

# BILL TOWNSEND

*Our New Voice in Congress*

P O L I C Y O V E R V I E W

## OUR MILITARY & VETERANS

*“...let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.” -Abraham Lincoln*

Nothing embodies the spirit of American patriotism like a man or woman in uniform.

A strong America is a better America and our nation must maintain a strong military and borders. We no longer need to be the policemen of the world, but we must give our active-duty and reserve military personnel the tools they need to face changing enemies.

**As your voice in Congress, I will work to bring advanced technologies and capabilities to Nevada’s military bases, creating new career, recruitment, and expansion possibilities.** Whether at Tonopah, Nellis, Creech, or other facilities, Nevada-stationed soldiers and their families deserve to work on the most advanced training and weapons systems available.

**I will work to provide our Armed Services with the funding they require to maximize operational readiness.** The services have each taken their own approach to averting a readiness crisis under the pressure of sequestration and continued operational requirements. The Air Force has looked to trim training and readiness to preserve modernization accounts. The Marine Corps has done the opposite, looking to compromise anywhere but on readiness. The Army and Navy are somewhere in between, propping up readiness in some areas and taking “risk” in others. The problem is that they must fight as one joint force. This haphazard approach to readiness is like having a pickup truck with good brakes, bad steering, and one working headlight, and a bed that is rusted out and can’t hold anything. A plus-up across the board would level the playing field.

**I will work to put money back into modernization accounts.** We must restore some predictability and consistency in funding for major defense programs like submarines, drones, air-refueling tankers and surface ships.

**I’ll support programs the leaders of our military want and cut programs they no longer need.** For too long we have let members of Congress keep bases open the military doesn’t want (at taxpayer expense) and buy weapons the top brass says we don’t need (in an effort to get funding into defense contractors’ accounts).

A couple years ago, all the armed services agreed that they would not be able to continue to meet mandatory missions under the National Defense Strategy – win a major war, deter the threats of a second, major enemy and protect the homeland at the same time. The Defense Department’s acquisition and procurement personnel were concerned with wasting money on equipment the services didn’t need.

The defense spending bill included \$120 million for tanks that the Army has repeatedly said it did not want. For three years, the Army in numerous Congressional hearings had pushed a plan that essentially would have suspended tank building and upgrades in the US for the first time since World War II. The Army suggested that production lines could be kept open through foreign sales, but it didn’t need any more tanks. Regardless of what the Army wanted, Congress approved more tanks.

Retired Army Chief of Staff General Raymond Odierno, in congressional hearings, stated, “*We are still having to procure systems we don’t need,*” adding that the Army spends

*“hundreds of millions of dollars on tanks that we simply don’t have the structure for anymore.”*

Each time the military tells Congress they don’t want spending on unneeded equipment, Congress has pushed back. Why? Because members of Congress with defense contractors in their districts/states use government pork to win votes and keep employment going at these companies. This sounds like a great plan until you realize keeping those jobs may be putting the men and women of our Armed Forces in harm’s way.

*“When we are talking about tight budgets a couple of hundred million dollars is a lot of money,”* Odierno said. *“There are lots of people that have looked at procurement reform. And the one thing that has been frustrating to me is as the chief of staff of the Army is how little authority and responsibility that I have in the procurement process. I have a say in requirements, to some extent, but I have very little say.”*

In this particular case, Rep. Mike Turner of Ohio, said that Congress *“recognizes the necessity of the Abrams tank to our national security and authorizes an additional \$120 million for Abrams tank upgrades. This provision keeps the production lines open in Lima, Ohio, and ensures that our skilled, technical workers are protected.”* There you have it. The real reason the tanks were pushed through was the Congressman wanted to keep people working in his district, even if the military already had 9,000 tanks and didn’t want any more. This, my friends, is one of the reasons we have runaway costs in Washington, DC.

**Do you think the men and women who run the Armed Forces have a better understanding of their needs than an elected official? I do.** That’s why I pledge to listen to their recommendations and seek solutions to short and long-term needs.

**This leads to understanding the important of new initiatives versus previous programs that may no longer be useful. It’s also why having people with technical sophistication is important for Congress.**

Tanks are useful, but compared to drones they are relics. On February 4th, 2002, in the Paktia province of Afghanistan near the city of Khost, the CIA used an unmanned Predator drone in a strike for the first time. The target was Osama bin Laden. Though he turned out not to be there, the strike killed three men nonetheless. The CIA had used drones for surveillance before, but not in military operations, and not to kill. What had once merely been a flying camera in the sky was now weaponized.

In the following years, the Bush administration authorized 50 drone strikes, while the Obama administration greatly expanded the program, authorizing 506 strikes over his tenure.

These were almost exclusively Predator and Reaper drones, piloted by a human hundreds of miles away in American military bases, interfacing with systems that resembled playing a video game more than flying a combat fighter. The pilots were so far removed from the killings that the military itself had a term for a drone kill – “bug splat.”

In speaking with members of the military, drones, especially drones that act in concert—what the military calls *“Swarm Drones”*—will be the future of battle. A single Predator or Reaper drone will generally have multiple people involved with its flight and decision-making process. Not only do these drones require maintenance crews to repair it, each drone needs a human pilot on the ground to fly it. Perdix drones, on the other hand, communicate autonomously with each other and use collective decision making to coordinate movements, finding the best way to get to a target, even flying in formation and healing themselves—without a human telling them how. While a single person gives them a task, for example, *“go to the local hospital”* or *“encircle the blue truck”*, the drones decide autonomously what the best way to carry out the mission, without human direction.

The Air Force released a 20 year flight plan for small unmanned aerial devices, outlining how they’d begin to integrate drones and find more ways to use them in their existing projects. The military also is currently exploring ways to embed this technology in conventional military forces such as supply trucks crossing the desert or vessels patrolling a foreign coast. In 2014, the Navy successfully tested autonomous swarm boats, with their technology allowing unmanned vehicles to “not only protect Navy ships, but also, for the first time, autonomously ‘swarm’ offensively on hostile vessels.” At one point during the test, as many as 13 boats operated autonomously and coordinated their movements, all without a sailor actually at controls.

Of course, these types of advanced fighting technologies require funding and it is important for the security of the United States that members of the House and Senate provide funding needed for the projects the military says it needs. As an example, many feel the next generation of a swarm drone is a cluster bomb drone. Cluster bombs are munitions that contain multiple explosive submunitions—or clusterlets—and are dropped from aircraft or fired from the ground or sea, before opening up in mid-air to release tens or hundreds clusterlets that explode on impact.

Cluster bomb drones’ capabilities would be devastating, enabling simultaneous precision strikes on targets. Traditional clusterlets, which just fall, would be no match in precision and lethality as cluster bomb drones would instead navigate to a specific target once released.

These “cluster drones” could link up in the air autonomously once dispersed from the cluster-bomb shell to maximize their payload, or they could immediately disperse to separate pre-set targets. Each drone has a definitive amount of explosive attached to it. Once the cluster bomb is dropped, these drones swarm out of it, find their specific target, hit it and explode.

Drone cluster bombs are just one subset of what are known as loitering munitions, or unmanned aerial vehicles that are designed to blow up targets that are outside of the operator’s sight with an attached warhead or explosive. Loitering munitions are equipped with ultra-high resolution and infrared cameras that make it possible for a soldier to keep the explosive in a holding pattern in the air while they identify and watch a target, before striking when the time is ideal.

It is important to realize the U.S. military doesn’t have a monopoly on these kinds of drones. Up until recently, China led the world in drone development. Countries like Israel, South Korea, Turkey, Poland and Iran already have, or are looking to invest in, loitering munitions because they can be seen as an affordable alternative to a very expensive missile. In addition, the risk of soldier casualties is greatly reduced.

As innovations such as swarm micro-drones and loitering munitions continue to advance and expand how governments and their constituencies think of drones, the technology has spread to both state and non-state actors, sometimes with deadly results.

Development of these types of technologies will not slow down and funding must be assured to continue development and stay ahead of enemies and threats. We are going to have more robots taking on a greater number of tasks, and in many ways doing them in a smarter and more effective manner than humans.

Countries and non-state actors are going to come into possession of greater numbers of weaponized drones, and they will start to shape the battlefield in new and dangerous ways. From cluster bomb drones, to swarm drones and kamikaze drones, these threats are real.

As drones become cheaper and smaller, new threats will arise. A small, briefcase-sized drone could be dispatched from a parking lot and release biological weapons down the length of Fremont Street (as an example) or swarms of smaller drones could be used to bring down aircraft as they take off or approach airports. America must be ready with defensive capabilities for what is inevitable. Do we spend more on tanks because a congressman wants to keep the jobs in his district or do we spend more on weapons to engage and destroy the enemy’s offensive and defensive capabilities?

These are questions that must be answered.

It’s time for Congress to allow the military to make decisions on what weapons they require to keep America safe.

### **Expanding Education & Training**

Education is a vital part of any American’s ability to succeed. While each branch of the military offers tuition assistance programs intended to cover a portion or the entirety of a service member’s tuition costs for a degree or professional certificate offered by accredited colleges, universities, and technical schools, the maximum coverage currently stands at \$250 per credit hour up to a maximum of \$4,500 per fiscal year for active duty service members.

However, according to the College Board, the average cost of tuition and fees for the 2017–2018 school year was \$34,740 at private colleges, \$9,970 for state residents at public colleges, and \$25,620 for out-of-state residents attending public universities.

You can see the problem.

**I want to give our active duty personnel, veterans, National Guard and reservists even more incentive to continue their education during service** by the creation of what I call the **Armed Service Education Training and Tuition (ASSET)** program.

The ASSET program will provide college loans for the aforementioned men and women of our armed services. ASSET will be available to any personnel who either:

- Currently has served 8 years or more in active duty; or
- Served at least one tour of duty in a combat zone; or
- Served in the National Guard or reserves for 8 years or more; or
- Was disabled while on active duty; or
- Is the son or daughter of armed services permanently disabled or killed in action since 1990.

Loans covering full tuition at any US-based accredited college, university, trade school, or medical school, plus books and room and board will be available as long as a B or better grade point average is maintained.

The annual interest rate will be set at 2% with no increase, with the interest used exclusively to administer the program.

For active duty personnel, after the first full year of college, 5% of their weekly take home pay will be deducted to pay towards the loan and if the recipient remains in the Armed Forces for 12 years, since the beginning of studies, he or she will have the remainder of their loan, if any, forgiven. For those whose college degrees are earned under the ASSET

program, upon graduation, they would receive a step up in pay as recognition of their new completion of a degree program.

Under ASSET, if you racked up a substantial amount of student loan debt before entering into the military, you may be eligible for student loan repayment or forgiveness depending on your qualifications and promised commitment. The details of this will have to be worked out but it provides a means for more individuals to serve their country and receive additional education benefits for doing so for enlistments of 8 years or more.

For the children of armed services permanently disabled or killed in action since 1990, ASSET will provide full tuition with a commitment to enlist in the Armed Services. The program can be utilized post high school in order to earn a college or technical degree, prior to entering the military.

ASSET may also be applied toward the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) which allows service members to earn college credit by taking any of the 33 introductory-level college subject tests and receiving a satisfactory score. Nearly 3,000 colleges around the country accept the tests for college credit.

### **Our Veterans**

We must keep our promises to our veterans. President Trump signed legislation that will dramatically expand a program at the Department of Veterans Affairs that lets patients seek care from private doctors if they want to bypass the troubled VA system. This is a positive step forward, but there is much to be done.

As our Armed Forces personnel receive greater armor protection the loss of life has decreased but long-lasting physical and mental damage has increased. We must fund and study new treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and decreases in mental capacity, as well as prosthetics. Included in this must be cannabis, or “*medical marijuana*”, which has shown in initial tests to be a potential solution to PTSD, as well as promise as a non-addictive opiate alternative, especially when taken in oral form. As one of the leading states in “medical cannabis” cultivation, testing, and sales, Nevada should lead the way in development of clinical trials for PTSD, pain, nerve pain, and other illnesses.

### **Restructure the VA medical system.**

The first step in fixing the myriad issues at the Department of Veterans Affairs is to fix the accountability problem. In 2017, Congress passed the *VA Accountability First Act*, signed into law by President Trump, that removes the red tape and bureaucratic barriers that prevent VA leaders from quickly firing bad employees.

Since the Phoenix VA wait list scandal broke, there remains in many parts of the VA a culture that has become tainted due to a lack of accountability. Wait list manipulation is still widespread. A typical example is VA employees classifying scheduled appointments as “desired appointment times,” even if the appointment is weeks or even months after when the veteran requested. Manipulated wait lists are not simply a means to rig the system to show accountability, it is a problem that leads to death for many of those awaiting care.

Misconduct is worse than wait list manipulation. A facility in Alaska held a job open for an accountant while he served a prison term for killing a man. The same facility also hired a convicted child molester, keeping him on the payroll while he repeatedly reoffended. This must stop and the only way to stop it is to fight the special interests (primarily the American Federation for Government Employees) to bring about changes in human resources management, accountability, and termination protocols.

The VA’s mission to serve our military’s veterans is failing. When Army vets like D.J. Skelton walk into the VA in San Francisco and find a bathroom toilet tissue holder still broken after more than three months, it sets a bad example of the lack of respect the VA has for our vets. As D.J. says, *“great example of why I am pissy towards VA care. In the Army, this would never fly. We take pride in our equipment. Besides... it speaks volumes of the kind of leader that runs the joint. If you really care about your troops, you will ensure they have the best equipment..or at the very least..(crappy) equipment they have been assigned is in the best of condition...ready to deploy at anytime. One of the surest signs that your leadership doesn't care about you is when they let your equipment and tools go to (crap).”* He continued, *“I even looked for the inspection log to prove that it was inspected recently (due to OSHA and local Health Laws) yet...there was no health inspection log to be found.”*

Skelton continues: *“I make my way to the dental clinic to sign in (at the kiosk). At the end of signing in, it tells you all of your appointments you have in the upcoming 30 days. It displays I have none. That's odd. Earlier this morning I got an email from the VA listing at least 3 appointments in just the next 2 weeks. Ironically, yesterday, my case manager tells my all of my upcoming VA appointments, which are different than what the email tells me...which is different than what this Kiosk tells me. Sooo... who is right? Which appointments do I really need to go to?”*

This treatment of the men and women who served our nation must stop immediately. There is no excuse for any organization, regardless of size, to be run in such a roughshod manner. Veterans continue to struggle with limited access, poor service, bureaucratic operational systems and processes.

This must end.

If the Veterans Health Administration cannot provide the services necessary to ensure veterans receive timely and professional care, Congress must be prepared to allow all vets to receive care in the private markets and underperforming VA centers should be shuttered.

### **Re-entering Civilian Life**

Over the past 17 years, roughly 3.5 million active and reserve members of the U.S. armed forces have left military service and returned to civilian life. For a soldier, sailor, airman or Marine who has served in a military at war for more than a decade, reintegrating into civilian life can be challenging.

Veterans don't return home to federal agencies; they come home to communities, and meeting their needs often falls on the shoulders of county and city organizations with little experience in re-homing vets.

The transition from uniformed duty to civilian status is not just a change of jobs; it is a change in almost every aspect of life: careers, responsibilities, homes, communities, lifestyle, health care, training, and more. If service members have families, the transition will also mean big changes for spouses and children, maybe even more so because these family members largely have no access to continuing support from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

**Our plan is to find ways for the government to partner more effectively with private and nonprofit sector institutions that are employing and supporting veterans.** This means navigating complex federal ethics regulations to enable these partnerships to work, and sharing information between the Defense Department and Veterans Affairs on one side, and private companies and nonprofits on the other.

The Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs needs to work more closely with corporations, state and local governments, to open opportunities for placement of veterans. Many skills that veterans possess do not easily translate to commercial company operations because of how they are classified; thus, we need to help companies understand just what someone who served in logistics in the Air Force can offer a company. Members of Congress and their staffs are ideal conduits to reach out to their communities to put these processes in place.

As your voice in Congress, I plan to work with other members to design programs that can be deployed, tested, tweaked, and replicated across America and I believe Nevada is an ideal state in which to test these initiatives.

Supporting the transition of service members to civilian life

is not just a way to keep faith with the men and women who have put everything on the line for their country. It is also an investment in the strength, diversity, and security of our communities.

### **Companionship**

People who have pets tend to have lower blood pressure, heart rate and heart-disease risk than those who don't. Those health boons may come from the extra exercise that playing and walking require, and the stress relief of having a steady best friend on hand.

Research concludes that:

- Dog owners are less likely to suffer from depression than those without pets.
- People with dogs have lower blood pressure in stressful situations than those without pets. One study even found that when people with borderline hypertension adopted dogs from a shelter, their blood pressure declined significantly within five months.
- Playing with a dog can elevate levels of serotonin and dopamine, which calm and relax.
- Pet owners have lower triglyceride and cholesterol levels (indicators of heart disease) than those without pets.
- Pet owners make 30 percent fewer visits to their doctors than those without pets.

I plan to introduce legislation creating block grants to The Humane Society of the United States to train and place rescued dogs with veterans who have PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), or simply wish to have the companionship of an animal to address stress or other medical conditions. This program will give our retired and honorably discharged men and women the therapeutic care necessary to fully engage in their personal and professional lives.

With PTS and TBI often come suicidal thoughts. It's estimated that 20-22 veterans take their own lives every day. New scientific evidence shows that specially trained service dogs are helping our veterans win the battles they're still fighting.

Current adoption programs may take as long as two years; much too long to wait for a veteran who is in need of companionship now. The average cost to train a companion dog to enable him or her to perform in public, is \$14,400. Our program will develop the outline of the training program, deploy it to every Humane Society location across America, and then match animals to veterans based on geographic location. By creating a centralized training system that can be distributed nationally, we believe the time to train an

animal can be reduced to 12 months and the cost reduced to approximately \$9,000.

We will propose 3 categories of training for canines:

- a) a companion-type animal that is housetrained and obedient but not likely to be used in public (such as in a shopping mall);
- b) a dog that is trained to behave properly in public; and,
- c) a fully trained service dog capable of work or task training. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the US Department of Justice (DOJ) requires that service dog training includes work or task training. Tasks are disability-mitigating responses to cues that are intentionally given, for example, getting a bottle of water from the fridge or turning on a light switch when asked. Work includes passively-available trained behaviors that are offered by the dog in response to changes in the person or their environment, without the handler intentionally giving the cue. Examples include alerting the handler to a panic attack or to an alarm the handler doesn't hear (for example, waking a veteran with a hearing disability when a fire alarm is activated).

We will seek waivers from the DOJ to provide the first two types of training as many veterans do not require a work or task trained animal and work with DOJ to ensure the third type of work and task trained animal meets their standards. At a minimum, every dog made available through the program should reliably perform the following commands:

- Stay
- Wait
- Sit
- Sit/stay
- Down
- Down/stay
- Come, recall
- Leave-it
- Heel
- Look/focus on handler

Approximately 3.9 million companion animals enter animal shelters nationwide every year with a projection that between **500,000-800,000 dogs could be trained as companion animals**. While this won't cover every veteran who may want to adopt a dog, it could reach the most at risk individuals, and due to its nationwide presence, bring vets and dogs together quickly and efficiently.

The legislation will fund veterinary services in zones where convenient and low-cost care is lacking and contract with regional and national veterinary clinics and national chain pet stores to provide discount care, grooming, and food.

## Homelessness

One out of every 4 homeless men in the United States is a Veteran. There are anywhere from 529,000 to 840,000 Veterans who are homeless at some time during the year. Our plan to combat and end homelessness will provide veterans the shelter, training, tools, and communication/outreach they need to reestablish themselves. *Please see our "Homelessness" policy in "12 Big Ideas for Nevada" or download an Adobe PDF file at [www.TownsendForNevada.com/downloads](http://www.TownsendForNevada.com/downloads).*



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*What else can we do to bring more jobs to Nevada?*  
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