

*WASHINGTON, DC (May 30, 2011) –Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) issued the following statement in honor of Memorial Day :*

"Today, on Memorial Day, we pause to remember the brave men and women who gave their lives in defense of our country. Over the course of American history, countless soldiers have again and again answered the call of duty, and fought around the world to protect our nation and our ideals. Over a million of those soldiers have paid the ultimate price. Today, we remember those who died, and we redouble our commitment to caring for our veterans and military families.

Amidst ongoing war in Iraq and Afghanistan, today we pay tribute to the military families who are coping with the true cost of war. Families that have lost beloved mothers and fathers; sisters and brothers; sons and daughters. Over six thousand brave Americans have died in service of their country in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Two hundred and thirty of these are from our own state of Illinois. For the families who have lost loved ones, we share their grief and truly appreciate their sacrifice to keep our nation safe.

Today I'd also like to pause and remember the veterans who we've lost to suicide. These men and women are casualties of war, and I strongly believe that they should be treated and remembered as such. To start with, we need to work to avert these suicides, which should be preventable. As we place an ever-increasing burden on the men and women of our military, we need to increase our commitment to ensuring that they and their families have access to the care and services that they need. We should also immediately reverse the longstanding policy of denying Presidential condolence letters to military suicide victims.

I also would like to honor the growing number of women who have given their lives for their country. Like their colleagues, they often leave behind families, young children, and loved ones. Today, we recognize and honor their sacrifice, and the sacrifice of their families. With more and more women breaking down barriers and serving in the military, we need to ensure that the 1.8 million female veterans can access a full range of benefits and services. With a 30% increase in the number of female veterans enrolled in VA medical care expected in the next 5 years, we must act quickly to ensure that the VA is able to meet their needs.

On this Memorial Day, we come together here to recognize courageous men and women who have given their lives for their country. We honor the families who have lost loved ones to military conflict. And we redouble our commitment to meeting the needs of all those who have chosen to serve the United States in our armed forces. Today, the thoughts and prayers of all Americans go out to those who put their lives on the line for this nation."

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