

## Time to serve our veterans : The Kentucky Kernel

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By Douglas A. Wain

We all have the utmost respect for those who serve in our armed forces and for those who serve overseas in harm's way. They deserve special respect and benefits since they are the only ones who stand between us and those who wish to do us harm.

Now, in addition to Veteran's Day this month, we also have another special opportunity to act and put our words into action.

We possibly have three times as many service personnel and support people out of the country the last few years — from 200,000 deployed for almost eight years from the 1990s and early 2000s — to maybe up to 600,000.

But, judging from recent pronouncements by President Barack Obama and the mood of the country, there seems to be a new development: They are coming home.

That, I think most would also agree, is the good news. But to really honor our service people who have survived and sacrificed, we are the ones that now need to do them a service. We need to help them with the many problems that have been plaguing our veterans upon their return.

Unemployment for veterans is at least 2 percent higher than for non-veterans. Twenty percent of returning veterans have symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which raises the risk of domestic abuse.

Prescription drug abuse has soared and suicide deaths have outnumbered combat deaths in the last two years.

Even one-third of children who have a parent deployed in a war zone are at higher risk for psychological problems, and a new study says that violence is more common among kids of combat veterans.

It seems clear that not one group or institution can handle these problems all by themselves.

We are now all going to have to pitch in to make sure all veterans have a soft landing.

I cannot think of any adjustments bigger than coming from an environment where there is violence to one where there isn't. We can never know what they went through, and I'm sure they don't want us to go through it and find out.

Those of us in the south may have an even bigger burden of helping veterans since the tradition of military service in the south has continued since 2001.

In my home state of Kentucky, we alone might have upward of 10,000 service people deployed.

If we want America and its forces to continue to be strong, and we want America to continue to become more peaceful, then I think it is time for all of us to do our service personnel a service and now give them the special attention and consideration they deserve, in areas big and small.

This goes not only for the ones who will be returning, but the ones who already have returned.

This would not elevate them above the rest of us, but only ensure that they can enjoy a normal life, like the rest of us.

This is probably the biggest gift we can give them; that despite their sacrifice, they are still an equal member of the American family and the American dream.

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