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**ICYMI: Heller Emphasizes Senate Accomplishments** **(Washington, DC)** – Recently, U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) spoke on the Senate floor underlining his Senate accomplishments benefiting the state of Nevada. Specifically, Heller discussed the vital changes implemented at the VA, his important infrastructure victories like Interstate 11 and the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, as well as his fight against Obamacare through the repeal of the Cadillac tax. Click [HERE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lypkLhqDLu8) or below to watch Senator Heller’s speech.

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| **Remarks as prepared:** Mr. President, as we approach the end of this Congress, I rise today to discuss not only what we have accomplished as a Chamber but also what specifically we have accomplished for the state of Nevada.  I’m especially proud that many of my priorities have been able to move forward to help Nevadans thrive—from veterans to health care to infrastructure.  These accomplishments prove that this Majority was prepared to work and produced lasting results.  And I look forward to advancing even more priorities that benefit Nevada in the 115th Congress.As a member of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, I have been proud to advocate on behalf of Nevada’s brave heroes.My focus has always been the issues impacting Nevada’s veterans most:* Guaranteeing our veterans have access to care;
* Ensuring they receive care quickly;
* Working to hire more VA doctors;
* Providing health care for rural veterans; and
* Addressing the disability claims backlog.

And in this Congress, there has been a lot of progress.As the Co-Chair of the Senate VA Backlog Working Group, I’ve been holding the VA’s feet to the fire on the disability claims backlog. The VA has adopted many of my Working Group’s policy recommendations, and this pressure has helped reduced the backlog from 405,000 claims in 2014 to 92,000 today.  Although there is still much to improve, Nevada’s veterans are far better off submitting a claim to our Nevada VA Regional Office today than they were two years ago. Nevada was once worst in the nation, and now it is in the top 25% for performance.Another issue plaguing veterans in Nevada and nationwide is VA doctor shortages.  It is hard for the VA to recruit and retain medical professionals, and that impacts how quickly our veterans can get their care.I’ve asked the Government Accountability Office to examine the VA’s current policies for recruitment and retention and report back to me on what improvements can be made.I look forward to receiving that report next year and acting to ensure we address this issue that affects urban areas like Las Vegas, and our rural veterans in Elko, Ely, and Winnemucca.And when it comes to bringing high-quality care to Nevada, I’m also proud that the VA finally opened a brand new VA clinic in Pahrump.  While there have been many positive steps forward for Nevada’s veteran community, there is still more to be accomplished next Congress.In fact, I’m working to pass legislation through the Senate right now that would bring greater accountability to the VA by reporting each year on bonuses awarded to critical positions like VA hospital directors.  While I recognize that my colleague from West Virginia would like to ensure passage of one of his legislative priorities, I would hate for this important measure to be blocked.  I’m hopeful that we may be able to move this commonsense transparency legislation for our veterans before we go home for the holidays. We still have a 20% disability claims backlog, and a growing appeals backlog. The VA Choice Program must be re-visited in 2017 for reauthorization and improvements. The VA still struggles to fire employees who are poorly-performing. Rural veterans still struggle to find doctors to serve in their area.  These are priorities for Nevada’s veterans that I am committed to advancing every day I am in the Senate. I am also particularly proud of the work we’ve done here in the 114th Congress on infrastructure.  Those efforts yielded major results for the state of the Nevada.  Last year, we enacted the first long-term highway bill in nearly a decade, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act or FAST Act.  This five year bill provides states the resources and tools to advance high priority projects, such as the new Interstate 11 connecting Phoenix and Las Vegas, the Carson City freeway, and the widening of the Nevada’s busiest freeway Interstate 15 in Las Vegas.   The bill also included my top infrastructure priority – the expansion of Interstate-11 to northern Nevada.  I have been working for years to improve mobility between Las Vegas and Reno.  Surface transportation projects like these spur economic development opportunities, reduce congestion, and increase safety – the recipe for creating short-term jobs and long-term economic growth.   In July, the FAA Extension, Safety, and Security Act was enacted into law.  This important legislation implemented important reforms that make U.S. air travel safer and more efficient, essential to tourism destinations like Las Vegas, Reno, and Lake Tahoe.  And again later this weekend, we will debate yet another important infrastructure bill –the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act.Included in that package is a bill I sponsored and have been working on with my Nevada and California colleagues for nearly a decade – the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act.  This initiative will reduce wildfire threats, jumpstart transportation and infrastructure projects, and combat invasive species at Lake Tahoe, ensuring the Jewel of the Sierras is preserved for generations to come. It also includes a provision I crafted with Senator Heinrich that improves the water security of rural western communities.  I hope my colleagues will agree to quickly take up and pass this critically important legislation for my state, sending it to the President’s desk before the end of the year.With a new majority in the Senate, we were also able to make good on a number of promises to the American people on the health care front. First and foremost was being able to send an Obamacare repeal bill to the President’s desk within the first year of our new majority. One of my top priorities in our Obamacare repeal efforts was to fully repeal the 40 percent excise tax on employee health benefits. In Nevada, 1.3 million workers who have employer-sponsored health insurance plans will be hit by the Cadillac tax. I knew the devastating impact this tax would have on Nevadans – but I also knew that in order to get anything done, we needed a bipartisan effort. My friend Senator Heinrich from New Mexico and I teamed up to successfully include a delay of the Cadillac tax in the Omnibus bill at the end of last year.  Rest assured I will continue to fight for a full repeal in the next Congress.  This week we were also able to pass the 21st Century Cures Act, which was a two year process to work in a bipartisan way to advance medical research and clear out government red-tape at the Food and Drug Administration. I was very pleased that two of my bills that focus on mental health and protecting seniors’ Medicare benefits were included in this health care package. First, my bill “Bringing Post-Partum Depression Out of the Shadows Act” was included in the mental health title of the bill. After working with mental health care providers in my home state, I learned that Nevadans lack access to the appropriate treatment, screenings, and community support needed to provide effective care for new mothers struggling with post-partum depression. I worked with Senator Gillibrand and HELP Committee Chairman Alexander on this important piece of legislation, which builds upon existing state and local efforts by providing targeted federal grants to assist states in developing programs to better screen and treat maternal depression.Another bill we were able to pass as part of the Cures package was my legislation, the Medicare Advantage Coverage Transparency Act. This legislation requires more transparency of Medicare Advantage and Prescription Drug benefits enjoyed by seniors throughout the state. It will also ensure that these benefits continue to provide meaningful coverage to seniors and will help us protect important health care benefits for current and future retirees. More than 30 percent of Nevada’s seniors enjoy their Medicare Advantage benefits, and enrollment continues to grow in the state. Successfully passing a number of health care bills will surely set the tone for early next year when a united Republican government finally repeals Obamacare. I am optimistic that with a willing partner in the White House, we can build on these successes. And I plan on using my role on the Senate Finance Committee, Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, and the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee to tackle the challenges facing Nevadans across the state.  I know that we will do everything in our power to protect our constituents’ access to care as we transition out of Obamacare, and into a new era of a 21st Century health care system that works for patients. I know we will honor our veterans by improving the quality of care and benefits they have earned.And we will invest in roads, bridges, clean water, a modern and reliable electricity grid, telecommunications, and other pressing domestic infrastructure needs.I look forward to working with my colleagues in the United States Senate on these important priorities in the coming year. |
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