

Testimony for '2016 Year of the Military Family'

HCR 28
Allen Niksich
Attachment 2a

Good morning, my name is Allen Niksich. I live and work in Mountain Home. I am a retired Air Force Command Chief Master Sergeant. I had two assignments at Mountain Home AFB, totaling 14 of my 30 years in the Air Force. I retired from Mountain Home AFB a few years ago, as the lead enlisted person for over 4000 Airmen and their families, and continue to work as a civilian on base at the Airman and Family Readiness Center. My wife is also retired Air Force and we have graduated three kids at Mountain Home High School and have a fourth who is a freshman this year.

I am not from Idaho, neither is my wife, but we decided to stay and become Idahoans because we loved what Idaho has to offer and the close knit relationship we have in our state between the military and the people of Idaho. Idaho is full of patriotic and humble Americans. Military members truly appreciate their time in Idaho because they are treated with respect and dignity, regardless of their standing, color and culture...by the great people of Idaho.

In my job, I assist military families in their daily lives, whether it concerns deployments, relationship issues, financial struggles, relocation, school issues, and the general day to day challenges of being a military family. I deployed 5 times in my career and in the last few years I am finding that many military members are getting up to their 7th and 8th deployments and will hit the 10 deployment mark before they separate or retire. Just this aspect of military life brings many challenges to families that many would never understand, let alone try to attempt successfully. Military families don't complain much, they press on, realizing what they signed up and re-signed up for. However, with all the news of the world seeming to be reality TV and anything else but the continuing deployment rate of our military members and having many constantly in harms way, the average citizen doesn't appreciate that we still have military members fighting for our freedom and liberties, and families waiting for them to hopefully return to them safely.

Our hope to make 2016 the Year of the Military family would be a great opportunity to highlight that we are still at war, that Idahoans support the efforts of our military members and their families, and tell those active duty and National Guard Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen, that, even with everything else that is happening in our daily lives, we, as Idahoans, still support them and appreciate their service and sacrifice to our great state and nation. At Mountain Home, we will soon be returning over 500 Airmen to their families, all safe and sound, after a six month deployment to a very hostile place. Our Boise Air Guard, the 124th Fighter Wing, will be deploying over 500 troops very soon to hostile territory for 6 months, and Mountain Home will, again, have a ~~large~~ ^{major} deployment leaving out in the Fall with large numbers. These are only the deployments I know about. No doubt the Army Guard has and will continue to have soldiers deployed and in dangerous locations as well.

Babies are born, first steps are taken, first days of kindergarten happen, athletic sports events and dance recitals commence, family member illness and deaths occur, and high school graduations are held, while the military member is thousands of miles away. A few of the heart-warming stories make the local news, but the vast majority go largely un-noticed. The cool thing is, military families are okay with that. They support each other through the good and the tough times. We chuckle when a civilian family complains about a separation for a week long business trip and wonders how they will survive until the person returns next week. Or when we call pro athletes heroes because they have such a tough traveling schedule and play out of town, away from their families, on Thanksgiving. My co-worker, a military spouse, told me yesterday...Quote: yes, we have challenges...but we are proud, too. I am proud to be a military wife and family. I am happy to deal with all the challenges because it makes me proud to see the jets in the air and know that my husband is one who maintains them and keeps them flying...and I am proud that we get through the struggles together...the stress, long work hours, deployments, financial worries...even when we are physically apart. End quote.

Imagine packing your family up every 3 to 5 years, with a couple 1 year relocations, and moving to a new community, a new state, a new country.

Military members struggle with finances throughout their military service, buying and selling homes and vehicles, kids leaving and making new friends at their next stop, wives and husbands having to find employment at a new location they will only be at for a short time, making a career impossible. Parents trying to decide the right schools for their kids and hoping they will fit in with sports and dance and debate teams. It takes a lot of effort in base helping agencies, the community and effort from the military family to get settled into a new area...every 3 to 5 years!

Idaho does a great job of welcoming and embracing military families and that is why many non-Idahoan military families choose to retire in Idaho like we did. Whether retired or still in the military, we military families embrace Idaho and Idahoans as well. A couple months ago, my co-workers covertly nominated me for a special award and I was as a finalist for the Idaho's Brightest Stars Award for volunteerism. I tell you this not to brag about myself, but to emphasize that military families understand a sense of community and volunteering. They know 'Service before Self' and they engage and become involved in their Idaho community, be they active duty or Idaho Guard families. When I put together a volunteer team to do Idaho Veterans Olympics, Idaho Patriot Thunder, Special Olympics, Cancer or MS walk fundraising teams, See Spot Walk Humane Society fundraising teams, volunteers to go to the local senior citizens home or the local elementary schools to be judges in contests or tutors, I always get more volunteers than I need.

The feeling is mutual between Idahoans and Military Families. We care about our communities and we care about each other! What better tribute can we make to all those military families, that Idaho is supporting them as they put themselves in harms way? Declaring 2016 as the Year of the Military Family displays our continued gratitude and is great recognition of their service and sacrifice.