

EDITORIAL

Heroes
often are
reluctant

It's easy to say, on this day devoted to them, that we should thank military veterans for their service to America.

But it's not always such an easy thing to do.

Not because veterans are scarce hereabouts.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau about 2,000 veterans live in Baker County — approximately 12% of the county's population.

But though around one in 10 county residents is a veteran, very few boast of their service. Some, in my experience seeking interviews with veterans, will go to some length to keep hidden their status as a veteran, or at least to act as though it's insignificant.

The opposite is true, of course.

That many veterans are reticent about discussing their contributions to our country is perhaps not surprising. Serving in the military is by its nature a selfless act.

Then, too, veterans who endured combat sometimes seek to avoid encounters, even conversations with well-meaning people who want only to honor their sacrifices, that recall terrible memories.

Just as veterans have earned our respect for their service, so should we defer to those who, for whatever reason, prefer either anonymity altogether, or at least don't like to have their military experience highlighted.

And yet, if we have the chance we should try to make sure that all veterans who we have occasion to acknowledge understand that what they have done for us matters.

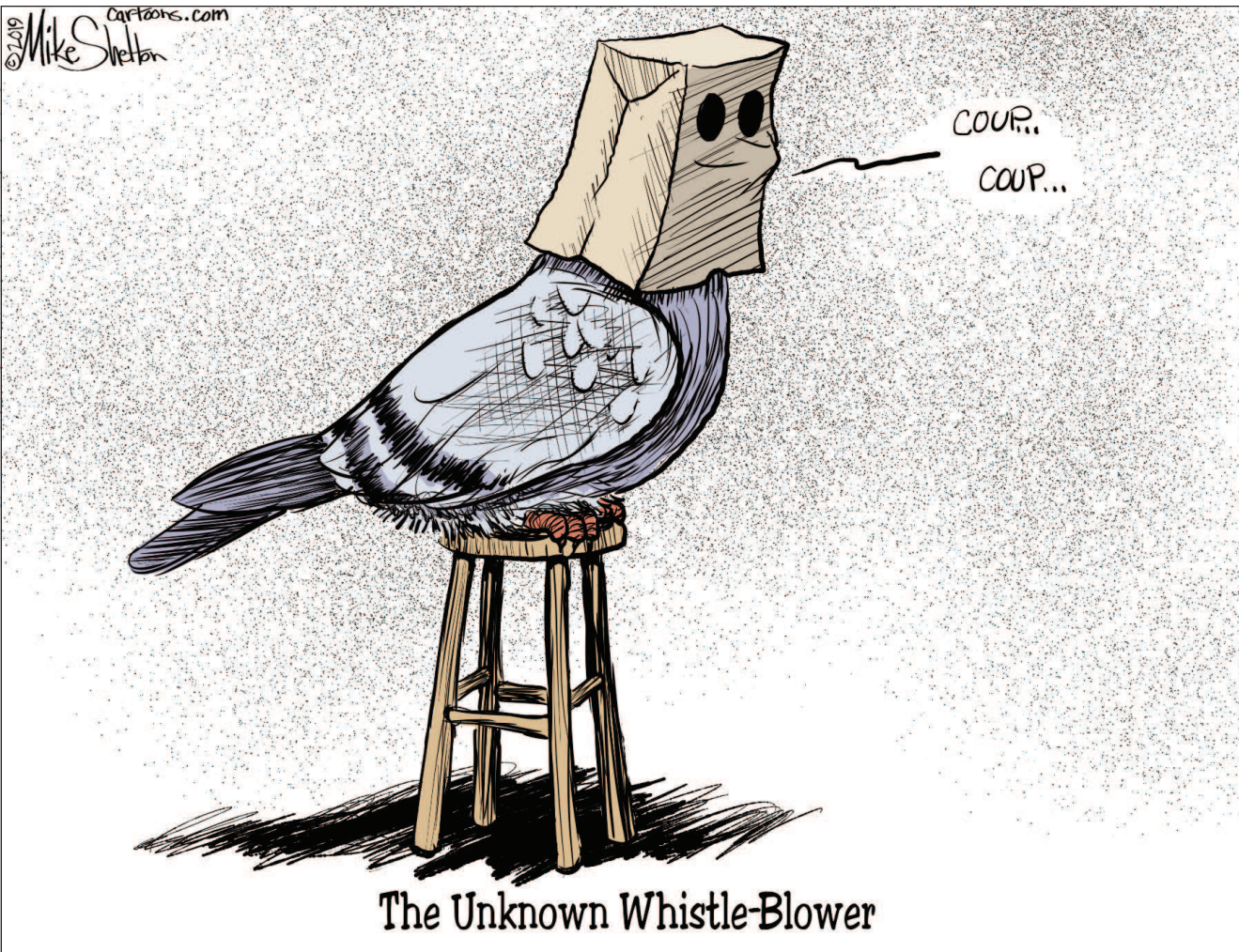
Today, and every day.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- Letters are limited to 350 words; longer letters will be edited for length. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.
- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.
- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

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Veterans stories to be shared

I love to study our nation's history through the lens of our military veterans.

Who could fail to be inspired by the brash courage of the United States Marines during the Battle of Belleau Wood in World War I? Or by the words of Marine Captain Lloyd W. Williams, who, after being repeatedly urged to turn back by retreating French forces, famously said, "Retreat? Hell, we just got here."

Legend has it that it was at this battle that Marines earned the German nickname "Teufelshunde": "Devil Dogs."

What about the story of Pfc. Dirk J. Vlug, serving in the Philippines during World War II, who refused to back down despite being outnumbered 5-to-1. No, it wasn't one against five enemy soldiers. It was one soldier against five, heavily armed Japanese tanks.

Reacting on instinct, Pfc. Vlug grabbed a bazooka and six rounds of ammunition, and managed to destroy all five tanks single-handedly.

I still get goosebumps when I read the words of Lt. Gen. Lewis "Chesty" Puller, the most decorated Marine in American history, when he and his men were surrounded by enemy forces at the Battle of Chosin Reservoir: "They're on our left, they're on our right, they're in front of us, they're behind us ... we got them right where we want them. They can't get away this time."

Or the story of Master Sgt. Roy Benavidez, who jumped from a helicopter armed only with a knife, determined to help a Special Forces patrol trapped in North Vietnam. Over the course of a six-hour ordeal, Benavidez was wounded by bullets, bayonets and shrapnel a total of 37 times.

When he was awarded the Medal of Honor, President Reagan said that if his story were a movie script, audiences wouldn't believe it. His heroic actions saved the lives of eight men.

In Iraq, Sgt. Leigh Ann Hester became the first woman awarded the Silver Star since World War II. A retail store manager from Kentucky, Hester led the counter-assault against 50 insurgents who attacked her convoy, braving heavy mortar and machine gun fire to engage the enemy on foot.

These stories of courage, selflessness and sacrifice are so much more than just stories to tell on Veterans Day. They are a crucial part of our nation's history, and the foundation upon which its legacy has been built.

Countless millions of American lives — with more to come — have been lived in the freedoms secured by the blood and service of our veterans.

Despite this rich history of military service that continues to this day, our country has not drafted a single soldier in over 45 years.

Since the draft ended in 1973, no person has been compelled to serve their country. And yet, each year, an estimated 180,000 young Americans voluntarily enlist in the United States Armed Forces.



KELLY
FITZPATRICK

One of the many things that makes this country so great is that its people have the will to serve. They have the will to lay down their own freedoms, and even their own lives, to defend those of others.

Our veterans didn't have to be told to serve or to sacrifice. It was already there, in our DNA.

This is why I believe it is so important to honor, remember and celebrate our veterans, not just on Veterans Day, but every day. And it's not only because they have earned it — though they have.

But it's also because in honoring and remembering our veterans, we reveal the values that matter to us as a nation: Courage. Sacrifice. Selflessness. Dedication. The willingness to give up one's own life so that others might live and be free, which we call "heroism."

We reveal ourselves and our values in what we remember, and in what we give our time to. This Veterans Day, I encourage you to spend your time in a meaningful way.

Say, "Thank you," to a veteran, yes, but also take some time to hear their story. I guarantee you: It's a story you won't hear anywhere else.

Kelly Fitzpatrick is the director of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs and Gov. Kate Brown's policy adviser on veterans' issues. She is a retired Army officer. Her military awards and decorations include multiple awards of the Meritorious Service Medal, the Southwest Asia Service Medal and the Army Parachutist Badge.

We must continue standing up for veterans

The men and women who have selflessly served our great nation deserve the utmost support and respect. While every Veterans Day we pay special respect and honor to our nation's finest by visiting gravesites, attending memorial services, and participating in parades, let us also remember that veterans deserve the best every day. That is why one of my top priorities in Congress is ensuring our veterans receive the service and support they earned every day.

This year, we have done a lot for our veterans. First, Congress passed the biggest budget in history for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), particularly when it comes to health care. That includes \$8.6 billion for mental health care services, \$400 million for opioid abuse prevention, \$206 million for suicide



GREG WALDEN

prevention outreach, and \$270 million specifically for rural veterans' health initiatives. A strong VA budget is especially important with the launch of the VA MISSION Act.

The VA MISSION Act, which I cosponsored, was signed into law by President Trump last year. This past June, the community care program, an aspect of the law, launched. This gives veterans increased access to timely, quality care by allowing them to seek care in the community and by establishing a more permanent network of doctors to partner with VA and see veterans close to where they live. The community care program is essential for

veterans living in rural areas, like much of our district, because the nearest VA may be hours away.

Another huge win our veterans received this year came when the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 was signed into law. This law ensures that Vietnam Navy veterans who served in the offshore waters of Vietnam receive the presumption of exposure to Agent Orange, a toxic chemical used during the Vietnam era. Many veterans exposed to the chemical found that it resulted in medical issues such as colon cancer.

In addition to providing necessary compensation to our veterans, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act included a provision I coauthored that ensures veterans in rural Oregon no longer face needless delays when seeking to buy a home using the benefits they

earned through their service. I have heard several horror stories from veterans about delays getting an appraisal for their VA-backed loan. Some waited up to nine weeks to even have an appraiser assigned to their case, making them far less competitive as prospective buyers in the housing market — one veteran even lost his prospective home when his interest rate lock expired as he waited for an appraisal. That's unacceptable. Now, veterans living in rural America will get a fair chance to have their appraisals completed in a timely manner.

In June, we celebrated the 75th anniversary of the GI Bill, which has allowed our nation's veterans and their families to return home to pursue further education. I worked to help improve this benefit by supporting the passage of the Forever GI Bill, which made the benefits

last a lifetime.

While we have already achieved a significant amount for our veterans this year, we still have much more ahead of us. I will continue to work to improve the benefits and services that veterans receive and help veterans in my district with any issues they may face with VA. If you are a veteran in the 2nd District of Oregon, and you're having problems with VA, please give my office a call at 800-533-3303. My team and I are ready to assist you with problems you are having with VA. We will do everything in our power to get results for you.

God bless all our veterans and their families, and thank you for your service.

Greg Walden is the U.S. representative for Oregon's 2nd Congressional District, which includes Baker County.

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