



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
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Southwest Missouri Bids Farewell to Area Soldiers

This has been a difficult week for Southwest Missouri, and the nation as a whole, as we witnessed young men and women going off to war. Joplin, Carthage and Neosho all held special ceremonies for soldiers shipping out to defend our country.

I am a former member of the 203rd Engineer Battalion, which was among divisions that shipped out this week. I have no words for the pride I felt when I learned that hundreds of people turned out at intersection of Highways 86 and 71 in Neosho to bid these soldiers farewell.

I marvel at the courage and willingness that these men and women demonstrate as they set off to defend our country and all that it stands for.

The United States has been a very different place since that September day when terrorists struck at our heart, wounding us but by no means delivering a fatal blow.

Out of the ashes of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, came a renewed American spirit.

This spirit enabled us to move beyond the grim images of twisted metal and dark clouds of smoke.

This spirit reminded us of what it means to be Americans with all the blessings and burdens that entails.

The men and women who left their homes this week are answering our country's call just as our grandfathers, fathers and brothers did when they fought in World War II, Korea, Vietnam and the Persian Gulf.

I heard a quote once that went something like this: "We sleep safe in our beds because there are men and women who stand ready to defend us against those who would do us harm."

Throughout the history of the United States the men and women of the armed forces have selflessly stood guard in the night in the defense of freedom and liberty, and have made an extraordinary difference throughout the world.

The Missouri Veterans Commission will hold a Supermarket of Veterans Benefits from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, March 29, at Joplin's Memorial Hall, 212 8th St.

The Supermarket of Veterans Benefits is meant to inform Missouri veterans of the benefits that they are entitled to.

More than 32,000 Missouri veterans may be eligible for as much as \$331,000,000 in VA compensation and pension benefits earned while serving on active duty. The goal of the Veterans Commission is to identify these veterans and give them the opportunity to improve their quality of life by accessing those benefits that they have already earned and deserve.

I encourage all veterans to attend this event. The benefits are out there and the veterans of this state have certainly earned them.

After all, without the courage, valor and singleness of purpose of our nation's soldiers and veterans, the values that have always made it possible for us to meet new challenges, and move forward as a nation, would have been lost.

I salute the men and women who are defending our nation. In the coming days, they will remain in my thoughts and prayers. I look forward to their safe return.

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