

Lodi News-Sentinel

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Saying that addressing veterans' issues in Congress is a tough assignment because so much needs to be done on their behalf, Rep. Jerry McNerney discussed treating brain-injured soldiers, employment opportunities and the future nursing home for veterans coming to San Joaquin County.

McNerney, D-Pleasanton, addressed a group of Okinawa veterans from Lodi at a special luncheon on Wednesday at Phillips Farms. He acknowledged Americans' "grave, unforgivable error" toward veterans after the Vietnam War.

"We will never let that happen in our country again," he said.

McNerney added that one of the biggest issues in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is treating soldiers suffering from post-traumatic brain injury after they're discharged. It's a more significant injury than ever before, he said, because in previous wars, soldiers didn't survive the brain injuries.

In other veterans' issues, McNerney addressed a bill he authored that, if Congress approves it, will require veterans to have equal access to good job opportunities. He also discussed the veterans' nursing home planned for French Camp in about 2018.

"The Veterans Administration is bureaucratic, slow," McNerney said.

He pledged to make sure the VA keeps the construction project moving.

Lodi resident Richard Neuharth, a Battle of Okinawa survivor, said he didn't learn anything from

McNerney that he didn't already know.

"He's not saying anything more than you can read in the newspapers, including the News-Sentinel," Neuharth said.

One local veteran attacked McNerney for supporting the new health care plan recently signed by President Barack Obama.

"Did you vote on Obamacare?" the veteran asked.

"Yes, proudly," McNerney replied.

"Did you read the bill?" the man asked.

"Yes, a couple of times," McNerney said.

"Oh no you didn't, not before you voted on it," the veteran said.

The wife of an Okinawa veteran asked McNerney why the United States is giving so much money to foreign countries when America desperately needs that money.

"That's an excellent point," McNerney said.

The federal government needs to focus its spending on issues at home, such as research and development.

"We need to stop outsourcing," he said.

Local veterans who survived the Battle of Okinawa during World War II meet monthly for breakfast at Phillips Farms. Some 20 people attend the breakfast, but on Wednesday, the group held a luncheon to accommodate McNerney's schedule and to invite veterans' wives, said Okinawa veteran Bob Terry, who emceed the event.

Phillips Farms owner Don Phillips, also an Okinawa veteran, invited anyone in attendance to tell stories from World War II, and he ended festivities with a rousing sing-along of "Home on the Range."