

Alan Khazei's Approach to *Big Citizenship*:
A Blueprint for American Policy

Veterans and Military Families Policy

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Paid for by Citizens for Alan Khazei.

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Alan Khazei is dedicated to ensuring that veterans receive world-class health and medical care, that they are provided with the most effective tools and resources when reintegrating back into civilian life, and that their families receive care and support for their own unique sacrifices.

Guiding Principles

- The most sacred decision an elected official can make is to send our troops into harm's way. As our troops serve selflessly in war zones, some of them invariably suffer physical and psychological trauma. It is our responsibility to ensure that when our nation's service members return from duty they are cared for and never neglected.
- We need to guarantee that the Department of Veterans Affairs has full, mandatory funding to provide continuous care to our veterans and military families. This must include comprehensive coverage for mental health issues, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).
- We must work with existing programs – and create innovative new solutions – to improve the transition to civilian life and end homelessness among veterans. This approach is central to the concept of Big Citizenship, the idea that empowered citizens are responsible for bringing real change to their communities.
- Veterans' employment and education benefits must be kept intact and well-funded.

Key Facts

- Veterans will make more than 65 million outpatient visits to VA health care facilities this year.
- It is estimated that among the more than 1 million veterans returning from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, 19 percent may have TBI. Around 30 percent may have PTSD, depression and/or anxiety.
- Since the Post-9/11 GI Bill was passed on August 1 of this year, 400,000 veterans either started school or continued their studies under the bill.
- Over 2 million children have a parent who has served in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Among these, 24,000 children have a parent who has been severely injured, and several thousand have lost a parent.
- More than 200,000 veterans are homeless, and more than 20 percent of America's homeless population is composed of veterans. The VA's homeless services reach only a quarter of this population.

Positions

Veterans' health and medical care

Alan knows that there are costs associated with going to war and believes it is our responsibility to care for our veterans when they return home by providing excellent health and medical care. This commitment includes providing comprehensive mental health coverage that is accessible, high-quality, and reliable.

Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are coming home with record levels of combat stress, but our military and VA medical systems do not have the resources to adequately provide for them. Alan strongly supports President Obama's increased budgetary appropriations to address mental health issues at every stage of military service. This includes recruiting more mental health professionals and improving screening processes; placing more mental health professionals with troops as they train, deploy, and return; fighting the stigma of psychological injury by enhancing training and outreach; and helping military families by offering more counseling and support services. Alan looks forward to the implementation of the VA's National Mental Health Strategic Plan and its Uniform Mental Health Services initiative, and supports the work of networks of mental health organizations that serve veterans.

Alan also strongly supports President Obama's standards of care for TBI treatment and requirements for pre- and post-deployment screenings, and will make sure that veterans receive optimal case management services. Alan is very supportive of medical research clinics such as the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center and the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury.

Alan recognizes that the veterans' benefits claims process is inefficient and cumbersome: over half the 800,000 claims filed in 2008 are currently still pending. He supports improving the quality of the claims filing process by upgrading to an electronic benefits system that will reduce error rates and improve timeliness. Alan also looks forward to the common-sense reforms of the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act, recently signed into law by President Obama. This bill will provide the VA with advanced appropriations, allowing them to effectively plan their budget ahead of time, instead of months after the fact.

Alan appreciates the importance of programs such as the Wounded Warrior Project and The Mission Continues, which not only recognize wounded soldiers for what they have sacrificed, but what they have to offer. He looks forward to working with organizations such as these in continuing to push for positive veteran health care reform and service opportunities for wounded vets.

Transition to civilian life

Alan will work tirelessly to follow President Obama's pledge to provide a "seamless transition" for veterans and military families as they readjust to civilian life. For the past 20 years, Alan's work has helped to bring the civilian and military worlds together. His vision is to harness the incredible potential of veterans and channel it toward his philosophy of Big Citizenship by providing opportunities for civilian-military partnerships, recruiting veterans into domestic service, protecting their educational and employment benefits, and combating homelessness among veterans.

Alan is dedicated to using his vast experience as a social entrepreneur to design and implement innovative strategies to increase opportunities for veterans to become engaged in domestic service. He worked alongside Sen. Ted Kennedy and Sen. Orrin Hatch to build the coalition that would design and pass the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. This coalition consisted of more than 250 organizations across America, including many veterans' organizations that collectively reach 100 million people. The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act creates a Veterans Corps to identify and meet the unmet needs of veterans and members of the Armed Forces on active duty. The Veterans Corps aims to help veterans develop their educational opportunities, recruit veterans into service opportunities that utilize military experience, and assist with issues such as filing claims or finding jobs in federal agencies. The Corps will also keep veterans connected with service members on active duty by helping them organize fundraisers or create care packages, while helping to integrate returning veterans into their communities through activities such as developing mentoring relationships with economically disadvantaged students. As Senator, Alan will make sure the Serve America Act is fully funded over the next two years.

As part of the Service Nation campaign, Alan inaugurated a special effort called "Mission Serve: Forging a Continuum of Service," a network of 36 initiatives partnering civilian and military service organizations to meet the critical needs of our troops, military families, and veterans. This endeavor taps the energy, wisdom, and experience of citizens and military personnel who are dedicated to strengthening America by engaging and integrating the two sectors.

Alan strongly supports such Obama administration programs as the Council of Veterans Employment, the Veterans Employment Program within government

agencies, and the Green Vets Initiative, which seeks to place returning veterans in the emerging green energy economy by providing training and career opportunities. Alan also supports the Obama administration's push to create jobs for veterans by partnering with the Small Business Administration and the General Services Administration to enhance visibility and competitiveness of veteran-owned small businesses.

Alan believes that the post-9/11 GI Bill is a powerful tool to help veterans help themselves by providing meaningful opportunities once their terms of service end. While Alan is highly supportive of this bill, he acknowledges that there are inefficiencies in its implementation and will work tirelessly to find solutions to these problems.

Alan applauds President Obama's recent announcement of his goal to end homelessness among our nation's veterans within the next 5 years. Alan will use his vast experience as a community builder to spearhead cooperative efforts among the public, non-profit, and for-profit sectors to enforce President Obama's "zero tolerance" policy for veterans falling into homelessness. He supports the construction of more transitional housing units for homeless veterans, limited equity housing projects – such as the Gordon H. Mansfield Veterans Communities in Leeds and Pittsfield, spearheaded by Soldier On – and expanding the homeless veteran housing voucher program.

Military families

Alan is dedicated to ensuring that military families – the pillars of our nation's armed forces – receive proper support services. He knows that when one family member serves, the entire family serves. As the co-founder of City Year and Be the Change, Inc., Alan has worked closely with organizations such as the Military Child Education Coalition, which provides support and guidance for military families affected by deployment and loss.

Alan recognizes the enormous challenges confronting service members and their families during deployment. He supports such programs as home loan protection, expanded educational benefits for military families as mandated in the Post-9/11 GI Bill, military spouse scholarship programs, and the Operation Purple Program that provides after-school and summer programming for children of service members.

Alan will make the successful reintegration of veterans and military families a priority. Successful military family readiness programs, such as Blue Star Families, will be funded and replicated on a national scale. These programs connect and empower military families, helping them meet the unique challenge of balancing all the pieces of the military family life and providing them with the tools and networks that meet their needs.