

House Appropriations Committee

I have been asked several times why Veterans should receive the consideration HB 49 proposes. The major point of this bill is potential economic development resulting from increasing the veteran population in Montana, but there are other considerations as well.

Veterans have always held a special place in the minds of most Americans. I think it goes back to pre-constitution times when a select few were asked and performed military duties at the community level. We called them Minutemen; they were farmers, butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers, who kept a weapon close at hand to defend their family and community. The concept of the draft started in the Civil War but in the south and much of the north, state militia volunteers formed the bulk of the military capability, as warfare escalated to a regional/ national level. In the Civil War another huge change took place, the level of violence involved, and it was horrifying. Often tens of thousands died on a single day and many thousands more were maimed for life. The carnage in WW1 was even worse, in that poison gas, heavy artillery, machine guns, and equipment like tanks came in to play. After the Civil War, WW1 and WW2, our society was reminded daily by contact with Veterans, of the terrible human cost of war. Special consideration has been given to Veterans because of these sacrifices.

How do we place a monetary value on the job we expect of our military members? In no other field of endeavor do we ask or expect what they give. They are expected to be available for duty 24 hours a day 365 days a year and to lay their life on the line. An E-5, the middle of the enlisted ranks, bears the brunt in war, and has a base pay of \$3045.60/ month. They receive additional allowances for housing and subsistence (food) but it still leaves many of them needing food stamps and other assistance to keep their families going. Then of course, they are asked to deploy, leaving spouse and family behind for 6 months to a year or more at a time. Many of them have deployed as many 5 times in the last 12 years since 2001. The answer to the question is that there is no monetary value that can be placed on what we ask of them. We do however, give them a promise in 2 ways; first is the promise of "free" medical care for them and their families, plus some other things like life insurance. This promise also includes a retirement annuity, medical care and other "benefits"; in my mind that's what Veterans programs are all about, a part of the promise made.

About 3 million served in the Viet Nam era; 58,261 names are on the Wall as killed in action. Last summer the number of suicides among Viet Nam veterans



exceeded that number. There is no way to know how many more have attempted suicide or are in the act of killing themselves by self medication with drugs and alcohol. My bet is that it's 5 or even 10 times as many, or much higher. We will never know the true cost in human terms, of the Viet Nam War.

In this most recent set of conflicts, roughly the same number have served, near 3 million men and women. Our understanding of PTSD has increased dramatically. We now believe PTSD can occur months and years after, and may affect as many as 60 or 70% over time. That's potentially 1.5 million+ men and women who may exhibit PTSD symptoms during their lifetime. In addition, there are physical injuries that leave many with significant problems in daily living.

I have the utmost respect for other people who serve the public. They make great contributions to our society. However, I don't believe that what they do harbors the same level of sacrifice and consequences I have outlined above.

I hope the information and thoughts I have provided here will be of value to you as you consider HB 49. Thank you!

Respectfully,

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