

OPINIONS

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IN HONOR OF VETERANS DAY



GUEST COLUMN: JOHN M. BRIDGELAND

Encouraging service helps veterans

Veterans Day has been a day of parades and speeches from politicians. Our country has new data that can turn this day into something far more meaningful for our nation's veterans — engage them in service on the home front.

Today, we release a new report, "All Volunteer Force: From Military to Civilian Service." It is the first nationally representative survey of returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan and shows how we can ease their transitions home and improve their lives as civilians. They need help from communities.

Many of the nearly 2 million veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan have rocky transitions home. Veterans between the ages of 20 and 24 have a suicide rate two to four times as high as civilians the same age; the unemployment rate outpaces adult unemployment; 3,000 veterans have sought assistance for homelessness; and they and their families redeem food stamps at twice the civilian rate. Divorce rates among returning veterans have increased 44



Cincinnati native John M. Bridgeland is co-author of "All Volunteer Force," released today in Washington at an event with first lady Michelle Obama, Jill Biden and leaders of the Service Nation coalition. Bridgeland was director of the White House Domestic Policy Council under President George W. Bush.

percent since 2001. Only 13 percent of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan strongly agreed their transitions home were going well.

Government appropriately worries about their health care and provides benefits, including the GI Bill. Americans do a wonderful job welcoming returning veterans. But our new research shows we can do much more in engaging veterans in community life.

Service is the DNA of our veterans. They bring home this ethic of service and new skills. Imagine returning veterans organizing teams for Habitat home and playground builds, teaching young students the meaning of service to country, and organizing Meals on Wheels drives.

Ninety-two percent of these veterans agreed that serving

communities is important to them and nearly 9 out of 10 believed the American people can learn something from their example of service. Yet, only half consider themselves leaders in communities. Sadly, nearly 70 percent of veterans had never been contacted by a community institution, local nonprofit or place of worship after they returned home. Veterans who volunteered had much better transitions than those who did not, as did their families.

Veterans see themselves as mentors and tutors, coaches and teachers, and volunteers who help at-risk youth, older Americans and communities meet many pressing needs. Large numbers want to work to prepare communities for disasters, conserve the environment and help address poverty and homelessness.

Nearly all want to help other veterans and military families.

Churches, synagogues and mosques can sponsor meals among parishioners and returning veterans and engage them in volunteer service. Businesses can reach out and connect veterans to both jobs and service opportunities. Schools can encourage veterans to be mentors, coaches and teachers, and colleges can educate veterans on how to take advantage of the GI Bill. Mayors and governors can launch initiatives to connect veterans to opportunities. Congress can pass the Troops to Teachers Enhancement Act.

The most significant change, however, must be through a national dialogue. Returning veterans are not charity cases or individuals whose desire to serve has come to an end when they return to U.S. soil. They are civic assets. By recognizing them for who they are and engaging them in service at home, we will be giving them the greatest gift on Veterans Day.

DAVID BRODER

Returning vets come back with their patriotism

WASHINGTON — A couple weeks before Veterans Day, I went down to the World War II Memorial on the Mall to join Bob and Elizabeth Dole and a group of elderly soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen from her hometown of Salisbury, N.C., who had been flown to Washington that morning to get their first view of the nation's tribute to the troops that helped defeat Hitler's forces.

Bob Dole, who was badly wounded in Italy during that war, had just been recognized with a plaque for spurring creation of the memorial, and Elizabeth Dole said that "Bob and I are down here almost every Saturday," greeting one of the Honor Flights that bring veterans to Washington to see the memorial.

This flight was special, because their caps and T-shirts bore the name of her older brother, the late John Hanford, himself a Navy veteran.

After the ceremonies, I visited with Jeff Miller, another North Carolinian who is chairman of the Honor Flight Network. Miller, a small-businessman, told me that when the memorial opened, he regretted that his father, a Navy vet, had never gotten to see it. An idea began to form and he started talking to friends about how wonderful it would be if they could somehow arrange for all the World War II vets in their home county who wanted to see the memorial to be flown to Washington.

He talked his way into the office of an executive of US Airways — himself the son of two war vets — and just before Christmas in 2006, he had raised enough money to send the first chartered plane to Washington.

The next year, Bob Dole came aboard and Bill Geist of CBS did a Sunday morning



feature on the program — and it took off. With groups now operating in 33 states, 40,000 veterans have been treated to their first view of "their" me-

morial. Those I met said they were overwhelmed by the honor. But really, as Elizabeth Dole told them, "It is you who honor us."

That experience was still much on my mind when John Bridgeland (see column, left), a friend who had worked in the George W. Bush White House, sent me a report that is being issued today, outlining a volunteer community program focused on the nearly 2 million young Americans who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan.

"They are a vulnerable population, especially during the transition home," the report says, with higher rates of suicide, homelessness, unemployment and dependence on food stamps than their contemporaries.

But the thrust of the report is that these men and women, products of the all-volunteer armed forces, responded to a survey with answers showing they brought their patriotic motivations back with them from the wars. Many of them are eager to become involved in projects in their hometowns, but relatively few have been asked to help.

The report — from Civic Enterprises in Washington — sketches many ways in which they might be mobilized. It is as rewarding a Veterans Day project as the Honor Flight

LETTERS

Heroes who tended to body and soul

On Veterans Day I believe it appropriate to note people who many times may be overlooked: The nurses who treated and cared for our wounded and dying men with such tenderness and efficiency. The doctors who performed with such skill and professionalism to help the soldiers who suffered greatly with loss of limbs and horrific burns. And the chaplains of many denominations who gave solace to the dying and hope to the wounded. None of these won great battles, but surely they too are among the heroes we honor today.

— **Gilbert Thiergartner**
Reading

Remembering vets

This Veterans Day, let's honor all of the local service people who have given their lives to protect us. This includes the veterans of World War I, who have almost been forgotten. There is a memorial to Marines of Hamilton County in a corner of Lytle Park downtown. It isn't the biggest or the grandest memorial, but it has the names of all the brave men who died during that war. Take a few minutes today and honor these Marines. Let them know they are not forgotten.

— **Kathie Fuller**
Westwood

Record vets' memories

As I read about the African-American veterans ("Black veterans of WWII recall past with pride," Nov. 7), I am reminded how fortunate we are to be surrounded by these quiet heroes. I urge anyone that knows a veteran, especially of World War II or Korea, to ask about their experiences and document them so future generations may appreciate sacrifices that

they made for this country.
— **Chris Hamilton**
Batavia

Thanks for health bill

I want to thank the House for voting for this important health care bill. I know so many people who are unemployed, underemployed or just not able to afford their employer's health care. I know of two people recently in the hospital who face hundreds of thousands of dollars of debt. The next election will focus on who voted for health care and who did not. We, the people, are watching and the people vote — not the insurance bloc.

— **Beverly Kleeb**
Harrison

More bureaucracy

Rules and procedures conceived by a plethora of new committees administered by unionized bureaucrats. Now that's change we can believe in.

— **Steve Fischer**
Mount Lookout

Reagan's historic speech

How can one write an article on the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall without a single mention of Ronald Reagan ("Wall fell, communism buried," Nov. 10)? Reagan's speech at the Brandenburg Gate in 1987 in which he challenged Mikhail Gorbachev with, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" has historical importance and is an integral part in the story of the wall's collapse. And it doesn't even warrant a mention?

— **Sara Solis**
Pleasant Ridge

Credit Reagan, Thatcher

Celebrating the fall of the Berlin Wall without mentioning Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher is like celebrating the end of World War II in Europe without mentioning Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill.

— **Mark Woolsey**
Indian Hill

BOB HERBERT

We need more jobs, not more war

If I were a close adviser of President Barack Obama's, I would say to him: "Mr. President, you have two urgent and overwhelming tasks in front of you: to put Americans trapped in this terrible employment crisis back to work and to put the brakes on your potentially disastrous plan to escalate the war in Afghanistan."

Reforming the chaotic and unfair health care system in the U.S. is an important issue. But in terms of pressing national priorities, the most important are the need to find solutions to a catastrophic employment environment that is devastating American families and to end the folly of an 8-year-old war that is both extremely debilitating and ultimately unwinnable.

We have spent the better part of a year locked in a tedious and unenlightening debate over health care while the jobless rate has steadily surged. It's now at 10.2 percent. Families struggling with job losses, home foreclosures and personal bankruptcies are falling out of the middle class like fruit through the bottom of a rotten basket. The jobless rate for men 16 years old and over is 11.4 percent. For black people, it's a back-breaking 15.7 percent.

We need to readjust our focus. We're worried about Kabul when Detroit has gone down for the count. I would tell the president that more and more Americans are questioning his priorities, including millions who went to the mat for him in last year's election. The biggest issue by far for most Americans is employment. The lack of jobs is fueling the nervousness, anxiety and full-blown anger



that are becoming increasingly evident in the public at large. I would tell the president that the feeling is widespread that his administration went too far with its bailouts of the financial industry, sending not just a badly

needed lifeline but also unwarranted windfalls to the miscreants who nearly wrecked the entire economy. The government got very little in return. The perception now is that Wall Street is doing just fine while working people, whose taxes financed the bailouts, are walking the plank to economic oblivion.

I would also tell him that rebuilding the economy in a way that allows working Americans to flourish will require a sustained monumental effort, not just bits and pieces of legislation here and there. But such an effort will never get off the ground, will never have any chance of reaching critical mass and actually succeeding, as long as we insist on feeding young, healthy American men and women and endless American dollars into the relentless meat grinders of Afghanistan and Iraq.

We learned in the 1960s, when Lyndon Johnson's Great Society was trumped by Vietnam, that nation-building here at home is incompatible with the demands of war. We've managed to keep the worst of the carnage — and the staggering costs — of Iraq and Af-

ghanistan well out of the sight of most Americans, so the full extent of the terrible price we are paying is not widely understood.

The ultimate financial costs will be counted in the trillions. If you were to take a walk around one of the many military medical centers, like Landstuhl in Germany or Walter Reed in Washington, your heart would break at the sight of the heroic young men and women who have lost limbs (frequently more than one) or who are blind or paralyzed or horribly burned. Hundreds of thousands have suffered psychological wounds.

"Mr. President," I would say, "we'll never be right as a nation as long as we allow this to continue."

The possibility of more troops for the war in Afghanistan was discussed Sunday on "Meet the Press." Gov. Ed Rendell of Pennsylvania noted candidly that "our troops are tired and worn out." More than 85 percent of the men and women in the Pennsylvania National Guard have already served in Iraq or Afghanistan.

More troops? "Where are we going to find these troops?" the governor asked. "That's what I want somebody to tell me."

While we're preparing to pour more resources into Afghanistan, the Economic Policy Institute is telling us that one in five American children is living in poverty, that nearly 35 percent of African-American children are living in poverty, and that the unemployment crisis is pushing us toward a point in the coming years where more than half of all black children in this country will be poor.

"Mr. President," I would say, "we need your help."