

# Sen. Baldwin: Bipartisan legislation includes Sen. Baldwin's work to improve care for Wisconsin veterans

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*Fully funds Jason's Law, invests in opioid treatment and prevention, and supports Gulf War and homeless Vets*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Senate Appropriations Committee has announced that a final conference agreement has been reached that includes a number of measures from U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin that will improve care for Wisconsin veterans.

“Our veterans and their families deserve solutions to problems at the VA and I am proud to have worked across party lines on bipartisan legislation that includes many reforms that I worked for to improve services and care for our veterans,” **said Senator Baldwin**. “We can serve our veterans and their families when we work together to fix problems at the VA and put in place bipartisan solutions. Let’s send this bipartisan legislation to the President for his signature and get the job done for our veterans.”

The appropriations package includes the bipartisan FY19 Military Construction-VA Appropriations Bill, which is expected to be voted on this week and sent to President Trump for his signature.

## **Jason's Law: Safer Care for Veterans**

Senator Baldwin's bipartisan legislation, the *Jason Simcakoski Memorial and Promise Act*, or “Jason's Law” earned the support of the Simcakoski family, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), The American Legion,

and other veterans service organizations. The bipartisan VA reform was signed into law in 2016.

Jason's Law is holding the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) accountable, strengthening oversight of the VA's opioid prescribing practices and providing safer care for our veterans. Earlier this year, Senator Baldwin secured full funding for implementation of Jason's Law in the FY18 omnibus spending bill signed by President Trump in April.

Now, Senator Baldwin has worked to include \$52 million for implementation of Jason's Law in FY19.

Jason's Law strengthened the VA's Opioid Safety Initiative, and according to June 2018 data, in Wisconsin, the bipartisan reform has helped the Tomah VA Medical Center achieve a 47 percent decrease in the number of veterans on chronic opioids. For veterans on opioids and benzodiazepines, there has been a 76 percent reduction.

### **Funding for Opioid Treatment and Prevention**

Senator Baldwin secured a significant increase in opioid treatment and prevention funding to support veterans receiving care at the VA.

The bipartisan bill includes over \$400 million for Opioid Abuse and Prevention, including funding to implement Opioid Treatment and Prevention programs Senator Baldwin got included in the *VA MISSION Act* that President Trump recently signed into law. The funds will be used to expand treatment options for veterans and develop programs aimed at ensuring non-VA providers treating veterans through Care in the Community programs are held to the same standards set by Jason's Law.

### **Increased Funding Opportunities to Help Homeless Veterans**

In her role on the Appropriations Committee, Senator Baldwin has worked for funding to help reduce veteran homelessness in Wisconsin. This bipartisan legislation provides \$1.8 billion for VA Homelessness programs, including \$380 million in support services for low-income veterans and their families to help reduce chronic homelessness.

### **Enhanced Research for Illnesses Affecting Gulf War Veterans**

Gulf War veterans claiming disability get denied at much higher rates than average. In fact, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, only 17 percent of claims get approved. Senator Baldwin worked to include a reform that directs the VA to improve approval rates, including through the streamlining of the claims process and better training of claims processing personnel. She also included a reform recommending the VA continue Gulf War Illness research and make the findings public, along with improve training for providers on the illness.

### **Supporting Veteran Caregivers**

Senator Baldwin has supported expanding and strengthening veteran caregiver services and she helped secure \$865 million for the VA Caregivers program. This funding will continue expanding access so that caregivers of all generations who put their careers and lives on hold to care for veterans will be able to get the support they need.

### **Helping Veterans Exposed to Toxic Burn Pits**

The open-air burn pits that the U.S. military has used in many overseas combat operations, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have exposed many service members to a variety of potentially harmful substances. Those exposed to burn pits have experienced a wide range of health effects, including cancer, neurological effects, reproductive issues, respiratory toxicity and cardiovascular toxicity.

Senator Baldwin worked with her colleagues to include \$5 million in the bipartisan legislation to create a Center of Excellence in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) focused on researching the health effects associated with burn pits and treating veterans who become sick after exposure.

### **Improving VA Inspector General Oversight**

The bipartisan legislation includes \$192 million for the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), which is a \$20 million increase from the President's request. This funding will help ensure the OIG does not have to reduce its staff and will allow them to improve their oversight responsibilities over the VA's budget and initiatives. It also includes an amendment cosponsored by Senator Baldwin to ensure that the VA OIG can investigate, audit and conduct oversight of the nation's largest health care system without being hindered by political delays, non-cooperation and stall tactics by the VA.