



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## MAKING VETERANS FEEL WELCOME

We are about to celebrate another Veteran's Day. Our veterans have served America with the principle that freedom and democracy are ideals to be upheld around the world. There are more than 18 million veterans in our country. Most veterans didn't serve for a thank you, a discount, or a free meal. However, any genuine gesture of appreciation is appreciated by those who sacrificed.

We must do more as a society than repeat the well-deserved tributes of the bravery and patriotism that our veterans symbolize. Historically, our government has often failed to keep its promises to those who served. Too many vets have become acquainted with indifference, left with unwanted souvenirs of wounds and scars, they never wanted. Some of these are external, but many are internal.

When I returned to my hometown of Cleveland, Tennessee, in 1985 to attend Lee University after my time in the Marine Corps, I felt out of place there trying to adjust to a new normal and hoping to reintegrate and get my life back. I never felt like part of the University, nor was there any outreach on the university's part to make me welcome. I appreciated my professors and could relate to many of them, but I couldn't relate to most of my fellow students.

I had already experienced a life most couldn't possibly understand. Thanks to a supportive wife and family, I channeled feelings of anxiety, isolation, fear, and guilt into a positive transition. I completed my undergraduate studies in less than 3 years. I was fortunate.

The military builds character traits that are needed in society. Veterans are known hard workers, with the ability to learn quickly. Veterans are loyal to causes and people they believe in. They are usually men and women of integrity. Veterans are faithful and loyal, and willing to give their very lives to defend their country.

Has the handling of veterans improved in over 35 years at my alma mater? Probably not. That is also true of other public and private colleges and universities. Most veterans have sought after qualities such as leadership, team building, personal resilience, or problem-solving. These characteristics were instilled during military service and should be embraced and utilized by a "veteran-friendly" campus. While many in higher education are promoting inclusivity and celebrating diversity, we are missing a golden opportunity to honor the men and women who made it all possible.

Many veterans return with physical issues, posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, problematic alcohol use, and thoughts of suicide. Many veterans suffer from more than one of these conditions. We know that the average number of veterans who commit suicide remains at 20 a day. We also know that younger veterans are among that number.

### SUMMARY

*We need to honor veterans and make them feel welcome throughout the year, and beyond just one day.*

Suicide is a complex issue, and veterans are not getting the help they need. Why is this not a national priority? It is good political rhetoric during campaign season. Veterans who are in crisis or are having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a veteran in crisis, should call the Veterans Crisis Hotline for confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year at 800-273-8255, chat online at [www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/get-help/Chat](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/get-help/Chat), or send a text message to 838255. You can learn more about VA's suicide-prevention resources and programs at [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention).

A lot of veterans end up serving as police and corrections officers, firefighters, EMTs, and PreK-12 teachers. Many are teaching in Tennessee classrooms across the state. For them, teaching is an extension of their service to their state and nation. Our classrooms are full of children who are the sons and daughters of active-duty military and veterans. Tennessee has more current and former military among our citizenry than most states.

I am proud to have served in the Marine Corps and appreciate my fellow veterans. Anyone who has served will tell you it was an honor to wear the uniform of our nation and take the vows to defend our citizens, our country, and our Constitution. Military enlistment has no expiration date, and service to a nation is never-ending.

On this Veterans Day let us remember the service of our veterans. Let us keep our promises and obligations to our veterans and their families who have sacrificed so much so we can live freely. We need to honor veterans and make them feel welcome throughout the year, and beyond just one day.

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