



Op-Ed

# Return the favor for veterans

By Douglas A. Wain

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300 dpi Amy Martin color illustration of U.S. foot soldier transforming from combatant to civilian and entering road that leads to future relationship. Detroit Free Press 2007<p> war psychology illustration ilustracion grabado combat combatant ptsd post traumatic stress disorder recovery gun weapon flag golden road, homeland security, krtiraq, krterror, krterrorus krtmilitary military, krtnational national, krtwar, 07003005, HEA, mental health treatment, HTH, krthealth, therapy, krt, mctillustration, guerra soldado relaciones americano camino de contributed coddington martin mct mct2007, 2007, krt2007 MARTIN — MCT

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 because they are the only ones who stand between us and those who wish to do us harm. Now, we have an opportunity to put our words into action.

They are coming home. That is the good news. But to really honor our service people who have survived and sacrificed, we are the ones who now need to do them a service. We need to help them with the many problems that have been plaguing them on 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 violence is more common among kids of combat veterans. And that includes the daughters.

It seems clear that not one group or institution could handle these problems all by itself. We are now all going to have to pitch in to make sure they have a soft landing. I cannot think of many 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. And those of us in the South might have even a bigger burden of helping veterans because the tradition of military service in the South has continued since 2001. Kentucky alone might have more than 10,000 service people deployed.

If we want America and its forces to continue to be strong, and America to continue to become more peaceful, then it is time for all of us to do our service personnel a service and 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.

This would not elevate them above the rest of us but only ensure they can enjoy normal lives, like the rest of us. This is probably the biggest gift we can give them, that despite their sacrifice they are still equal members of the American family and the American dream.

Douglas A. Wain of Lexington is founder and executive director of Win The War! Against Violence, a non-profit dedicated to violence prevention through education.