|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **For Immediate Release:** | **Contact:** [Neal A. Patel](mailto:neal_patel@heller.senate.gov) | | May 27, 2016 | 202-224-6244 |   **Heller Honors Fallen Heroes on Senate Floor**  **Before Memorial Day Weekend**  **(Washington, DC)** – Recently, U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) spoke on the Senate floor honoring those who made the ultimate sacrifice in defending our nation. Click [HERE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhbhDh5kCGE) or below to watch.   |  | | --- | | *“On behalf of the state of Nevada, the United States Senate, and the United States of America, I express my sincere gratitude to the families of all Nevadans who have given their lives in the line of duty.*  *“I assure you that your loss will never be forgotten. And I thank and commend each of the brave Nevadans currently serving in our armed forces, as well as their families, for their sacrifice.”*  **Remarks as prepared:**  Every day in Washington, I pass by the Iwo Jima Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery. This is a humbling reminder of the valiant men and women from across this nation who have answered the call of duty in two World Wars, the wars in Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan, and numerous other conflicts waged to keep America free. It constantly reminds me that the ongoing fight to care for our nation’s veterans is my duty and responsibility as a United States Senator.  These fearless warriors had moms and dads of their own. They had sons and daughters, loved ones, neighbors and friends. But they selflessly made the ultimate sacrifice for us. They stood against tyranny, fought oppression and injustice, and defended liberty with the highest measure of honor, valor and courage. They demonstrated the greatest love a person can have by laying down their lives for our country.  The greatest honor we can bestow on our men and women in uniform and their families is to remember their immeasurable sacrifice. While we carry on the tradition of Memorial Day, let us never forget that every day is a chance to thank and honor our patriots in uniform.  Last week I had the honor of attending the final send off for two of Nevada’s very own at the Arlington National Cemetery. Let me tell you about one of them, Bob Wheeler.  Mister Wheeler was a patriot in every sense of the word. He joined the United States Air Force in November of 1962, serving in the Para-Rescue career field. He was recognized as a true innovator in his leadership position, opening the door for free-fall parachuting and combat tactics. He led by example, working diligently and earnestly to help those around him and to protect our country. Bob was credited with saving 28 lives throughout his career, including vulnerable aviators who had crashed and distressed seamen in the Vietnam War. He received the Distinguished Flying Cross for Valor, the Airman’s Medal, numerous Commendation Medals, 17 Air Medals, and SEA Services Ribbons. His twenty years of service and bravery will never be forgotten. Those are the types of men and women our armed services is made up of, and they live all across this nation in each and every state represented in this body.  I had the pleasure of working with Mr. Wheeler personally, as he served on my Northern Nevada Veterans Advisory Council. We worked as a team, along with the rest of the council, to help improve resources for Nevada’s veteran community. His first-hand knowledge of combat and veterans’ needs could never be replicated – he was one of a kind, and I am thankful to have had him as an ally in helping Nevada’s veterans.  That’s why I was so disappointed to hear the head of the VA, Secretary Robert McDonald, comparing the wait times veterans experience at the VA for health care appointments to the wait times at Disney theme parks. It’s totally inappropriate and inexcusable. It shows there is still a culture and an attitude inside the VA that needs to change. The mission of the VA should always be serving the veteran, not finding ways to avoid accountability.  With the words, “To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan,” President Lincoln affirmed the government’s obligation to care for those injured during the war and to provide for the families of those who gave the ultimate sacrifice. Congress can do this is by working diligently on behalf of those who served and survived, which is why one of the greatest privileges of serving Nevada in the Senate is the opportunity to sit on the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee.  Recently, I joined my colleagues to introduce the Veterans First Act. It focuses on one thing: improving the delivery of care and benefits to our nation’s veterans and their families. Specifically, I championed causes that reform the VA disability claims process and create a system that can withstand surges in disability claims without generating another claims backlog. Also, I sought to implement a new, voluntary five-year pilot program to help reduce the large backlog of appeals at the Veterans Benefits Administration. I want to establish a new channel whereby veterans can expedite their appeal instead of waiting two to four years for a decision by the Board of Veterans Appeals. Finally, I want to ensure homeless veterans AND their families are cared for, which is why this bill includes provisions to reimburse VA-funded shelters for care of the child of homeless veteran.  On behalf of the state of Nevada, the United States Senate and the United States of America, I express my sincerest gratitude to the families of all Nevadans who have given their lives in the line of duty. I assure you that your loss will never be forgotten. And I thank and commend each of the brave Nevadans currently serving in our armed forces, as well as their families, for their sacrifice. But my gratitude extends across the nation to all veterans and their families. We owe you all a debt that can never be fully repaid. May God bless our troops, and may He continue to bless our great country. | | **###** |   [http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_fb.png](http://www.facebook.com/pages/US-Senator-Dean-Heller/325751330177) [http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_tw.png](http://twitter.com/SenDeanHeller) [http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_yt.png](http://www.youtube.com/user/SenDeanHeller) |