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# Jason Smith Capitol Report - Friday, November 11, 2016

NOVEMBER 13TH 2016 BY DEE LOFLIN

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## **We Honor Your Service, Your Sacrifice**

Throughout our country's history our veterans and the patriots before them answered the call of duty and have valiantly fought to make America a place where personal liberties are celebrated and the rights bestowed to us upon the Constitution are forever protected and preserved. Veterans Day is our chance to express gratitude for the service and sacrifice of our brave men and women in uniform who thanklessly gave their time and often lives to protect a truly free nation.

This week I visited several schools in southern Missouri that held ceremonies in honor of Veterans Day including Bourbon High School, Sikeston High School and Senath High School. It was wonderful to see a current generation of young people honoring the veterans that have served so they can continue to enjoy the same protections, rights and freedoms of those who came before. I encouraged all of the young Missouri students I visited this week to continue to honor our nation's heroes not just once a year on Veterans Day, but challenged them to find an opportunity throughout the year to give back to their communities and say thank you to the brave men and women who serve our country.

This Veterans Day we also need to remember and recognize the special acts of those in our communities who demonstrated bravery, exemplified service, and made us all proud, those like Tom Surdyke who tragically lost his life in June saving the life of another. I had

the honor of nominating Tom to West Point in 2015 and sharing in his family's celebration the day he earned his Eagle Scout. While on vacation on June 24th, 2016, Tom and another swimmer he'd just met on shore were caught in a rip tide. Tom instinctively went to save the other young man, sacrificing his own life. He was buried at West Point on July 4th, 2016 on his 19th birthday and was given the Soldier's Medal, the Army's highest non-combat valor award for saving the life of another. ?In June, I was lucky enough to honor another American hero, the now late Veteran Raymond Burbach, by presenting him with seven awards and accolades he earned during his service in the Korean War that were 60 years past due. Both Tom and Raymond will always be remembered as American heroes. ?Their dedication to a life of service and the instinct to put others first is what distinguishes our veteran patriots and heroes.

There is much we can do to honor our veterans not just on Veterans Day, but every day of the year by helping them transition successfully back to civilian life. Things like ensuring that veterans have access to adequate health care, including mental health, educational opportunities and good paying jobs when they return home.

For instance, when I heard from numerous veterans across southeast and south central Missouri that they wanted to see expanded care, service hours and options at VA facilities in Salem, I was proud to help by meeting with VA officials and securing additional hours and operations for the facility. Earlier this year, I was also able to play a role in supporting legislation which provided \$176.9 billion in funding for the VA, including \$52.8 billion in funding for VA medical services, which included mental health services, suicide prevention activities, long-term care services, funding for rural health initiatives and support services for caregivers of veterans and initiatives to fight homelessness among veterans and their families. This effort was an important reminder that our thanks shouldn't just be for their active service, but in helping them transition.

There are over 55,000 veterans living in the 8th Congressional District of Missouri alone who deserve our gratitude for their service to our nation. There is much work still to be done to improve the lives of our veterans when they return home - let us make that our duty, our service, and our commitment to all of them, they deserve it.

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