

What's the Benefit of Being a Veteran?

In principle I consider myself an American patriot. In practice it's a different story. During my last nine months of active service, I did more than my share of notification next of kin for those fallen heroes who defended our country and way of life. Why them and not me was a question left unanswered as it concerned their death and not mine. That question has recently resurfaced as it concerns American military personnel as they become Veterans especially in the areas of employment and disabilities.

America has made a strategic mistake as it concerns our veterans. What should have been established policy long ago has been sidestepped—for every dollar spent in our military abroad (and at home) there should be a corresponding amount set aside to take care of our vets when they are discharged. This has not been the case and it needs to change by Executive decision and/or Congressional action a.s.a.p. To bring this point painfully into focus I address the following two issues: the unemployability of newly discharged vets and the denial of Veterans Affairs disabilities when they are valid disabilities.

Concerning unemployability I quote from an article printed in USA Today titled: *Out of uniform means out of work for many new vets. Unemployment payments to servicemembers fresh out of the military have doubled since 2008, a sign that veterans are returning from war to an increasingly tough job market... Veterans are having a particularly tough time finding jobs... With some exceptions, troops honorably discharged are eligible for unemployment checks if actively looking for civilian work... Last year, more than 90,000 veterans recently out of service were unemployed for months, some until benefits checks were exhausted.*

What can we do about this? Employers who can afford to hire—hire a vet. Citizens make your voice and vote known to our congressional representatives as it concerns our vets and their wellbeing after laying their lives on the line to defend that voice and vote. Call your congressional representatives and senators and demand accountability as it concerns the employment and benefits of our veterans. There are things that can be done that go beyond the rhetoric of politicians and the bureaucracy of the Veterans Affairs that need to be put in place now. Don't let the freedom our vets have fought to secure for us be lost in the halls of bi-partisan affairs in Washington D.C.

And while you're at it put a word in for one more vet named Simeon Hill who happens to be my son. Simeon was honorably discharged from the U.S. Army in 2001 having sustained a TBI (traumatic brain injury) in the 82nd Airborne. After more than 7 years "negotiating" the "battlefield" of the Veterans Affairs bureaucracy he was "awarded" hundred percent disability status on the basis of his unemployability. Just recently, the VA arbitrarily summoned him to a "reevaluation" of his medical condition. None of his VA medical/mental health team could understand why. In consequence of this "arbitrary reevaluation" in June he received a mailed statement changing his status from 100% to 60%, effective September 1st, cutting his benefits by 2/3rds. This means he won't even be receiving enough benefits to pay his rent. In essence, what the VA has done is issue him a "death notice" concerning his benefits and no one knows why. We are in process of appeal which is next to impossible to reverse even with the help of his U.S. Senator. What is going on in this land of the free and the home of the brave? What is happening to those who have paid the price for the freedom we enjoy?

Back to the question: Why them and not us? I'm struggling with answering it. Are you? Pardon me if I don't wolf down the hot dogs this July 4th and shout with joy when the fire works go off. There's something more important at stake this year—our Veterans and taking care of them especially in their unemployment and in their disabilities.

Bud Hill, pastor, Central Christian Church