

Gov. Ritter: Hire a veteran first

By Bill Ritter, Jr.

Some memories never fade. They stay with you long after the sun has set, long after your surroundings have changed ... long after the world has become a different place. It doesn't matter how long ago the events of war took place to those who lived through the conflict. For those who went to war and came back, a part of them will forever remain in that place where those memories were made.

On November 11, America pays tribute to the millions of brave men and women who have answered the call of duty. Some are still with us, others are not. Regardless of the decade or the years in which they served, their service to the country shaped and changed their lives. They left their homes and their loved ones. Many put their career and their education on hold. They endured tremendous hardships, were placed in the most inhospitable places and placed their lives in harm's way – all in the name of freedom. Across the span of time, they were willing to stand up for the values that our forefathers, in turn, gave their lives to establish.

Their service to country changed their lives but it also changed *our* lives. The freedom and the democracy we enjoy today was hard won by these successive generations of soldiers who fought against tyranny and defended our country. We owe them all a debt, one that we may never fully be able to repay. What they have done for us and for the Americans that followed in their footsteps deserves our thanks and our gratitude.

How do you adequately thank someone for such a tremendous sacrifice? Here is one good way. We have nearly 450,000 veterans in Colorado today, some of whom are struggling to find a job despite their outstanding skills and experience. The way we can thank those veterans who have interrupted their lives and often suffered physical or emotional injury in defense of our freedom is to ensure that when they return home, they are welcomed, respected -- and employed.

I have signed a proclamation proclaiming November to be "Hire a Veteran First Month" in Colorado. I am encouraging employers statewide to hire as many veterans as possible, and not only during this month in which our thoughts turn to veterans, but as a long-term matter of policy.

When leaving military service, having a job can make all the difference for veterans and their families. So if you are an employer, take part in "Hire a Veteran Month," and hire a veteran this month, next month, or whenever you have the opportunity. If you have employees who are called to active duty, make sure their jobs are waiting for them when they return. Let that be your thanks for their service. Employers who hire veterans will tell you that it is not merely a way of saying thanks, but see it as an investment. Veterans know what it means to work hard. The leadership, sense of teamwork and discipline they bring to a job is what every employer needs.

There is also another way to thank a veteran and it is a very simple act. It doesn't involve special programs or parades or proclamations. Simply offer them your hand and thank them for their service. It is the best way for you to let them know that you recognize what they have done and that it has not been forgotten or taken for granted.

On Veterans Day, we honor veterans who fought to keep freedom safe in America and veterans who fought to extend that freedom around the world. We thank those who are serving now and

we look forward to their safe return. We also thank the families of veterans who are not recognized nearly enough for the hardships they endure. It is difficult to have your child, or parent, or spouse away from home and serving in harm's way. They too are making sacrifices in the name of freedom and should be recognized on Veterans Day for their own dedication and courage.

Some memories never fade away for the men and women who served in uniform, but as generations disappear over time, the memories they carry with them begin to disappear as well. But Veterans Day is an opportunity for a nation and its people to ensure that the *collective* memory of their accomplishments and service will never disappear. It is a time to say thank you to our living veterans and recognize those who have contributed so much to America. No matter how long ago, their sacrifices and bravery remain undiminished.

On this Veterans Day, we pay tribute and we bow our heads to remember.