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## Returning troops need easier transition

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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 we have a unique 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 in the 1990's and early 2000's to maybe up to 600,000. But judging from recent pronouncements by the president 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 who now need to do them a service. We need to help them with the many problems that have been plaguing our veterans on their return. Unemployment for veterans is at least two percent higher than for nonveterans.

Twenty percent of returning veterans have symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and PTSD 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.

It seems clear that not one group or institution could handle these problems all by themselves. We are now all going to have to pitch in to make sure they all 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 may have even a 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 over 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. 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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