

Our Enduring Responsibility: To Support and Honor Wisconsin's Veterans

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Last Friday, November 11, we celebrated Veterans Day. This week, Senator Smith writes about our continuing responsibility to provide support to our veterans and the gratitude we owe them for their honorable service.

MADISON - Last Friday, November 11, we celebrated Veterans Day. The theme for this year's celebration was honor. The commitment to our country that our veterans have shown by remaining steadfast in the face of peril is one of the truest forms of honor.

Wisconsin is home to over 300,000 veterans, comprising 7.4 percent of the adult population. From Revolutionary soldiers at the very birth of our nation to modern-day soldiers protecting us abroad, our state and our nation owe the utmost respect and gratitude for those who have served and the families that supported them.

Veterans make many sacrifices to preserve our freedom as Americans. Our veterans deserve recognition for their commitment to putting our country ahead of themselves. More importantly,

our veterans deserve assurance that the country they served will be there to offer support if and when they need it.



We ask a lot of our service members. It is critical that we address the immediate needs of veterans and their families. These include support for physical and mental health services, education programs, career and job placement assistance, as well as addressing housing insecurity and substance abuse initiatives.

Veterans often face unique challenges affecting their mental, emotional and physical health after completing their service. Many returning veterans suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and substance abuse, and are more likely to die by suicide. According to the census, over 20 percent of Wisconsin's veterans have a service-connected disability.

The COVID-19 pandemic created staffing shortages throughout our healthcare system, and long-term care facilities for veterans were particularly impacted by this shortage. Rural areas, which often have more limited mental health services, were also disproportionately impacted.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, 67 percent of Wisconsin's veterans live in rural areas, with long distances to travel to access Veterans Affairs (VA) resources. Since 2006, the Department of Veterans Affairs has administered the Office of Rural Health, established to address the unique issues faced by veterans in rural areas when it comes to accessing healthcare.

