

State Senator Robert Mayer The Mayer Memo

Senator Robert Mayer - Serving Butler, Dunklin, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Ripley, Stoddard & Wayne Counties



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Remembering & Honoring Missouri Veterans

JEFFERSON CITY — The Memorial Day weekend has arrived, and as Missouri families gather to remember and pay tribute to veterans who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our country, I want to share with you a number of ways the state of Missouri now honors our veterans and men and women of the armed services.

During the recent legislative session, the General Assembly passed a measure I sponsored that designates certain stretches of highway after military personnel and law enforcement officers. I am very pleased that part of Highway 84 in Pemiscot County will be named the “Corporal Rickey L. Bell Memorial Highway.” The 21-year-old Caruthersville soldier, who was a member of the 4th Squadron, 6th U.S. Air Cavalry Regiment, stationed in Ft. Lewis, Washington, was killed last August in Iraq following a helicopter crash. Naming this expanse of highway will serve to recognize this young man’s brave service, and to honor his memory.

Another measure I supported during the legislative season was a bill that requires all government buildings to fly the U.S. and Missouri flags at half-staff when any Missouri resident is killed in military combat. Without hesitation, the General Assembly supported the bill, which goes into effect later this summer.

As chair of the Senate Education Committee, I was happy to also endorse a bill that will now limit the tuition that can be charged by higher education institutions to some combat veterans. The “Missouri Returning Heroes’ Education Act” limits the tuition charged to combat veterans attending state public institutions to \$50 per credit hour for any program leading to a certificate or an associate or baccalaureate degree. A combat veteran is any person who served in armed combat after September 11, 2001, who was a Missouri resident when first entering the military, and who was discharged from military service under honorable conditions.

Other veteran-related bills I supported that were recently passed into law include requiring state and political subdivisions to favor service disabled veteran businesses when letting contracts and updating various laws relating to members of the military and their families. Among the new laws affecting our military families is a provision that exempts military dependents that have completed qualified prekindergarten or kindergarten programs in another state from meeting the Aug. 1 deadline and age requirements for entering kindergarten or first grade. The bill also allows the state board of education to develop recommendations for alternate assessments for military dependents that relocate to Missouri during the school year.

In addition, the measure allows the spouse or children of a soldier killed in action after Sept. 11, 2001, or who became 80 percent disabled as the result of an injury sustained in combat action after that date, to be eligible for educational grants for tuition at public or private colleges or universities in Missouri. The veteran must have been a Missouri resident when first entering military service — or at the time of death — in order for his or her survivors to receive the grant. The grant includes the cost of tuition (not to exceed in-state tuition at the University of Missouri-Columbia), \$2,000 per semester for room and board and the actual cost of books up to \$500 per semester.

If you have never been there, I encourage you to visit the Missouri Veterans Cemetery south of Bloomfield in Stoddard Cemetery. The cemetery opened in 2003 and serves as a beautiful and final resting place for some of our Missouri men and women who served in various branches of the armed services.

Veterans are and always have been an important part of our state's history and framework. As we head into summer, I hope that you will take some time to pause and remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom and to thank those who are selflessly sharing their time, talents and skills and making countless personal sacrifices to protect Missourians and all U.S. citizens from threats to our freedom and safety.

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