



Gloucester Daily Times

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Letters to the editor Veterans Day: A thanks and a challenge

To the editor:

On Nov. 11, 2019, this nation honors its veterans on Veterans Day. Unlike Memorial Day, where we join together to remember and pay a lasting tribute to those men and women of the armed services who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the defense of their country, we set aside Veterans Day to thank and honor our living veterans and all they have done for this country.

On Nov. 5, local elections occurred and there were changes to our elected officials. But it was the ballot box and not the end of a rifle that caused this change. And for that you can thank a veteran.

Every day, there are debates across this country in regard to the separation of church and state. And the voices come from a myriad of different religions and different walks of life and not just a “state-approved” religion, and for that you can thank a veteran. Every day the average citizen seeks recourse and justice from our court system. And every day the citizens of this country are accorded their rights and due process within these courts. And for that you can thank a veteran.

Every day the working men and women of this country can express their disagreement with companies and management in regard to what is a fair compensation for their labors, to include work stoppages. Today, these matters are resolved by collective bargaining and not by unilaterally denying these men and women decent jobs and decent pay. And for that, you can thank a veteran.

And every day we breathe the air of freedom and make decisions based upon what we want to do and not be dictated by tyrants and despots. And for that, you can thank a veteran.

But all too often we take these freedoms for granted and we come to expect them.

We forget that we have paid a high price for these freedoms over the centuries and continue to do so. For these freedoms were first won by our Founding Fathers, who took up arms to wrest this country from the tyranny of the British. And over the years, all too often, our young men and young women are called upon to again put on the uniform, take up arms and to fight for and defend these freedoms from oppression.

I and thousands of my fellow veterans are citizens of Gloucester. We never asked for a war. We never wanted a war. We didn't want to fight, bleed, or in many cases make the ultimate sacrifice. All of us who returned were changed. But we answered the call of our country without hesitation, without pause and because it is the right thing to do. The defense of our country, our freedoms, and our families is paramount to us. Veterans Day is very significant. This should be a very special and important day for both the veterans and all citizens of this country. On Veterans Day we have an opportunity to express our thanks and appreciation, in person, to those who left their homes, the arms of their loved ones, their fellow citizens, and careers to answer the call of our country and who then return to take an honored place within our communities. It is a time and an occasion when the citizens of this country should join together with these men and women and collectively say to them thank you for your sacrifice and patriotism. Thank you for putting the ideals of this country first by rising in defense of these ideals. Thank you for supporting and defending the Constitution of this country against those who seek to destroy our society and freedoms.

These are again frightful and terrifying times. Our nation is again under attack from radical fanatics and terrorist forces who are jealous of our freedoms and seek to impose their draconian and dictatorial laws upon our nation and its citizens. But as prior generations have done, it is our young men and women, the cream of our country, that don the uniform and go forth to battle these forces of darkness. And then they return. Too often these days many return hurt and changed, both physically and mentally. The fighting in which they sustained their wounds may have been brief, but all too often the healing process is too long. This is the time to remember their sacrifices. This is the time to offer support and assistance as they try to integrate back into society. Our returning veterans need our support and assistance and they need it now. How can we not help those who have placed themselves in harm's way for our benefit and to protect, with their lives if necessary, our right to live in this great society?

How can we not help their families, who stay behind and worry while their sons and daughters, their husbands, wives, and loved ones place themselves at risk and danger for our benefit and so that we, the citizens, can enjoy the fruits of our labors? It is often more frightening for those who have been left behind and who do not know what is happening 5,000 miles away than perhaps those who are enmeshed in the conflicts.

Sadly, this often is not the case. There are approximately 29,000 residents of Gloucester. But in past Veterans Day ceremonies, barely 400 residents have spent two-plus hours to attend. I am often asked by my fellow veterans where is everyone else? Are they lured by retailers who trumpet "save big on Veterans Day!" (Perhaps a donation by these retailers to veterans' organizations in return for these profits is warranted). We understand the impact of work and family on all of us, so I offer this suggestion: If you can't attend the Veterans Day ceremony for three hours then I challenge you to spend at least three hours per year doing something to support veterans. It can be going to visit elderly or disabled veterans who live in either the

Soldier's Home in Chelsea or the VA hospital in Bedford. Show them that you care. Volunteer at the Gloucester Veterans Service Office and help them pack "care packages" for troops who still serve overseas. Volunteer to help the Elks when they have their annual "Welcome Home Veterans" event. Volunteer to help the Capt. Lester S. Wass American Legion Post 3 (full disclosure I'm the commander) serve and deliver free Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday meals throughout Cape Ann to the elderly, the homeless, the aging veterans and the shutins. There are a host of things that you can do to show that you care and appreciate the service and sacrifices of your veterans. Each and every citizen of this country and of this city has a moral obligation to support those who defend us in any way that we can. We are often guilty of sitting back and waiting for those who need help to come forward and ask for help. That is not enough.

Always remember, they are your fellow citizens of Gloucester! They were there for you, now you must be there for them. We need to affirmatively reach out and offer assistance to them. We need these men and women to understand that the benefits that are available to them are not handouts! They are rights they are entitled to for their sacrifice and hardship.

As we celebrate this Veterans Day each one of us within the community should make a vow to do more, starting today. When the veteran returns, reach out to him or her. Be there! Listen! Offer!

To our elected officials, all of you should shoulder the mantle of leadership. We have a duty and obligation to insure that our returning veterans receive all of the help and benefits that they are entitled to and which they so richly deserve. You have the moral duty to fight for their benefits and insure that they are not stymied or ignored by governmental bureaucracy be it federal, state or local. This is your call, this is your duty.

Let us make this Veterans Day a new day with renewed efforts. Let us insure that all veterans know that the sacrifices in defense that they made of their country are not ignored. We understand, we support, and we care.

To all men and women who have ever donned the freedoms and society you will never be forgotten.

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