

## **SENATOR TOM UDALL: AN ADVOCATE FOR VETERANS IN WASHINGTON**

*Tom has championed legislation to support and honor our nation's heroic veterans*

The son of a World War II veteran, Tom grew up with the firsthand knowledge of the sacrifices that veterans and military families make every day. And while representing New Mexico for 20 years, the proud home of military families and installations critical to our national security, Tom has worked to fulfill the promises of a grateful nation to our veterans.

*"New Mexico has a proud history of contributing to our national defense. From our veterans to our active-duty military, our three Air Force bases and the Army's White Sands Missile Range, thousands of New Mexicans dedicate themselves every day to ensure our safety. Keeping promises to veterans who served, and to the brave men and women who serve today, is a basic commitment New Mexicans expect. Few of us truly know the burden they and their families have borne and we must always remember the debt we owe them. In Congress, I have always advocated for programs that meet this commitment." – U.S. Senator Tom Udall*

### **Tom's Work to Protect Veterans' Health and Health Care**

While serving on the **Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs**, Tom has worked hard to make sure that our nation demonstrates its gratitude to military veterans not only with words but with actions to protect and secure their health.

- After meeting Albuquerque veteran MSgt. Jessey Baca and his wife Maria, who faced a multitude of health problems believed to be associated with his exposure to toxic chemicals and fumes from open-air burn pits, Tom introduced the bipartisan **Burn Pit Registry Act**. The legislation created a registry of service members and veterans like MSgt. Baca – now numbering over 212,000 – who were exposed to toxic chemicals and fumes from open-air burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a result of the new registry, the VA can monitor and improve programs to help veterans who are concerned that they may have been exposed to toxic chemicals while they were deployed. President Obama signed the legislation into law in 2013.
- Tom has continued to improve and expand the burn pit registry program. In 2015, Tom introduced an amendment and secured Senate passage to require the Defense Department to submit information to the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs and exposure of members of the Armed Forces to airborne hazards and open burn pits.

- Tom also introduced the **Burn Pit Registry Enhancement Act** to authorize military families to update the registry with the cause of death of an individual listed on the registry, allowing for more comprehensive information on the effects Burn Pit exposure had on that individual's health.
- Tom was the first to speak out in 2014 after New Mexico veterans reported mismanagement and cover-ups at the Department of Veterans Affairs and **led the call for reform inside the Veterans Health Administration**. He helped spearhead legislation that President Obama signed into law in 2014 for VA reform that included a \$9.5 million lease agreement to continue the VA's pharmacy research center in Albuquerque, reduce long wait times for doctors appointments, increase accountability and hire more health care providers to serve our nation's veterans.
- Passed legislation to honor and reimburse the **contributions of home caregivers serving veterans** across the country. Tom helped champion the effort to extend and expand the pilot program using community-based organizations and local and state government entities to ensure that veterans receive the care they need.
- Made improvements to **increase access to health care for veterans in rural areas**. After meeting many New Mexico veterans who live and work in rural communities who face barriers to accessing health care, Tom acted to connect them with the care they have more than earned throughout their service.
- Legislation to improve Native American veterans' access to culturally competent health care. Through the **Urban Native Veterans Act of 2019**, Tom has sought to bridge the gap that Native American veterans living in urban areas face in accessing health care that meets their needs. The legislation would allow Urban Indian Organizations to provide care for Native veterans with resources the nation has set aside for our veterans.

### Tom's Work to Value Veterans' Unique Contributions and Support their Transition to Civilian Life

Tom grew up learning from his father Stewart Udall, a World War II veteran, about the unique skills and experience that veterans bring to their communities when they return home. Tom has introduced legislation to honor their service and enhance the support that our country gives to our veterans, including:

- An amendment to **expand veterans' access to tax credits for unemployed veterans** in the midst of the 2008 recession. Tom championed the amendment's addition to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.
- Funding increases for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to support **comprehensive service programs** for homeless veterans.
- Passing the **Mothers of Military Service (MOMS) Leave Act** to ensure that the approximately 150,000 women serving in the National Guard and Reserve across the country can take paid maternity leave without losing service credits that determine retirement benefits. Tom secured this important provision as an amendment in the National Defense Authorization Act so that women who serve our country do not have to choose between their service and their families.

### Tom's Efforts to Honor and Memorialize the Diversity of Voices of New Mexico Veterans

Tom also knows the importance of documenting the living history that veterans carry with their stories and ensuring that veterans appreciate the gratitude of our nation. When Tom learned that the narrative histories of New Mexico veterans and Native American and Hispanic and Latino veterans were underrepresented in the **Veterans History Project** at the Library of Congress, Tom worked with his staff to document and interview veterans from all 33 of New Mexico's counties.

- Tom and his staff worked with New Mexico veterans who generously donated their time to document their narrative histories of service, with the original goal of presenting 50 narrative histories from each of New Mexico's 33 counties to the Library of Congress' American Folklife Center. Tom and his staff nearly doubled this goal, **ultimately presenting narrative histories from 90 New Mexico veterans to the Library of Congress**. Tom personally conducted six interviews for the project to make sure the voices of New Mexico veterans will be available to future generations so they can hear directly from veterans and better understand the impacts and realities of war.
- Tom has worked for years to secure a Congressional Gold Medal for the heroic veterans who defended Bataan and Corregidor, and suffered through the Bataan Death March. Tom has introduced legislation in several Congresses to award the Congressional Gold Medal to heroes of Bataan and Corregidor

**Throughout his time in the Senate and House of Representatives, Senator Udall introduced 36 bills and amendments supporting veterans including:**

- S. 2823, the Las Cruces Bataan Memorial Clinic Act (2019)
- S. 2365, the Health Care Access for Urban Native Veterans Act of 2019 (2019)
- S. 554, the Burn Pit Registry Enhancement Act (2019)
- S. 1895, the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Reauthorization Act of 2017 (2017)
- S. 903, A bill to amend the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 to extend and expand the pilot program on the use of community-based organizations and local and State government entities to ensure that veterans receive care and benefits for which they are eligible and for other purposes (2017)
- S. 2265, the Rural Veterans Improvement Act of 2015 (2015)
- S. 2009, the Rural Veterans Improvement Act of 2014 (2014)
- S. Amdt. 192, to S. Con. Res. 8, to modify the deficit-neutral reserve fund for America's servicemembers and veterans to increase access to health care for veterans in rural areas (2013)
- S. 2760, a bill to provide for an increase in the annual amount authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out comprehensive service programs for homeless veterans. (2009)
- H.R. 5517, the Seeds for Soldiers Act (2006)
- H.R. 601, the Native American Veterans Cemetery Act of 2005 (2005)
- H.R. 5275, the American Indian Veterans Pay Restoration Act of 2004 (2004)
- H.R. 3483, the Seeds for Soldiers Act (2003)
- H.R. 2983, the Native American Veterans Cemetery Act of 2003 (2003)
- H.R. 3017, the Department of Veterans' Affairs Nurse Recruitment and Retention Enhancement Act of 2001 (2001)
- H.R. 1929, the Native American Veterans Home Loan Act of 2001 (2001)
- H.R. 4263, Atomic Workers' Compensation Act (2000)

**Udall also signed on as a cosponsor to an additional 324 pieces of legislation relating to veterans.**