



December 19, 2016

## Honoring Our Military

Where would we be as a country and society without our military members? Throughout this year, I have had the pleasure to share many special experiences with various members of the military in Illinois, along with their families. The perspective I have gained during these ceremonies will last a lifetime. I was able to learn more about our men and women in uniform, and more about the real sacrifices each member offers up in defending our freedoms. I have had the honor to hear many stories about all of the personal sacrifices they have given for our country.

Many of our service members are well-camouflaged in our civilian ranks as full-time students, police officers, professionals, regular workers, newlyweds and parents. To hear their personal sacrifices to serve our country at a moment's notice has been nothing but remarkable. 'Service before self' is a motto that I heard often during my time spent with our men and women in uniform. This not just a slogan that military members have to remember for the sake of having a motto. 'Service before self' is a value practiced every single day of their lives.

We also need to honor the family members of our service members. The family is the backbone of the soldier's health and resiliency. Families also sacrifice by understanding and supporting the military member when our country calls. They also have to share the value of 'service before self'. Family members are keys to ensure our soldiers stays mentally resilient to accomplish the mission at hand. Military families are, in a sense, helping to give back to our country in a very positive manner by also accepting the value of 'service before self'.

I was humbly honored to recently present an achievement award to an outgoing commander for the 108<sup>th</sup> Sustainment Brigade in Chicago. The young captain shared with me that he had taken a job in D.C during the middle of his command, and he continues to live in D.C. Even though he lives in another part of the country, he continues to fly or drive back to Chicago every month, and has for several months, to fulfill his military duties as commander. I believe this type of commitment and selfless service was undoubtedly instilled through his military service.

I think we all should encourage more men and women to consider serving in our armed services. The professionalism and skills learned in the armed services are some that cannot be obtained anywhere else. Service in the military offers so much more than just the professional and leadership skills and a certain presence that is often sought out by employers. Service in the military offers the opportunity to

gain a college education free of charge. Illinois, I am proud to say, is one of only a few states that offers 100% college tuition at any public college for those in the armed services. Aside from reliable income, a serviceman or woman can share the honor to wear the United States military uniform, with the pride of giving back to one's country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford  
State Representative-Eighth District