

Military Families Deserve Attention

By □ Sam Farr

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We are all very lucky to live in a nation with such a rich history of service. My work with the thousands of veterans on California's Central Coast is one of my most fulfilling duties, and I pride myself on championing so many of their causes.

I think one of the reasons I'm so eager to work with our veterans is because the idea of dedicating life to service is very dear to me. My life of service began nearly 45 years ago when I entered the Peace Corps. I spent two years in Colombia teaching poor Colombians how to improve their lot in life, how to lift themselves out of poverty. It was an experience that molds much of the work I do today.

I also discovered during those years that the idea of service can mean different things to different people. Our veterans and our active duty service members, of course, have served our country by risking life and limb time and time again to protect our values and our way of life. While the face of war has dramatically changed in the last 50 years, it is still the soldier, sailor, airman and Marine who remain our military's greatest asset--even more so now that we have an all volunteer force.

In return for their service to our country, these veterans deserve nothing but the best from our country. I'm proud that the new Democratic majority served our veterans last year by passing the largest health care increase in the history of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Taking care of our veterans by making sure they have nothing short of world class health care should be our number one priority.

But I'm also interested in those individuals whose service isn't always recognized, or ever volunteered: namely our military families. They're not spending time in the war zone, but it's difficult to argue that the sacrifices they live with every day aren't worthy of honor. Our fighting men and women would not be able to operate as they do without a solid family foundation back home, and when one of our service members makes the ultimate sacrifice, it is their family members who must live with it.

We have wives and husbands whose spouses are away on multiple deployments; children whose parents aren't around for the special moments; and parents who live in fear for their soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines fighting overseas. I think too often we don't offer enough attention on those who are left behind when the men and women in our armed forces are sent abroad. It's important from the community level all the way up to the federal level that we remember that families are just as much in need of our nation's support and prayers as our fighting forces.

In Washington, we need to keep in mind that many of the problems facing families across the country affect our military families even more severely. Already in an uncertain environment, from housing to medical care to a rising unemployment rate, it's harder to for our military families compensate during turbulent times when a family member is serving overseas. Congress and the president have come together on some of these issues, but there is much more work to do.

The economic stimulus checks that were received over the summer injected a much-needed boost to our economy, but for many of our military families those checks had a much more personal effect: they allowed many families some breathing room during a rough economic patch.

But a little extra pocket money only goes so far. We need to make sure that our soldiers overseas don't have to worry about their families being evicted from their homes. We need to guarantee that military spouses and children have access to the best health care available. The work our soldiers are doing is the most obvious examples of service, but they're nothing without their families. It's our responsibility to make sure that hidden service is rewarded with responsible care.

I want to thank our men and women in uniform. I am inspired by the courage, professionalism and patriotism of our men and women in uniform, past and present. As we honor all those who have dedicated their lives to military service for our country, we must never forget those who make the ultimate sacrifice for liberty, freedom and justice for all. And we must never, ever forget our military families who make it all possible. I'm proud of the hard work they do for our country and the freedoms they represent.

I will do my best to make sure our active duty military and our veterans receive the benefits deserve. And I want to thank the families who make so many sacrifices. Your troubles are not forgotten. You are always in our minds and we thank you.