

# Marcio Rubio's Brilliant Idea for Honoring Veterans

U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), with his brother Mario at his side, told a roomful of Iowa voters his vision for honoring veterans, if elected President of the United States.

"The first job of our president—as stated in the Constitution—is actually the last thing President Obama seems interested in doing, and that is serving as Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces of the United States," he said. "So in just two months, we'll begin choosing the person who will be in charge of the world's greatest military, the person responsible for protecting the safety of your children and mine. And with that honor comes another extraordinary duty: That of representing those who put their lives on the line for freedom."

Rubio said the commander-in-chief has a two-part duty to those who serve in the military. The first is to "honor our troops while they're serving," he said, while the second is to "honor them after they come home."

"Honoring them while they're serving begins with reducing the likelihood that they will be pulled into conflict," he said. "The way to do that is not to ignore threats—it's to project American strength abroad, to stand beside allies such as Israel, stand up to enemies such as Iran and engage strategically around the world."

Rubio said to do that, he would reverse defense spending cuts implemented during sequestration, but with an eye toward reducing fraud, waste and abuse. He added that he would never take the decision to commit U.S. military forces lightly, and when he did make that decision, U.S. forces would go into battle with a "full commitment to victory."

To address how he would honor veterans once they come home, he first discussed his brother's story of frustration in dealing with the Department of Veterans' Affairs:

"Like many thousands of other veterans, Mario is struggling to get the care owed to him for an injury he suffered during his service. He was hit in the mouth while in jump school, bending his front teeth back in a way that became an orthodontic nightmare. He was driven to the dentist at Fort Benning where they did some initial work to correct the damage, but the Army never made an official record of the visit.

"So today, he needs more orthodontic work as a result of his injury, but the VA won't cover it. He's had to file a claim and wait for a hearing, which could take anywhere from 18 months to three years. Meanwhile, he's stuck waiting for the procedures he needs.

"Mario is going through the exact same bureaucratic nightmare every other veteran in his situation has to go through. And like so many of them, he will tell you how confusing it has been, how even the forms he has to fill out seem almost intentionally complicated. He's often met with the same charm and efficiency at the VA that the rest of us find at the DMV.

"My brother, like all of our veterans, deserves better. When I am president, they will have better."

Rubio said one of the reasons why the VA is "so incompetent" is because "union bosses have rigged the system," making it difficult, if not impossible, to fire bad VA employees. He said this was an issue he tried to address in the Senate.

"It wasn't easy," he said. "I had to take on Bernie Sanders, who actually tried to block my bill. I took on the Unions. I took on every one of them to put the interests of veterans above the interests of bureaucrats, and I succeeded."

Rubio noted that, even with his legislative victory, little

has changed in the VA. Few have been fired, he said, and corruption “still runs rampant” within the department. He said he has filed a second bill that goes even further, allowing for the firing of not just ineffective managers, but also lower-level employees who are neglecting their duties.

“Yet the truth is we’ll never be able to completely overhaul the system until we have a new commander-in-chief,” he said. “Hillary Clinton wants to be that commander-in-chief, but she refuses to admit there’s a crisis, saying problems at the VA aren’t as ‘widespread’ as has been reported. On this issue, like virtually every other, Hillary Clinton would keep the status quo the status quo.”

Rubio said he doesn’t just want to reform Washington, he wants to transform it. To transform the VA, he offered a three-step approach.

## 1. Accountability

“Accountability is the radical concept I just discussed – so radical that no one in Washington seems to have any clue what it is,” Rubio said. “And that is that any corrupt and negligent workers at the VA should be fired.

“Now, let me be clear: there are a lot of good people at the VA. Many are veterans themselves. And the other side of accountability is that, if you’re doing a good job, you should be recognized and valued for your hard work. But those who are not doing a good job will be fired when I am president.”

## 2. Transparency

“One reason we’re not seeing the results we wanted out of our first effort at reforming the VA is that we simply have no way of verifying what’s happening,” Rubio said. “I’d love to be able to give you a specific number of people who have been fired as a result of my law, but no one knows what that number is. The VA is claiming it’s in the hundreds, but the fact

checkers have laughed that off. They estimate it's in the 20s. Others say it's in the single digits. But no one knows. And this is how bureaucrats at the VA get away with it all.

"When I am president, we'll know what's happening. I will require the VA and VHA to report publicly on all aspects of its operation, including quality, safety, patient experience, timeliness and cost-effectiveness. And with that information, we'll be empowered to make decisions and make lasting changes to the system."

### 3. Choice

"When I'm president, benefits are going to follow the veteran; the veteran is not going to have to follow the benefits," Rubio said. "That means if the local VA doesn't provide efficient and high quality care, but the hospital around the corner does, you will be able to take your VA benefits and go to that hospital. Veterans facing health problems of all kinds, including mental health issues, need to have the option to seek care from private providers in a way that also preserves traditional VA services.

"This, by the way, is important for Mario because he needs periodontal work done but there isn't a periodontist with the VHA anywhere near him. To get the care he needs, he'll have to go to a private provider."

After explaining the "what" and the "how" of his plan, Rubio then delved into the "why," telling a story about his grandfather, who lived with him throughout much of his childhood. He told of the pain his grandfather felt over the loss of his country, and how he believed the U.S. was "destined to be the defender of human progress throughout the world."

"Our lessons took place against the backdrop of the Cold War. It's easy to forget today just how tense those times were for America," Rubio said. "In some ways, what we're going through

today is similar—not just with a resurgent Russia and other traditional powers, but also with our civilizational struggle against radical Islam. Like the Cold War, this is a clash of ideologies, and we have to win.”

Invoking presidents Harry Truman and Ronald Reagan, as well as his grandfather, Rubio attacked President Obama for believing “something different.” He said Obama believes America has been a bully for too many years, and that the U.S. should be tolerant to the point of violating the very God-given rights it was founded upon.

“There is no doubt in my mind that his weakness, both moral and strategic, has led to the discord we see around the world today,” he said. “This, in turn, has endangered our people as well as the men and women in uniform who are called to defend them.”

Rubio said the lesson of history is that the only means of achieving peace is through “strength of arms and strength of values.” He then ended his speech by reiterating his commitment to U.S. veterans.

“As president, in all that I do, I will honor the two centuries of veterans who have defended this exceptional nation and the values it represents, and I will honor the brave men and women in uniform who carry on that legacy today,” he said. “I will honor them by defending their dignity in Washington, by proudly advancing the values many have died to defend, by uniting our people around the common cause of liberty, and by promoting the security our nation needs to thrive in our time and for all time.”