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## Our Vow to America's Veterans

President Lincoln, in his second inaugural address, asked the country to *"bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan."* It's a motto etched in stone at the Department of Veterans Affairs and in the heart of a grateful nation that celebrates Veterans Day.

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Weekly Column

Veterans Day offers a chance for Americans to pause and honor, remember, and thank all the women and men who served in America's Armed Forces. On this Veterans Day, I was at the Louis Stokes VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Cleveland, a cutting-edge facility that delivers the care our veterans have earned and deserve. Since Hand Hospital first opened in 1778, in Pittsburgh, our nation has recognized that we possess a sacred obligation to care for those veterans who have given so much to us. The Stokes VA Hospital continues our federal government's promise to provide world-class care to our veterans. It's a model of care that began with one of the first VA medical centers in the country located in the heart of the Miami Valley, and continues throughout Ohio's other VAMCs, Community Based Outpatient Clinics, Veteran Service Organizations, Veterans County Service Officers Associations, and our dedicated network of veteran advocates.



But we can do more to translate President Lincoln's words into action, especially in a still recovering economy that too often leaves our veterans behind. Today, veterans and servicemembers returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are falling victim to economic exploitation through unscrupulous lenders, illegal foreclosures, and too few opportunities for good paying jobs. Today, the unemployment rate for veterans between the ages of 20 and 24 is 22 percent. That means more than one in five young veterans can't find a job to support their family or to ease their transition to civilian life.



Over the summer, I traveled from Youngstown to Cleveland to Columbus to see how our colleges and universities, communities, and businesses are trying to close these gaps in employment and opportunity. At Youngstown State University, I met an YSU student and veteran who told me about the skills he and other veterans could bring to the labor market. At Cleveland State University, I spoke with staff at its SERV Program, which is a national model for helping servicemembers and veterans transition to civilian life through education and workforce training. And in Columbus, I visited a small business that has hired returning

veterans to install energy efficient technologies because it knows that veterans have the specialized skills needed to get the job done. Now is the time we help them do just that.

That's why I introduced the *VOW to Hire Heroes Act*, also known as the Veterans Jobs Bill. Servicemembers risk their lives protecting our nation only to return home to fight each day looking for work. The *VOW to Hire Heroes Act* would provide critical hiring incentives, transition assistance, mentorship programs, and job training that would connect our veterans with jobs in high-demand sectors from clean energy to IT. And it marks an investment in our nation's citizens that has been proven to strengthen our economy and create jobs. Once again, veterans will help to lead the way.



In previous generations, Ohio veterans returned to their hometowns and started small businesses or became firefighters, astronauts, factory workers, or police officers. Half a dozen became President of the United States. For America's returning veterans during WWII, our nation provided education benefits, hiring preferences, job training, small business loans, and the chance to own a home. With these policies, the federal government laid the foundation for economic prosperity for generations to come. Today, the post-9/11 GI Bill, which provides updated educational resources to veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the *VOW to Hire Heroes Act* represent a new effort to thank this generation of veterans for their service and to give them the same opportunities afforded to prior generations of veterans.

As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I support providing our nation's veterans with the resources and services they need. In addition to supporting enhanced education and job training benefits, I will continue to fight for assured funding for all VA health services and benefits. Funding for our veterans should always be a top federal priority.

Each November 11, we celebrate that story and history of our nation's veterans. On Veterans Day, reach out to grandparents, parents, neighbors, and friends who have served and ask them about their service. From deployments to welcome home ceremonies, to medal presentations and parades, we learn about the courage, honor, and sacrifice exemplified by our servicemembers and veterans. From the newly-sworn in soldier and the children of military parents, to our veterans young and old, we learn about the greatness – and history – of our country. As the holidays approach, our thoughts and prayers are with those returning home as well as those still serving overseas. On behalf of a grateful state, I thank all Ohio veterans on this Veterans Day. It's an honor serving those who serve us.



*Sheward Brown*





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