



## **Veterans Day: All Those Who Served Should be Honored**

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“The character of a nation can be measured by the way that nation treats its veterans.”

— Author Unknown

I'm proud to be a veteran and to be the son of a veteran. My father, a Colorado native, came back to Colorado for his last assignment with the U.S. Army at Fitzsimmons Army Medical Center in Aurora in 1964 having fought in both WWII and the Korean War. I've served in the U.S. Army, the Army Reserve, the U.S. Marine Corps and the Marine Corps Reserve and I'm the only Member of Congress to have served in both the first Gulf War and the Iraq War.

I grew up with a deep respect for those who have worn the uniform but, unfortunately, not as much for those who did not serve in the military but were, nonetheless, vital to the defense of our nation. However, that all changed for me when I attended the recent National Day of Remembrance for nuclear workers and met with those who had worked out at Rocky Flats during the Cold War. They served our nation on the front lines of producing nuclear weapons to defend our country but were never acknowledged for these vital efforts.

At the rally, I had the opportunity to meet with former Rocky Flats workers and their families. Many of the former nuclear workers had succumbed to terrible life threatening illnesses related to their service to our country. During the Cold War having a nuclear arsenal meant the ability to deter our adversaries from attacking us as well as preventing smaller conflicts from escalating into world wars.

There were also family members of former nuclear workers representing loved ones who made the ultimate sacrifice while working in defense of our freedom and are now only with us in memory. It was an emotional event and it gave me a deeply personal understanding of the challenges that these former nuclear workers and their families face every day.

The workers at Rocky Flats did not belong to a military service or wear a uniform. They did not work directly for the Department of Defense but for a civilian defense contractor. The nuclear workers at Rocky Flats clearly knew when they took the job that their work could be extremely dangerous and they would likely be killed in the event of an accident but at the time no one understood that their work could destroy their health decades later.

Just as I believe that Members of Congress have an obligation to those who have served our nation in uniform, I also strongly believe we have a moral obligation to help those who didn't wear the uniform but sacrificed just as much defending our nation.

In 1865, President Abraham Lincoln spoke of our responsibility for those who have served our country in his second inaugural address just before the end of the Civil War, "Let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan...." Much credit should be given to our nuclear workers for our victory in the Cold War. I'm proud to recognize their efforts and as a Member of Congress and will do everything I can to make sure that they, and their families, receive the same compensation they would have had they accomplished the same tasks as members of our armed forces.

Read more at [\*The Aurora Sentinel\*](#)