

## A Moment of Silence For a Lifetime Commitment - May 30, 2005

by Delaware Congressman Mike Castle

We have long honored those who gave their lives during the unfortunate reality of war. In fact, the ancient leader Pericles offered a tribute to the fallen heroes of war saying, "not only are [our soldiers] commemorated by columns and inscriptions, but there dwells also an unwritten memorial of them, graven not on stone but in the hearts of men." In every war our nation has fought, Delaware men and women laid their lives on the line to protect all of us and the liberties we enjoy. These fallen heroes represent the character of a nation who has a long history of patriotism and honor - and a nation who has fought many battles to keep our country free from threats of terror. Repaying the debt of these ultimate sacrifices seems nearly impossible but we must try.

That is why I have been working this Congress to ensuring that our troops have the needed resources for our troops in the field including vehicle armor, night-vision devices, and roadside bomb jammers. I fought for the first increase on the death gratuity paid to the families of our brave soldiers who are killed in combat from its current Vietnam-era level of \$12,000 to \$100,000. Although there is certainly no replacement for a life lost, I believe this provision will allow families of our fallen heroes to have some financial protection as they deal with the tragedy of a lost loved-one.

Over the past four years we have increased funding for veterans health care by 40% and the Department of Veteran's Affairs' total budget has risen by more than \$23 billion -- a 50% increase since 2001! Also since 2001-- Congress has passed and President Bush has signed into law-- 17 new comprehensive veterans laws to enhance health care programs and provide education, employment, and entrepreneurial training to help transition our returning service-members into civilian life.

Another program we have been working hard on is the GI Bill educational benefit, boosting funding by 50% in the last 3 years. This program is a true success story for helping our veterans pay for college or job training programs. And just this past Thursday, I am proud to say, I supported legislation providing \$121.8 billion next year for programs to improve the quality of life for veterans, active duty soldiers, and military families. And finally I look forward to the ground-breaking for our new VA Home coming up soon, and I am excited to see this important project move forward.

The time has come to honor our fallen heroes with a moment of silence this Memorial Day. Join with me in pausing for a moment of silence on Memorial Day to remember and honor those who have died in service to the nation.

As we observe Memorial Day, our nation continues to win a war against terrorism. I would like to take this opportunity to salute our brave servicemen and women who our serving our nation in the United States military. Today let us also remember the brave soldiers who died for our freedom and our veterans who selflessly stood in harm's way to guard our freedoms.