

Pete Ashdown for U.S. Senate
EMBARGO UNTIL 11:30 AM NOV 11, 2005
Contact: Brett Garner
Office: 801.983.PETE
Cell: 801.573.4759
brett@pashdown.org

Statement of Pete Ashdown at Utah Democratic Party Veterans' Caucus Press Conference

SALT LAKE CITY, UT—Pete Ashdown, US Senate candidate (D-UT), made the following statement at the Utah Democratic Party's press conference announcing the formation of the Veterans' Caucus.

“If you go to the Salt Lake City Cemetery, the northeast section is dedicated to graves of servicemen and women. On this day, I urge everyone here to visit those graves and reflect on the sacrifice that these men and women gave. While you are there, you will notice many gravestones are sunken down to the names, leaning to one side or another, or otherwise in disrepair. If you ask the sexton of the cemetery why such disrespect has been shown to our veterans who have died, sometimes in combat, he will tell you that the veterans' section is under Federal auspices. He only has funds to maintain the grounds, but not the stones of these soldiers, sailors, and airmen and women.

“These headstones are emblematic of the disgraces our government gives to veterans, living and dead, every day. While our deceased veterans are sinking into the ground, some living veterans are sinking under piles of student and household debts; others sink away into the depths of poverty; some are barely standing because they are unable to receive the medical and psychological care they were promised. It is emblematic of the incredible disconnect between the needs of America's veterans and those who are elected to serve them. If they do not give honor to those who have died, how can we expect our lawmakers to give respect to those who are living?

“The answer is we cannot. I applaud the veterans of the Democratic party who have said that they will no longer tolerate these disgusting inactivities. They realize that their obligations to fight for our freedom and honor did not end when they were discharged. The formation of this caucus shows that they still fulfill their oaths to 'bear true faith and allegiance to the [Constitution of the United States.]'

“Similarly, government at all levels must remember their obligations to these veterans and their families. I wholeheartedly endorse the efforts of our state legislators in their efforts to give more benefits to Utah's veterans and their families. At the same time, I cannot endorse the actions of our Senators, for they seem to have forgotten the promises they made to our veterans.

“Four times this year, Senator Hatch has voted against veterans health care benefits (Roll Call Votes Vote #[251](#), 10/5/05, #[89](#), 4/12/05; Vote #[90](#), 4/12/05; Vote #[55](#), 3/16/05). The last vote on October 5 attempted to establish the automatic funding mechanism, tied to inflation, that is

supported by: American Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Vietnam Veterans of America. Senator Hatch followed the flawed logic that Veterans do not are not entitled to expect the Cabinet department dedicated to them be adequately funded (*Congressional Record—Senate*, 10/5/05, page S1117, statement of Senator Craig). I believe that, if there is no better group of Americans entitled to our unending support than our veterans!

“Senator Hatch's record against veterans is too long to note in this presentation; in the past 5 years, he has voted 14 times against veterans' benefits, sometimes to protect tax cuts for millionaires.

“On this day, I propose a GI's Bill of Rights for the 21st Century. Our veterans benefit structure will have difficulty dealing with the new veterans of our current wars if we continue with things as they are.

“Among the provisions of this new GI Bill of Rights would be:

- “First: Eliminating benefit distinctions between Active Duty, Reserve, and National Guard Units serving in current Combat Zones (Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kosovo). With Reserve and Guard units being utilized, on the front lines, like never before, we need to treat them equally and give them equal veterans' benefits. An article in today's newspaper highlights this problem: Reserve and Guard veterans of the War on Terror have been eligible for the same student aid benefits Active Duty veterans receive. However, for the past two years, the VA has sent zero checks, those veterans who are eligible do not know that they are, and the VA has problems creating the database required to determine eligibility. We are denying a generation of Chapter 1607-eligible veterans the student aid and benefits they have earned. (See [Salt Lake Tribune, 11/11/2005.](#))
- “Second: Increasing funding for psychological treatment of returning soldiers. A Walter Reed Hospital study found *one in eight* returning servicemen and women had symptoms of PTSD, an unprecedented number. However, our VA clinics are straining to support these heroes in there hour of need; this is unacceptable.
- “Third: Increasing funding for the Readjustment Counseling Service of the VA. Do we realize that our nation relies on less than one-half of one percent of its population to serve? That puts an incredible strain on those who come back from combat into a society that has no idea what they have been through. At some college campuses, they have veterans' assistance centers. We need that for every segment, though; that is what the RCS does and we should give them the resources they need to accomplish their goal. By the way, in September, Senator Hatch voted against increasing its budget.

“These are a few proposals for issues I think need to be addressed; there are many more and I urge those with other ideas to log on to my website, www.peteashdown.org, click on the 'Collaborate' link, and share them. My campaign is about getting the best ideas from all Utahns and putting them to work in the Senate.

“If there is one issue which I think cannot wait until I am elected, it is fixing those gravestones at the City Cemetery and every Cemetery in the country. I ask all Utahns, including Senator Hatch, to help fix this problem. I put this as a test on Senator Hatch: if does not fix this by Memorial Day 2006, I personally organize a service project to fix those stones. In his Second Inaugural, President Lincoln said that it is our duty to “care for him who has borne the battle, and for his

widow and his orphan.” I promise to do that; Utah Democratic Party promises to do that, and I thank the veterans who have organized this caucus for continuing to care for our nation. Thank you.”

Senator Hatch's voting record on Veterans' Rights:

- On 9/22/2005, he voted (on party lines) against \$109 million for the Readjustment Counseling Service, which helps returning soldiers make the transition back to civilian life (Roll Call Vote [242](#)); the amendment failed
- Previous to the Bush Administration revising the FY 2005 budget to provide \$1.5 Billion in emergency funding for the VA, Hatch voted against Democratic amendments to restore from \$1.5-2.5 Billion in funding (Roll Call Votes [55](#), [89-90](#)); the amendment failed
- Hatch did support an amendment that gave less than \$500 million, most of the money coming from foreign aid, including AIDS prevention budgets (Roll Call Vote [54](#)). Amendment passed
- When Bush did request the funding, he, along with a unanimous Senate, voted for it (Roll Call Votes [165-66](#), [174](#)). All passed.

In Previous years:

- He voted against indexing the veterans health care budget to inflation (108th Congress 2nd Session, Roll Call Vote [145](#)); the amendment failed
- He voted against creating a reserve fund to allow for an increase in Veterans' medical care by \$1.8 billion by eliminating abusive tax loopholes (108th Congress, 2nd Session, Roll Call Vote [40](#)); the amendment failed
- He voted against creating a reserve fund to allow for an increase in Veterans' medical care by \$2.7 billion and lower the national debt by reducing the President's tax breaks for taxpayers with incomes in excess of \$1 million a year. (108th Congress, 2nd Session Roll Call Vote [34](#)); the amendment failed
- He voted against increasing FY 2004 funding for the discretionary programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs by \$1,019,000,000, so it matches the level proposed by a coalition of veterans groups in the Independent Budget; to decrease the deficit by a similar amount; and to use the unreconciled tax cut to pay for it. [meaning ending a Bush tax cut]. (108th Congress, 1st Session, Roll Call Vote [74](#)); the amendment failed
- He voted against increasing discretionary funding for veterans medical care by \$1.718 billion in 2002 and each year thereafter to ensure that veterans have access to quality medical care. (107th Congress, 1st Session, Roll Call Vote [84](#)); the amendment passed.