

# VETERANS NEWSLETTER



## CONGRESSIONAL UPDATE

FOR NEW MEXICO'S VETERANS

FALL 2023

# DEAR FRIEND,

It is an honor to serve you as New Mexico's senior senator. Our state has such a proud tradition of service and one of the highest rates of military volunteerism in the nation. I am committed to keeping America's promise to our heroic veterans and their families who have sacrificed so much.

Over the last year, I have worked to support the VA's implementation of the Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act to provide long overdue recognition, screening, and treatment for toxic exposure related conditions. Finally, so many generations of veterans who have been exposed to toxins through their service are receiving the VA health care and benefits that they have long deserved. I encourage eligible veterans and survivors to apply for your PACT Act benefits now at [VA.gov/PACT](https://VA.gov/PACT).

In recent months, I also worked to pass legislation to rename the Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Gallup, New Mexico in honor of the late Medal of Honor recipient and World War II and Korean War veteran Hiroshi "Hershey" Miyamura. I will never forget the times when I met with Hershey over the years. I was especially proud to join him nearly a decade ago to cut the ribbon and open this clinic that provides vital health care services to veterans from Gallup and surrounding areas.

My office has also helped hundreds of New Mexico veterans and their families access their military records, replace medals, and access their VA health care and benefits. Whether you or a family member is having trouble filing a claim or experiencing challenges with other veterans' issues, my office is here to help. Please contact us by calling (505) 346-6601 or visit the [Veterans Resources Center](#) on my website.

I remain unwavering in my commitment to veterans whose willingness to serve protected the freedoms and values that we all cherish.

Sincerely,



MARTIN HEINRICH  
United States Senator

# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

## LEGISLATION TO RENAME GALLUP COMMUNITY-BASED OUTPATIENT CLINIC FOR HIROSHI “HERSHEY” MIYAMURA

On October 2, 2023, President Biden signed my legislation to rename the VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Gallup after Medal of Honor recipient Hiroshi “Hershey” Miyamura into law. This renaming honors Hershey Miyamura’s courageous actions and brave sacrifices during the Korean War and his lifelong commitment to this community.



PHOTO: (From Left) U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich, Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Hiroshi "Hershey" Miyamura, and then-U.S. Representative Ben Ray Lujan cut the ribbon at the grand opening of the VA's Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in Gallup, New Mexico, June 5, 2015.

Hershey was a second generation Japanese American and a resident of Gallup, New Mexico. Hershey first volunteered in the 442nd Infantry Regiment during World War II. He was later recalled to active duty following the start of the Korean War. President Dwight D. Eisenhower presented him the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroic war efforts on October 27, 1953.

I was especially proud to join him in 2015 to cut the ribbon and open this clinic that provides vital health care services to veterans from Gallup and surrounding areas.

I hope that honoring Hershey’s memory will inspire future generations of New Mexicans to learn more about his life and the powerful example of humble patriotism that he left behind as his enduring legacy.

# HONORING OUR PROMISE TO ADDRESS COMPREHENSIVE TOXINS (PACT) ACT

The Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxins (PACT) Act continues to deliver critical compensation and care to toxin-exposed New Mexico veterans. Since the PACT Act was signed into law in August 2022, over 4,000 veterans' claims across our state have been processed, resulting in over \$18 million dollars in compensation coming home to New Mexico. Veterans with disabilities ranging from hypertensive vascular disease to bronchial asthma are finally being properly recognized by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and provided long overdue recognition, screening, and treatment.

The PACT Act also includes the Camp Lejeune Justice Act, which applies to anyone who lived, worked, or was otherwise exposed to contaminated water at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune or Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) in New River, North Carolina for at least 30 days between August 1, 1953 and December 31, 1987, including those who were in utero at the time. It affords those affected the opportunity to adjudicate their claims in court if they can prove they were harmed in relation to the base's water contamination.



PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich Addresses Crowd at PACT Act Press Conference, Washington D.C., June 16, 2022.

## Here are the 15 covered conditions related to Camp Lejeune:

- Bladder cancer
- Breast cancer
- Esophageal cancer
- Female infertility
- Hepatic steatosis
- Kidney cancer
- Leukemia
- Lung cancer
- Miscarriage
- Multiple myeloma
- Myelodysplastic syndromes
- Neurobehavioral effects
- Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- Renal toxicity
- Scleroderma

The PACT Act is about keeping our promise to our nation's veterans and their families who have sacrificed so much for this country. It was an honor to help get this law across the finish line.

Eligible Veterans and survivors are encouraged to apply for PACT Act benefits now at [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT).

# UPRIGHT HEADSTONES AT SANTA FE NATIONAL CEMETARY INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

On July 13, 2023, I joined Senator Luján in introducing the New Mexico Veteran Burial Dignity and Honor Act, which would repeal a 1999 provision that allowed for the use of flat gravestones at the Santa Fe National Cemetery. We have heard opposition from veterans and military families across New Mexico who believe the 1999 change lessened the honor and reverence owed to veterans when they are laid to rest.

Our bill also requires the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to replace these flat markers with upright ones over the next five years.



PHOTO: Upright headstones and flat headstones at Santa Fe National Cemetery, KOB, New Mexico, July 13, 2023.

Senator Luján and I successfully included this legislation within the Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which will authorize \$886.3 billion for New Mexico's military bases, national labs, and service members.

I am focused on securing final passage of the New Mexico Veteran Burial Dignity and Honor Act and other important provisions for our veterans and service members in the final version of the NDAA that the Senate negotiates with the House of Representatives and sends to President Biden's desk.

## EVENTS

### VETERAN SERVICE ORGANIZATION GRANTS WORKSHOPS

New Mexico veterans and their families deserve the full education, housing, and health care benefits they have earned through their service. Veteran Service Organizations are an important part of ensuring these benefits are delivered.

To support their work in helping veterans, I convened a Grants Workshop for Veteran Service Organizations across New Mexico for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to discuss information about the federal resources that are available.

During the workshop, representatives from the VA provided an overview of grant programs that can support their work, such as transitional assistance for unhoused veterans, transportation services for rural veterans, and mental health programs. They also highlighted new access to care and benefits that are now available under the Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act.

# CONSTITUENT SERVICES

## THE ONE-MAN ARMY

Earlier this year, I was proud to celebrate the memory and service of the late Korean War veteran, U.S. Army Sergeant First Class Roy Tachias. The Tachias family reached out to me for help with obtaining the medals and awards Sgt. Tachias had earned, but never received.

On November 7, 1950, then-Private Roy Tachias distinguished himself during a single-handed and fearless stand on the front lines of the Korean War. He had been manning an outpost all alone when enemy forces launched an attack. Private Tachias leapt to his feet and charged with hand grenades and his rifle. His one-man stand caused so much fear and confusion that the enemy withdrew in total disarray. In coverage of his heroic actions, the Stars and Stripes newspaper called him “The One-Man Army.”

Sgt. Tachias’ fearless one-man stand earned him a Silver Star Medal for singular valor. He also earned a Bronze Star Medal for his meritorious service in Korea. He would go on to serve our nation in a full career of 20 years in the Army. He never received the medals he had earned in Korea. When his family contacted my office and told us this, we went to work. At the ceremony, I was honored to present the Silver Star, Bronze Star, a Purple Heart, and 13 additional medals and awards to Sgt. Tachias’ widow, Ramoncita Tachias.



PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich presents Silver Star, Bronze Star, a Purple Heart, and 13 additional medals and awards to Sgt. Roy Tachias’ widow, Ramoncita Tachias, New Mexico, June 19, 2023.

# MEDAL RETRIEVAL PROGRAM

Service members, veterans, and their families deserve our utmost respect and gratitude. Military medals are an important way that we honor and recognize the service, accomplishments, and valor of our service members. Unfortunately, the process to retrieve these medals can be unnecessarily bureaucratic and delayed. I am committed to helping New Mexicans navigate and speed up this process.

My office assists service members, veterans, and their families in obtaining replacement medals and awards, as well as medals and awards that were earned but never received. My team is also available to help obtain copies of military service records and military discharge documents.

To learn more, you can visit the new Medal Retrieval Assistance page on my website at [Heinrich.Senate.Gov/Medal-Retrieval](https://Heinrich.Senate.Gov/Medal-Retrieval). The landing page gives examples of veterans and families that my office has assisted with retrieving service medals and a new Medals Request form.

For assistance with obtaining medals and awards, please contact my office at (505) 346-6601 or by emailing [militarymedals@heinrich.senate.gov](mailto:militarymedals@heinrich.senate.gov).



PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich retrieves a Silver Star, Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal with Two Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters, and 11 additional medals and awards in honor of the late Korean War veteran, U.S. Army Sergeant First Class Roy Tachias, New Mexico, June 19, 2023.

# HOW CAN I HELP YOU?

## MY OFFICE CAN HELP WITH:

- VA Claims
- Military Records
- Replacement Medals
- GI Bill Benefits
- VA Home Loans
- VA Health Benefits
- Survivor's Benefits

## TO CONTACT MY OFFICE:

Call (505) 346-6601 or fill out the Privacy Release Form on my website: [Heinrich.Senate.Gov](https://Heinrich.Senate.Gov)

**U.S. SENATOR MARTIN HEINRICH**

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