

Helping Veterans achieve the American dream

By U.S. Senator Jerry Moran

Americans come together each year on November 11 to celebrate and honor our nation's veterans. These brave men and women sacrificed to provide their children and grandchildren with the opportunity to achieve the American Dream, so it's imperative we make certain they themselves have the opportunity to live the American Dream.

In Kansas and across the country, veterans face a myriad of challenges when they return home from service from braving mental health conditions such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, to the basics needed to enter the workforce like creating or updating a resume. With 34,000 servicemen and women expected to return home by February 2014, practical programs and services must be in place to help them transition from one chapter of their lives to the next.

Whether it's continuing their education, finding a job to support their families, or starting their own business, Kansans continue a strong tradition of working to help our servicemen and women attain their goals.

For soldiers and their families looking to obtain a college degree, universities across the state offer flexible and affordable options such as online coursework and accelerated programs. Fort Riley and Kansas State University also have an unconventional collaboration connecting eight Division I sports teams and four club-level teams with combat units at Fort Riley. From scrimmaging to attending deployment and return ceremonies, the fellowship creates a mutual appreciation and has even inspired some soldiers to become the first in their families to attend college upon separation from service.

A real concern for veterans when returning to civilian life is finding a job and business owners in Kansas should strongly consider hiring our heroes. According to extensive interviews conducted last summer by the Center for a New American Security, business owners hire veterans because of their leadership and teamwork skills, character, discipline, effectiveness and loyalty. Numerous large companies like Garmin and Sprint have veteran-employment initiatives, so it's encouraging to see small businesses also taking steps toward proactively recruiting our heroes.

National initiatives are important, but support at the local level such as the job fairs at all of our Kansas military installations also make a difference.

Veterans are offered this kind of community networking and support through organizations like GallantFew, which was founded by Army Ranger veteran Karl Monger of Wichita in 2009. GallantFew exists to reduce veteran unemployment, homelessness, and eliminate veteran suicide. The nonprofit organization changes lives by pairing "seasoned" veterans who have successfully established their civilian careers with "new" veterans to mentor and facilitate a seamless transition from active military service to civilian life. You can get help or get involved by visiting www.gallantfew.org.

For many veterans, entrepreneurship is becoming an increasingly valuable way of providing for their families. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 2.4 million businesses, 9 percent of companies nationwide, are owned by veterans. And according to the Kansas City-based Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation the largest foundation in the world devoted to entrepreneurship today, 45 percent of veterans start their own businesses upon completion of their military service.

In April, I convened a Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee roundtable with business owners and veteran organization representatives to discuss the state of veteran entrepreneurship, ideas on how current programs may be improved, and gaps not being addressed. I'm also a sponsor of the Service members' Choice in Transition Act, which includes a provision to empower military members who seek to own a small business the ability to pursue that dream as part of the Transition Assistance Program.

On Veterans' Day, we express our gratitude for the service of those who have protected our way of life and allowed us to remain the strongest and freest nation in the world. Let's make certain whether veterans wish to start their own business, commence a job search, or go back to school, they are able to achieve the same American Dream they sacrificed so much to protect.

God bless our veterans: we respect you, we thank you and we love you.



Leave the diagnosing to the doctors

So, I never claimed to be a diagnostician.

Jim had been complaining of pain in the general area of his gall bladder surgery incision for two days and I chalked it up to thinking he probably lifted something too heavy. But I felt really bad when he said, "Look at my back. Is there something there?"

Indeed, there was something there. Several "somethings", in fact. He had a line of red, raised welts running from the middle of his back, around his right side. In my most authoritative voice I declared, "You've been bitten by something. Maybe a spider."

By Day 3, the pain was so bad he called the doctor himself and set an appointment. One look and the doctor said, "You've got shingles."

Oh, my. Why didn't I think of that? My youngest daughter, Kara, had shingles when she was just three. Our family doctor could hardly believe they would erupt in a child so young. But

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



the one thing I remember him saying was, "The pain from shingles is so intense, it's been known to drive a grown man crazy."

Upon hearing the diagnosis I had sympathy for Jim. I have been told the pain from shingles is an internal pain. It follows the nerve endings and cannot be scratched..

He's on a strong medication to control the spread and over-the-counter pills for the pain. He's supposed to keep his skin dry and not sweat.

Jim doesn't know any way to work except hard. And "not sweating" is an impossibility.

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This week marks my oldest daughter's birthday. I can always remember how old Halley is because I'm 20 years older.

My mother took a picture of Halley's father and me looking at her as she lay on her tummy in the middle of the kitchen table out at the farm. We were mesmerized by her. The look on our faces said, "Look! We invented babies. And this one is the cutest and smartest one ever."

I think we weren't far from wrong. Halley was and still is one of the most delightful people you will ever meet. Her sense of humor is sharp and quick. Sometimes satirical, always timely, never hurtful. She is a friend to many, a proud aunt to her nieces, a fiercely protective sister and a loving daughter.

Maybe we didn't invent babies, but we sure broke the mold when we made Halley. Happy birthday, Honey.

Farmers and ranchers wonder where is the farm bill

To say the farm bill has moved like molasses through Congress the past three years is a gross understatement. This branch of our federal government continues to be mired in the mud of partisan politics.

Congress seems hell-bent on infighting while this nation's business is left undone. Kansans and other farm-state lawmakers are urging their colleagues to look back to more bipartisan times and do something Congress hasn't done much of lately - pass a major piece of legislation.

Remember the old axiom: politics is the art of compromise?

Farm country needs a farm bill and we could have used it yesterday. Much of the fall corn, beans and milo are out of the fields and farmers are ready to look toward 2014 and next year's crops.

Kansas farmers and ranchers need the certainty of a completed farm bill in order to make business decisions for next year, says Kansas Farm Bureau President Steve Baccus, an Ottawa County farmer.

A strong, affordable crop insurance safety net will help producers develop individual risk management plans, he adds. Reauthorizing livestock disaster programs will protect Kansas ranchers from catastrophic losses such as those suffered by South Dakota ranchers after the recent blizzard.

Baccus urged Congress to fund all ti-

Insight

John Schlageck



ties in the new farm bill to avoid abandoning important conservation, research and trade programs to the mercy of the appropriations process. He also called on lawmakers to preserve traditional rural-urban cooperation on nutrition issues.

"A farm bill without a meaningful nutrition title will make it difficult, if not impossible, for the House and Senate to reach agreement on a bill that can be signed by the President," Baccus said. "Congress must pass a unified farm bill that continues the partnership between the nutrition and farm communities and their constituents."

Seems the main challenge in arriving at a new farm bill is the differences on food stamps, officially called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The House has passed legislation to slash approximately \$40 billion annually, or about 5 percent including changes in eligibility and work requirements. The Senate wants to cut a much smaller \$4 billion.

SNAP funding has more than dou-

bled during the past five years as the nation's economy struggled. Democrats contend it is working as intended, providing food to those in need when times are tough. Republicans believe it should be focused on the neediest people.

When most Americans think of a farm bill they think of farm subsidies. Few think of all the other things that are covered in this nearly \$1 trillion program.

Few Americans know that 75 percent of the farm bill is actually helping feed folks who need nutrition assistance. Let me repeat, 75 percent of this bill goes to feed hungry people.

Most of the current law's ag provisions expired in September. Direct payments would have been eliminated and our lawmakers could have taken some of that money and applied it to deficit reduction as well as an affordable crop insurance program.

If we don't have a farm bill by 2014 and Congress allows dairy supports to expire, 1930s and 1940s-era farm law would kick in. Some estimates conclude the government will then pay up to four times more for dairy products. If that scenario plays out, many farmers would sell to the government instead of commercial markets, decreasing the commercial supply while raising prices for shoppers at the supermarket.

So the question remains - can the House and Senate pass a farm bill?

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