

By Kevin McCarthy November 12, 2011 [Link](#)

Throughout our nation's history, America has been a shining city on a hill to the rest of the world – a representation of what freedom and a democratic system of government can produce. And we have the men and women of our Armed Forces to thank for it. Many of those brave patriots come from our communities. On Thursday, I toured Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake with House Armed Services Committee Chairman Buck McKeon, where I was again impressed by the great work being done there to ensure our nation's security. I was also impressed by the support the Bakersfield community showed on Veterans Day. The turnout for the 92nd Annual Veterans Day Parade and the Veterans Day Military Vehicle Show at the Kern County Museum was great. I was honored to participate in these events and interact with some of the courageous veterans who answered the call to serve our nation.

There are more than 22 million veterans in America, about 2 million reside in California. Our Congressional District is home to one of the highest concentrations of veterans in our state – nearly 55,000. Just a few examples of the courageous individuals from our community who have answered the call to defend America include: highly decorated Korean War veteran Larry Ybanez, who continues to give his time assisting fellow veterans; Iraq War veterans Jeremy Staat and Wesley Barrientos, who are gearing up to ride across the country from the Wall of Valor Memorial to the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C. to unify the nation's vets; and Ashleigh Martel, a veteran of the Iraq War who now works at the Kern County Veteran Services Department.

The men and women who have served our country deserve our unending gratitude for the sacrifices they and their families have made to ensure we can wake every morning to a nation full of endless possibility. One way we can demonstrate our gratitude is to make certain our veterans receive the benefits they earned. This past August, legislation I voted for was signed into law to ensure that veterans receiving tuition aid under the GI bill receive the funding they are entitled to. I was also pleased to vote for improving job training programs and employment opportunities for veterans. In addition, I recently led a group of my colleagues in requesting an independent audit into the Veterans Administration to get to the bottom of the continued backlog and delays our local veterans have been experiencing with getting the health care they need in our region.

As we take a moment to remember those who have answered the call of duty, let us renew our commitment to honor them when they return home. We are a grateful nation, and I thank the

residents in our community for always showing our veterans our heartfelt appreciation for their service. I encourage everyone to take a moment to thank a veteran for their service this Veterans Day and to reflect upon the opportunities afforded us because of their sacrifice.