

*EVANSTON, IL – (November 11, 2010) Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) made the following remarks at a ceremony honoring America's Veterans today at Evanston's Fountain Square.*

"Thank you for the opportunity to join you here today. It is a great privilege to pay tribute to our veterans, and to honor all those who defend and protect our country.

"We have just finished several months of partisan, and at times divisive, campaigning. Today, we have the opportunity to come together, regardless of political affiliation, to celebrate the brave men and women who risk their lives to defend the democratic ideals and freedoms that make our country great.

"As we pay tribute to veterans past, present, and future, we also must recommit to ensuring that every veteran returning from war receives the benefits and services he or she has earned. Despite major strides forward, too many veterans continue to encounter critical gaps in health care services and difficulties in pursuing educational opportunities; they may experience trouble finding employment and insufficient support for their families.

"We have made many important improvements. Last month, President Obama signed H.R. 3219, the Veterans Benefits Act of 2010, into law. This legislation improves and modernizes a range of benefits for veterans and families, including enhancements to employment programs, services for homeless veterans, education benefits, and housing for disabled veterans.

“In May of this year, President Obama signed the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 into law, creating a support system for veteran caregivers that includes training, education, and financial assistance. This legislation also provides major improvements in mental health services, health care for female veterans, services for homeless veterans, and programs to assist rural veterans.

“And, critically, this Congress has approved advance appropriations for veterans’ health care. This measure ensures timely and predictable funding for the VA, and it protects veterans’ health funding from political games and maneuvers.

“These are just a handful of examples. There is still a great deal more to be done. We need to do more to ensure that all eligible veterans are able to access the benefits of the post 9/11 GI bill, which expanded the promise of a full, four-year education to veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“I have heard countless heartbreaking stories of claims taking years to process, and I know the devastating impact those delays can have on families, particularly in today’s economic climate. My office continues to work with veterans to help them access their benefits, but this is a much broader problem. We must give the VA the resources it needs to handle claims promptly and fairly.

“The transition to civilian life is complicated by today’s economy. Too many veterans return home only to encounter serious difficulties in finding a job. We can and must do so much more to help these men and women – not only are we failing our veterans, but we are squandering the billions of dollars we invest in training our military personnel.

“In September 2010, I joined Teamsters Joint Council 25 to unveil two new certification programs to help veterans more easily transfer their advanced military skills to the civilian work force. Heroes to Healthcare and the Illinois Teamsters’ commercial driver’s license program build upon military training to put veterans to work in the civilian sector. Like Helmets to Hardhats, which has worked with the Teamsters to train over 40,000 veterans since 2003, these new certification programs will help veterans transition the skills they acquired during their

military service into solid civilian jobs.

“I am proud of many of the legislative victories we have secured on behalf of our nations’ veterans. But there is a great deal more that we need to do. Today on Veterans’ Day, we pay tribute to the generations of men and women who have served our country in the armed forces, and we recommit ourselves to meeting the needs of all our nation’s veterans.

“Today, we celebrate the men and women who face hardship and danger because they believe in the promise of our country. I want to end by voicing my sincere gratitude to all veterans, to all members of our armed forces, to the men and women of the National Guard and Reserves, and to military families throughout the country.”