

Idaho Statesman

GUEST OPINIONS

Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day a reminder to end our forever wars in Mideast

BY CRAIG SOWER

APRIL 11, 2019



On March 29, Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day was marked by a reverent flag raising at the VA Medical Center in Boise, followed by a wreath laying at Veterans Memorial Park.

Idaho Gov. Brad Little said correctly, “America’s Vietnam veterans faced unique and extraordinary challenges, and it’s important for us to openly show our support and thank them for their service and sacrifice.”

We owe a debt of gratitude to our Vietnam veterans, and we owe the same to our veterans of Afghanistan.

America has been blessed with generations of men and women who have been proud to don the uniform and serve in their country’s wars. Unfortunately, their dedication and sacrifice, as well as that of their families, has not always been matched by clarity of purpose from America’s political class.

Politicians all too often confuse waging war with nation building. The lives of our troops are too precious to squander simply to make political points.

When war is necessary, as it sometimes is, it should be fought for one purpose only: victory. The goals must be clear and concise, and battlefield necessity rather than lawyers should shape the rules of engagement. Our forces must be fully equipped and supported before, during and after

deployment, especially in the case of battle casualties. Multiple tours of duty take a heavy toll on troops and their families, particularly with our much smaller all-volunteer force.

Make no mistake, this is not an anti-war argument, it’s an argument against the careless use of people for vague purposes. If we fight a war, it should be to win, not to commit sociology.

We have been in this situation before. The Vietnam War lasted 17 years and four months. As of April 7, the war in Afghanistan will have lasted 18 years and six months, with no end in sight. It is time to bring our troops home.

Sen. Jim Risch currently serves as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a position previously held by Idaho Sens. William Borah (1924-33) and Frank Church (1979-81).

Sen. Risch should use his chairmanship to pass legislation ending American involvement in never-ending wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. In his heart, he seems to know that’s the right thing to do.

“We’ve spent \$2 trillion in Afghanistan, and we’ve shed lots of American blood there,” he told business leaders recently in Boise. “I am



U.S. Army soldiers oversee training of the 215th Corps of the Afghan National Army at Camp Bastion in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, on March 22, 2016. ADAM FERGUSON NYT

through trying to do nation-building with countries that don’t want it.”

For the 32 million people of Afghanistan, that works out to \$62,500 for every man, woman, and child in the country. That is a lot of hearts and minds.

I believe Idahoans agree, but in Washington, Sen. Risch is still voting to keep our troops deployed in situations with no clear exit strategy.

Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day should serve as public reminder each year to honor those who served bravely, and as a warning that today’s forever wars in the Middle East must end.

If you agree, please sign the petition at BringOurTroopsHome.us.

Craig Sower was born in Pocatello, graduated from Borah High School, is the son of a career U.S. Army doctor, and is a retired professor of English living in Japan.