

5/21/2008 Honor Flight: Honoring Our WWII Veterans

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By Congressman Jerry Moran

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In 2004, just a few days before its dedication, I walked outside the U.S. Capitol Building and beyond the Washington Monument to the newly constructed World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. It was inspiring. At long last, nearly sixty years after the war ended, these veterans who did so much to protect our country and liberate the world were to receive recognition through a national monument.

I happened to have my cell phone with me and called my 90-year-old father back in Plainville. He is one of the thousands of Americans who left their family and lives behind in World War II to fight on foreign soil. My father fought in Northern Africa, Sicily and Italy.

Fortunately, when I called, I got the answering machine. It is often difficult for sons and daughters to tell their fathers the things we should tell them. My message was, "Dad, I love you, Dad, I'm proud of you and Dad, thank you for your service to our country." I told my dad what I should have said a long time ago and what we all should say to our veterans. It was too bad that many veterans of this "Greatest Generation," now in their 80s and 90s, are unable physically or financially to visit our nation's capital and see this beautiful tribute to their service and sacrifice.

A few months ago, Senator Bob Dole - himself a World War II veteran who led the charge to build the Memorial - told me about a grassroots, non-profit organization called Honor Flight. Staffed by volunteers and funded by donations, Honor Flight enables World War II veterans to travel to our nation's capital to see the Memorial created in their honor. Honor Flight operates across the country using commercial and chartered flights to send veterans on a one-day, expenses-paid trip to Washington.

I have had the honor of joining Senator Dole to greet these veterans at the World War II Memorial. The time we spend with these proud men and women is very moving. As volunteers - often local high school students - help veterans off of the bus, you see the excitement in the veterans' eyes that has kept them up many nights beforehand in anticipation. As we walk past the fountains and to the granite pillar dedicated to Kansans, the student volunteers listen to veterans recount tales of their time in the service, of friends made and friends lost. Tourists stop their sightseeing to shake the veterans' hands and express thanks. Many veterans are moved to tears. It is a special day for a very special generation of heroes.

This Memorial Day, I want to call attention to this worthy program and the work of the volunteers who make it possible. Of the 16 million veterans who served in World War II, only three million are alive today. We are losing them at a rate of 1200 each day. Honor Flight is working against time to say "thank you" to these veterans. For more information or to donate to this program, call Pat Hageman, a Kansas coordinator, at (785) 737-6024 or visit <http://www.honorflight.org/>.

On Memorial Day, let us be grateful to the men and women who answered the call in service to our country, remembering their sacrifices and recognizing the debts we owe.

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