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Remembering the Price of Freedom - Jason Smith's Capitol Report

MAY 28TH 2016 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Remembering the Price of Freedom

May 27, 2016

Memorial Day is the unofficial start to summer. The temperatures are rising, school is winding down for many and the smell of backyard barbecues as the sun goes down is starting to fill the air. Memorial Day is also one of my favorite times to drive around our district and see so many American flags placed on houses, businesses, and in yards. In a united display of patriotism it is a symbol of how much we love our country. Many of us look at this long weekend as a chance to slow down, get together with family and friends, and sit outside to enjoy what we hope is beautiful Missouri weather. However, it is also important we honor and remember the real purpose for this holiday and pay tribute to the men and women who paid the ultimate price fighting for the freedoms and way of life we often take for granted.

We were reminded of this sacrifice recently when World War II soldier Herbert John Hoard of DeSoto, Missouri was finally given a proper burial some 74 years after he lost his life during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Mr. Hoard's was a moving story of a young man, a member of our greatest generation, who answered the call to serve his country, but never returned home.

Like Mr. Hoard, our community is home to more than 60,000 veterans and assisting those veterans navigate an often times confusing and unresponsive VA network accounts for roughly half of all the casework assistance my office provides each year. This year, we also held the first ever Veterans Summits here in southeast and south central Missouri which provided an opportunity for our veteran neighbors to come and receive information on the services available to them from multiple departments and agencies all in one place. This event was so rewarding because it allowed me to talk with veterans and hear first-hand the issues they are facing and learn how our office can better serve them. I am proud and humbled that this year alone my office helped a veteran in Perryville receive over \$100,000 in owed back pay and that we were able to honor another southeast Missourian veteran with multiple commendation medals he rightfully earned.

Of course all of this also comes at a time when the VA Secretary compared wait times at VA hospitals to wait times for rides at Disney theme parks. While his comments were shameful and disrespectful, it also highlighted the frustration so many of us have in a system that is simply not doing everything it can for those who gave us everything in return. Hopefully very soon we will see better performance to address management problems and health care shortages, and to increase the speed, efficiency and effectiveness as well as utilize technology to better serve our veterans.

You can continue to count on me to support our nation's heroes not only heading into Memorial Day weekend, but every day looking forward because the fabric of our country and constitution is defended by the heroes in our hometowns. I am proud of our community for recognizing these heroes and openly displaying our patriotism, especially when freedom is threatened throughout the world every day. May God bless you and your families this Memorial Day weekend.

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