



State of Illinois
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MEMORIAL DAY OP-ED

By Illinois Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn

This Memorial Day, as we honor our past and present heroes in America's armed forces, we should remember President Abraham Lincoln's thoughtful words: "Honor also to the citizen who cares for his brother in the field, and serves, as he best can, the same cause."

Here in the Land of Lincoln, we are keenly aware of our responsibility to our men and women in uniform, our veterans, and their families. In observing Memorial Day, we can take action to care for our brothers and sisters who have served -- and continue to serve -- in the fields of battle.

I am proud of the new "Let Them Rest in Peace Act," which protects grieving Illinois families from vile protests intended to disrupt funerals of servicemen and women who have given their lives in the Global War on Terror. Sponsored by Rep. Brandon Phelps (D-Norris City) and Sen. A.J. Wilhelmi (D-Joliet), this law establishes a zone of privacy to protect mourners at funerals from hate groups seeking to use vile signs and epithets to heckle and harass them. This law protects every Illinois family's fundamental right to conduct a funeral with reverence and dignity.

Illinois veterans won another important victory with the passage of the Veterans Care program offering affordable healthcare coverage to uninsured veterans in our state.

Right now, more than 9,000 Illinois veterans do not qualify for federal Veterans Administration health coverage and cannot afford expensive private health insurance. Under the Veterans Care bill, sponsored by Sen. Debbie Halvorson (D-Crete) and Rep. Frank Mautino (D-Spring Valley), those veterans will be offered comprehensive, affordable healthcare, beginning this September.

But we all can do even more to show our support for the men and women who have been called to active duty from the National Guard and Reserves. When these citizen soldiers volunteer to protect our democracy and serve our country, many of them make a substantial financial sacrifice as well. One recent study showed 55 percent of married National Guard members and reservists take a pay cut when activated, and 15 percent see their incomes drop by \$30,000 a year or more.

Through the Illinois Military Family Relief Fund, we can offer some modest help to those families struggling to make ends meet. Since 2003, more than 6,900 military families in Illinois have received grants of \$500 to \$2,000 to help them cover such basic living expenses as rent, utilities and groceries. The \$3.8 million distributed through the Fund since 2003 includes donations made through a check-off box on our state income tax return, as well as hundreds of voluntary contributions from individuals and organizations. Anyone interested in contributing to the Illinois Military Family Relief Fund may visit www.operationhomefront.org.

As we gather together for holiday parades, barbecues, and commemorative ceremonies this Memorial Day, I hope everyone in the Land of Lincoln will take a moment to demonstrate our continuing appreciation for those who have fought, and who continue to fight, to ensure that “government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

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