

Jake Towne – Our Veterans Plank

"Soldiers' supreme wish is to avoid war, for the costs are inevitably paid with their blood and brains."

There is no end in sight to the occupation of Iraq. The wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan are accelerating. I believe that spending cuts have to be made everywhere in government if we are to curb errant spending and inflation from the FED, even including the Veterans Affairs Administration. The VA is a large government bureaucracy run much like a DMV to provide health care and benefits to our veterans. Long lines at VA hospitals, long waiting periods to receive benefits, poor treatment and bureaucratic red tape have plagued the VA for years. The federal Congress is constitutionally responsible for raising armies and navies, they are also responsible for providing care and benefits in return for the veteran's willingness to place his body into harm's way. There are several areas where free market principles can be applied to both increase the quality of care and options for our veterans and yet still cut costs.

Health Care

Health care and maintenance of VA medical facilities comprises 42.5% or approximately \$45 billion of the 2010 VA budget. I would like to remark here that, unlike the health care for private citizens, this particular area is different. We the People have made a constitutional contract with our veterans which states they receive health care as part of their compensation for serving the common defense.

Many veterans suffer for their lifetimes from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), missing limbs, brain injuries, and other maladies. Health care should never be lessened or denied to these vets, but there are ways to cut costs and improve care at the same time. I want to add here that while I am fiscally quite conservative, the actual care provided to our veterans is not an area where I would skimp at all, but why waste money on bureaucracy?

Most veterans are required to travel to far-away VA hospitals to obtain treatment and medicine in facilities that are very sub-par, like the infamous 2007 Walter Reed scandal. In fact, rural health initiatives to treat vets who live far from metro areas for the 2010 Fiscal Year budget alone increased by 633% to nearly a half billion dollars! Instead of requiring veterans to go to the relatively few VA hospitals, they should be free to go to **ANY** existing hospital and a doctor of their choosing for treatment. Doctors currently practicing in VA hospitals would slowly be absorbed into existing hospitals and would therefore still be able to specialize in the treatment of unique, veteran-related medical conditions. This would also prevent long travel time to vets in rural areas and would be far more economically efficient.

Hospitals generally have fixed costs which include utilities, equipment cost and maintenance, and salaries. These costs are the same whether or not a hospital treats a few additional patients. Therefore, the additional marginal cost of treating vets at existing non-VA hospitals is far less than maintaining entire facilities rife with bureaucracy.

Employment

Veterans often face difficulty in obtaining proper employment upon retirement or separation from the military. In order to expedite the process of obtaining employment a temporary federal income tax credit could be granted to employers who hire veterans this is a zero-cost benefit to veterans and employers alike and the money saved by companies employing vets would be put to better use, helping those businesses and the economy thrive.

The Combat Veterans Debt Elimination Act HR 5148

If a service member dies in combat and has previously collected GI Bill benefits, the family of the deceased is required to repay those benefits to the VA. So far the VA has attempted to recover funds

from the families of 22 deceased service members. This is a complete travesty and should be stopped immediately with any money repaid thus far immediately given back to the families.

Military Draft

Forced military service is an affront to our liberties and rights and should never exist in a free society. History has shown that when faced with a threat against our homeland Americans respond and volunteer to defend our country. Unjust wars and foreign occupations, on the other hand, have shown a lack of support and usually result in a military draft.

Drafting males or females to join the military in non-combat roles is likewise morally wrong. Being an accomplice to forced aggression is morally only marginally better than committing the aggression itself. This statement holds true whether the individual is a cook, mechanic, stationed in a peacekeeping role in the homeland, or a POW guard all are helping in the war effort, and throughout history armies have always needed just as many or more support personnel.

Likewise, the event of an imminent physical invasion (or a multitude of terrorist attacks) is no justification for a draft either. Individuals should be allowed to join the armed forces in a nation's time of need of their own free will. In a truly free nation, it is my belief that there will be no need for a draft as We the People would gather to defend our freedoms from being stolen, our wealth plundered, and to protect our families.

The idea of using young people between the ages of 18 and 21 as raw material or cannon fodder is likewise morally unacceptable. In today's America, it is my view, as a young American, that these years are certainly not those of childhood, but for the wide majority of 18-21-year-old Americans, I charge they are still in their formative 'self-seeking' years, sent into harm's way by those a decade or more older. For those who have already gone to college, do you remember how your life changed before and after college? Were you really mature enough to fight a brutal war? Our societies' laws defy logic in that a person is old enough to be forced to fight a war but is not yet old enough to legally drink an alcoholic beverage.

Furthermore, forcing an individual to serve in the armed forces when they do not wish to do so is clearly involuntary servitude and as such is a blatant violation of the 13th Amendment.

As Congressman, I pledge to fight against any and all future attempts to institute a military draft, and I will attempt to specifically ban military drafts.

Conclusion

Service members shoulder a heavy burden when they volunteer to risk their lives in defense of our country. They perform a necessary function in our society and for their service veterans receive deserved benefits and gratitude. **However, the greatest way to honor them is to keep them out of unnecessary conflict.** The only just war is one carried out in self-defense, as a non-aggressor, and as a last resort.

It's important that we have a strong military to deter attacks against the our country and protect it when attacked. However, asking our young men and women to participate in unjust war is a moral abyss that we as a country should never leap into. If we aspire to be a just nation ruled by laws we must resolve to never ask our military men and women to engage in unconstitutional warfare and nation-building missions.

Jake Towne is [running for US Congress](#) in Pennsylvania's 15th District in the 2010 election as a citizen unaffiliated with any political parties. Jake plans to implement a novel "Our Open Office" form of accountable and transparent government when elected to give each resident a public voice. Visit [TowneForCongress.com](#) to learn more. Jake can be reached at TowneForCongress@gmail.com. Jake's full veterans plank is available at <http://towneforcongress.com/platform-issues/our-veterans>