

WE NEED MORE VETERANS IN CONGRESS

It is truly remarkable that the United States' military—the most powerful in the world—is entirely voluntary. Every single one of the roughly 1.3 million servicemen and women in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard voluntarily left their careers, family, and homes to protect our country. They believe freedom, liberty, and safety for their fellow citizens are more valuable than their own lives. They are true public servants.

Today, we need more true public citizens in Washington, D.C. People who wish to identify America's problems and then find real solutions. Washington has been overrun by career politicians who are beholden to corporate interests, special interest groups, and large PACs. Many of the men and women in the House and Senate today are there to make money, make connections, and set themselves up for a future position at a lobbying firm or cable news organization. They aren't interested in being effective.

Rep. Dan Crenshaw (R-TX), a former Navy SEAL who lost one of his eyes serving in the Middle East, said that veterans are “natural leaders, problem solvers, and patriots.” Veterans don't want to go to Congress to merely pontificate over this new tax cut or that new environmental regulation. When a veteran goes to Washington, they go to get things done. Let's take a look at a few veterans serving in Congress today and what they've done in their time in Washington.

Dan Crenshaw (R-TX)

Dan Crenshaw is a man with nerves of steel. He never gives up, and once he sets his mind to a task, you can be sure it will get done. This can be said with certainty because Crenshaw served the U.S. as a Navy SEAL.

Crenshaw is a sixth-generation Texan with much pride in his country, state, and family. Growing up, his father's work in the gas industry took him all over the world, including Ecuador and Colombia.

After high school, Crenshaw returned to the U.S. Upon his graduation from Tufts University in 2006, Crenshaw reported to BUD/S (Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training) and officially became a Navy SEAL in 2008. Crenshaw served with distinction and valor overseas, going on five tours of duty.

It was in 2012 when his life took a dramatic turn. While patrolling a village in the Helmand province of Afghanistan, Crenshaw's unit was hit by an IED explosion. Crenshaw lost his right eye and nearly his left as well. For some time, doctors thought he would be permanently blind. That was not enough to dissuade Crenshaw, however. Following his remarkable recovery and regaining of sight in his left eye, Dan served two more tours in Bahrain and South Korea.

In 2016, Crenshaw left the military to pursue another form of public service, politics. Dan Crenshaw burst onto the political scene in 2018 when he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Texas's 2nd congressional district.

He quickly rose to prominence after SNL comedian Pete Davidson poked fun at Crenshaw's eye patch and said he lost his eye in a "war or something." Many were appalled at the insensitivity of Davidson's comments, but Crenshaw took it in stride, going onto SNL with Davidson the following episode to address the criticisms. Because of Crenshaw's thick skin and ability to take a joke, there was a moment of national unity when people saw two prominent people on opposite sides of the political spectrum make peace.

Since coming to Congress, Crenshaw has fought hard for the Conservative principles he espouses and believes will help America. During the impeachment of President Donald Trump, Crenshaw voted against both articles of impeached and was an outspoken critic of the congressional Democrats pushing the impeachment.

Crenshaw focuses much of his efforts on matters pertaining to foreign policy. After China bungled its response to the COVID-19 outbreak—no doubt allowing the virus to spread much more effectively—Crenshaw introduced a bill alongside fellow veterans, Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR). The law would allow American citizens to file civil lawsuits against foreign states for incidents that bring about injury or death. As well as being an outspoken critic of China, Crenshaw has spoken openly about the threat posed to the U.S. by Iran.

Dan Crenshaw is just getting started when it comes to this new avenue of public service. Because of his belief that service comes before self, I am sure we can continue to look to Dan Crenshaw for effective leadership on Capitol Hill.

Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)

Tammy Duckworth comes from a long line of public servants. Her father, Frank Duckworth, was a veteran of the Army and Marines who fought in both World War II and the Vietnam War. The Duckworth family line has fought in every major conflict since America's War for Independence.

Tammy Duckworth was born in Bangkok, Thailand, due to her father's work with the United Nations. At sixteen, Tammy's family moved to Hawaii, and by 1992, Duckworth was a member of the U.S. Army Reserve.

Like Dan Crenshaw, Tammy Duckworth knows what it is like to have everything ripped away— yet, she didn't quit. On November 12, 2004, Duckworth was the co-pilot of a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter that was hit by an RPG fired by Iraqi insurgents. Duckworth lost both legs and partial use of her right arm in the explosion. Instead of retiring, however, Duckworth obtained a military waiver and joined the Illinois Army National Guard. She retired in 2014.

Duckworth's first political appointment was in 2006 when she was tapped to lead the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs. Under her guidance, the department created a program to help veterans dealing with PTSD and brain injuries.

In 2012, Duckworth went to Washington after being elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Illinois eighth congressional district. During her tenure in the House, Duckworth donated a part of her salary to the Treasury Department as an act of solidarity with furloughed federal employees.

In 2016, Duckworth won her bid for the U.S. Senate, defeating incumbent Mark Kirk. According to a project by the Center for Effective Lawmaking (CEL), Duckworth "exceeds expectations" as a freshman senator when it comes to effectiveness. One of her shining achievements as a senator was her saving the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Crenshaw and Duckworth are shining examples of veterans who have a desire to truly serve their country. Both nearly gave their lives protecting our homeland, and then came home to make a difference in government.