

STATEMENT OF JOHN J. KEEFE Col. USMC (ret) AT MONTANA STATE CAPITOL 18 JAN. 09
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Committee Chairman, Members, and my brother and sister veterans:

EXHIBIT 4
DATE 1-19-09
HB 28

I am a citizen of Missoula, Montana. I have been so for about 10 years. I am active in my community as much as my 79 years permit. My wife and I have raised two sons through high school there. One joined the US Air force and the other the US Navy. Two other sons were in the US Marines before our Montana adventure. Among them there are 5 tours in Iraq. Mike our youngest is in the training cycle so he has not been to Iraq – yet. One goes monthly to Iraq and works at CENTCOM under Gen Patraeus. We hope our younger ones will return to Montana. That depends on their career opportunities as it does for many Montanan youngsters. My own service covers two earlier wars.

You have been told of the number of military retirees and salaries these people bring to Montana.

I choose to call your attention to their character, spirit and physical contributions to our communities and to Montana. The retired guardsmen, airmen, soldiers, coast guardsmen, sailors and Marines, male or female, and their families will add to the rich environment already here. Many are young- less than 45. They are traveled, lived abroad and stateside under amazing conditions. They have the experience of other cultures, languages and levels of technology. They are strong, quick and smart. They live fitness, honor and integrity. They are informed and vote even when absentee ballots are not counted. They are skilled in leading, communicating, planning, problem solving, accountability, responsibility, tact and diplomacy. Persuasive leadership is used at levels most people would not expect. They are church attendees. The term, "Spending like a drunken sailor," is offensive, even to soldiers and other serve members today. This attitude is an example of inter service respect growing in our service members today. Race, gender, or other ethnic or regional discrimination is fought more successful in the service than any other element of our society. We will see acceptance of gays in the service. Young people already do. It is the geezers who find it difficult to accept any sort of change. I am old enough to remember meaningless discussions of the benefits of the 03 rifle over the M-1,- then the M-14- and then the M-16, then the black shoe over the brown shoe. Change is inevitable. These retirees are in step with the acceptance of change for greater good.

They have dealt with stress, disappointing assignments, violent deaths of comrades next to them, they bear wounds, they endure freezing, 135 degree heat, diminished rations, no water, deadly insects, environmental hazards—and they have survived. These survivors have so much to offer. Who would not welcome these graying warriors into their community?

The spouses and families need mention. They are survivors too. They are smart, tough and fit. They are athletes, and achievers too. The repeated separations, at sea or deployments to foreign lands in or out of combat, stress spouses and children. At the same time they are concerned about dad or mom's well being, morale and safety. Under these conditions, they carry on. Music lessons continue, Gold awards are accomplished. Eagle Scout awards are earned and scholarships are awarded. Life in the fast lane goes on. Their selfless sacrifices are seldom stated. What moral strength and courage can they bring? Huge doses of both.

Some will discover Montana as many of us have. Others will come, if invited and sought after. Waver of state tax on military retirement pay is an attraction and to be perceived as an invitation. It is a visible sign of the support and the esteem Montanans have for lengthy service to the nation, state and communities.

Thank you for your time and particularly your support in this enterprise.