



Veterans Day 2022

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November 4, 2022

With Veterans Day once again upon us, we are publishing our 4th Annual Special Edition of *The Ripon Forum* to commemorate the holiday. This year's edition features personal essays written by four members of Congress who also served in uniform and were asked to answer a simple question – “What does Veterans Day mean to me?”

Those writing include: U.S. Rep. Greg Steube (FL-17), who enlisted in the U.S. Army following the 9/11 terrorist attacks and served from 2004 to 2008 as an Airborne Infantry Officer and a JAG Corps Officer; August Pfluger (TX-11), who served his country in uniform for nearly two decades, commanding hundreds of combat airmen and serving in the Pentagon and NATO Command; Mariannette Miller-Meeks (IA-2), who enlisted in the Army at age 18 and served for 24 years as a private, nurse, and doctor; and William Timmons (SC-2), who serves as a JAG Officer and Captain in the South Carolina Air National Guard.

Steube, who represents an area in Florida that was devastated by Hurricane Ian, paid special tribute in his essay not only to the veterans he served with in uniform, but to the veterans who are on the ground in his district helping people to recover and rebuild their lives today.

“I’d be remiss not to mention the power of veterans in my district these past weeks,” he wrote. “In the wake of Hurricane Ian, we’ve seen countless volunteer groups sending supplies and manpower to SW Florida. Among them is Team Rubicon, a group of former military veterans who are helping Floridians clear debris, muck out homes, and tarp roofs. Their mission statement is ‘helping people on their worst day,’ and I think that phrase captures the true sense of service every veteran feels. Those who served our country in uniform know that service does not stop at discharge.”

Also contributing an essay to this 4th Annual Veterans Day Special Edition of *The Ripon Forum* is U.S. Rep. Nancy Mace (SC-1). A member of the Veterans Affairs Committee and daughter of an Army General, Mace graduated magna cum laude from The Citadel, the Military College of South Carolina, where she was the school’s first female to graduate from its Corps of Cadets in 1999. In her essay, she pays tribute to women who, she notes, currently represent 18% of the Armed Forces and make up the largest growing population of veterans, but, she adds, are facing “significant challenges” while serving in uniform.

“Women are 28% more likely to leave the service than their male counterparts,” Mace writes, “citing issues such as lack of family planning support, retaliation after sexual assault, a lack of female mentorship in senior leadership, and sexism in general. Once they separate from the military, women experience more unique and difficult challenges, including accessing their earned benefits, finding meaningful employment, and recovering from their time in the military ... Our women veterans have volunteered to give up their lives for our nation and deserve the unfaltering support of the United States government and the American people through health care, education, and other well-earned benefits.”

Will Hubbard of the non-profit group, Veterans Education Success, writes about another challenge facing veterans today involving the G.I. Bill and continuing concerns about fraud in the program. “A shocking six of the 10 schools that received the most G.I. Bill funds from 2009-2017 had been subject to law enforcement action,” Hubbard reveals. “This summer, one school was cut off from the G.I. Bill after the FBI raided several locations. Many of the former students described the school as being a bona fide ‘cult.’”

Another chronic problem facing veterans is homelessness. According to Ann Oliva, who serves as CEO of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the situation has improved over the last decade. “Between 2010 and 2019,” she writes in an essay for this special edition, “the number of homeless veterans was cut in half, outpacing progress for every other subpopulation of people experiencing homelessness.” But in recent years, she continues, the problem has gotten worse. “The most recently available federal data shows that between 2019 and 2020, there was a six percent increase in unsheltered homelessness among veterans. We can’t have that.”

Finally, with the focus of this special edition being those who served our country in uniform, this latest *Ripon Forum* also features a debate between Kristen Bennett, the CEO of the Service Year Alliance, and Doug Bandow, a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute, about national service and whether it should be a requirement in American life.