

**Rod Sweetman**

### ***Achievements***

*Original co-sponsor of S.407, the Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2009, which would increase veteran and survivor compensation by the same rate as the annual increase provided to Social Security recipients (based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index). This legislation passed the Senate by unanimous consent on June 11, 2009.*

*Original co-sponsor of S.546, the Retired Pay Restoration Act. This legislation would provide full concurrent receipt to military retirees with 20 or more years of experience, and allow veterans forced into retirement under the Temporary Early Retirement Authorization to apply for Combat-Related Special Compensation.*

*Original co-sponsor of S.663, the Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2009. This legislation would provide a monthly benefit of \$1,000 to veterans or survivors of the U.S. Merchant Marines who served between 12/7/41 and 12/31/46, or to their survivors.*

*Cosponsor of S.883, the Medal of Honor Commemorative Coin Act of 2009, which would authorize the Treasury to mint commemorative coins in honor of the distinguished service of the American military men and women who have been Medal of Honor recipients. Proceeds would be put toward the Congressional Medal of Honor Foundation.*

*Original cosponsor of S.RES.235, a resolution designating August 16, 2009, as "National Airborne Day." This resolution passed the Senate by unanimous consent on 8/3/2009.*

*Original cosponsor of S.RES.340, a resolution expressing support for designation of a National Veterans History Project Week to encourage public participation in a nationwide project that collects and preserves the stories of the men and women who served our Nation in times of war and conflict. This resolution passed the Senate by unanimous consent on 11/10/2009.*

*Original cosponsor of S.572, the Perpetual Purple Heart Stamp Act which would make the Purple Heart stamp a "forever" stamp issued on a permanent basis.*

*Co-sponsor of S.1775, the Service Member Student Loan Relief Act. This legislation would prohibit interest from accruing on direct student loans for servicemembers on active duty for up to 60 months, saving them between \$1,183 and \$1,479 over the course of a 12-15 month activation period.*

*Introduced S.AMDT.775 to S.CON.RES.13, the FY2010 Congressional Budget Resolution, which sought to create room in the budget that would tie education benefit rates for Guardsmen and Reservists to the "national average cost of tuition." This amendment passed the Senate by unanimous consent on 4/1/2009.*

*Original co-sponsor of S.597, the Women Veterans Health Care Improvement Act of 2009, which*

would authorize new programs aimed at improving the VA's capacity to care for women veterans' mental and physical health care needs. The bill would also authorize several new assessments of the care we are and should be providing to women veterans.

Co-sponsor of S.658, the Rural Veterans Health Care Improvement Act, which would give the VA additional tools to understand and address the needs of rural veterans. It would give direction to the newly created Office of Rural Health by tasking it with creating demonstration projects and centers of excellence that focus on improving healthcare for veterans in rural areas. The bill also adjusts the mileage reimbursement rate for veterans and authorizes transportation grants for Veterans Service Organizations to provide better transportation service in rural areas.

Original co-sponsor of S.731, the TRICARE Continuity of Coverage for National Guard and Reserve Families Act of 2009, which would address a gap in health care coverage for members of the Guard and Reserve. Currently, reservists who have retired (20 years or more of service) but are not yet 60 years of age are not eligible for TRICARE. This billow would allow them to purchase TRICARE Standard health care coverage for 100% of the premium.

Original cosponsor of S.AMDT.916 to S.CON.RES.13, the FY2010 Congressional Budget Resolution, which sought to create room in the budget for increasing funding for veterans beneficiary travel reimbursement rates. This amendment passed the Senate by unanimous consent on 4/2/2009.

Co-sponsor of S.475, the Military Spouses Residency Relief Act, which would ease the administrative burden faced by servicemen and women who must relocate to a new state. Currently, military members are allowed to declare a single home state, or permanent state of residency, while on active duty for the duration of their service. Spouses are currently not covered under this provision. This would give military spouses the option of sharing the service member's same home state and would significantly improve a spouse's ability to vote, maintain personal property, gain employment, and attain an education.

Co-sponsor of S.476, the Care Affordability for Military Families Act, which would increase reimbursement to military families for the cost of traveling to specialty care providers. Currently, mileage is reimbursed only for trips that are 100 miles or more each way. This would help alleviate costs for military families stationed at rural bases by changing the requirement to 50 miles.

Co-sponsor of S.262, the Fortifying Operational Reserve Component Efforts (FORCE) Act of 2009, which would provide support to the National Guard, Reserve members and their families by making benefit and healthcare programs more effective and accessible. In doing so, it would require the U.S. military to conduct a comprehensive review of its communication and outreach programs, provide spouses and dependents with a stipend, equivalent to the cost the government would pay for their TRICARE benefit, to use towards their private healthcare insurance, and require the military to annually update its database of healthcare providers participating in TRICARE. It would also increase the number of Post-Deployment Health Reassessments from one to four over a two-year period and require mental health training for all reserve component

members.

*Introduced of S.645, a bill to better allow the National Guard Youth Challenge Program to expand to new sites and make a difference in the lives of more young people across the nation. Currently, the federal government pays for 60 percent of a state's Youth Challenge operating costs, with states covering the remaining 40 percent. Your bill calls for the federal government to fund new programs at 100 percent for the first two years. For existing programs, it would change the federal government's cost-share ratio from 60 to 75 percent, decreasing the cost for states to 25 percent.*

*Co-sponsor of S.831 (formerly S.644), the National Guard and Reserve Retired Pay Equity Act of 2009. Current law allows members of the Selected Reserve to reduce the age of retirement (60) by three months for every 90 days of active duty served in support of a contingency operation. However, only assignments after January 28, 2008, currently qualify. This bill would amend current law to include any duty performed after September 11, 2001, as qualifying service.*

*Co-sponsor of S.1361, the National Guard Empowerment and State-National Defense Integration Act of 2009. This legislation would empower the National Guard in Guard-related decision making within the Pentagon by, among many provisions, placing the National Guard Bureau Chief on the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the rank of general and making National Guard commander the deputy commander of the United States Northern Command, which is responsible for overseeing the domestic military support mission. It would also give the National Guard the ability to budget and purchase equipment related to homeland defense, and it would offer governors greater input on domestic defense related matters through the National Guard.*

*Introduced S.1780, the "Honor America's Guard-Reserve Retirees Act," which would grant full veteran status to members of the reserve components who have 20 or more years of service and do not otherwise qualify under law.*

*Original co-sponsor of S.535, the Military Retiree Survivor Benefit Equity Act, which would provide concurrent receipt of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) and SBP annuity payments for spouses and children of service members killed in action. It would also allow 70-year-old military retirees who have paid SBP premiums for at least 30 years to stop paying premiums and retain their coverage, and would advance the full restoration of SBP annuity benefits for those 62 or older.*

*Introduced S.1118, the Veterans Survivor Fairness Act, which would enhance Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefits for survivors of severely disabled veterans and increase access to benefits for more families. In doing so, it would address inequities in the DIC program by increasing the basic DIC rate so it is equivalent to the rate paid to survivors of federal civilian employees; providing a graduated scale of benefits so many survivors are no longer denied benefits because of an arbitrary eligibility restriction; and allowing surviving spouses who remarry after age 55 to retain DIC benefits.*

### ***Professional Awards***

*Congressional Staffer of the Year presented by the Western Service Center of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service.*

### ***Community Awards***

*Golf coaching awards from The First Tee of Central Arkansas*

*Golf and fly fishing awards.*

### ***Other Notes***

*High-ranking amateur golfer*

*Avid fly fisherman*

*Board member of various civic and community organizations.*