

The “Inconvenience” of Going to War
By Senator Kathleen Vinehout

Should a mother be given time off from work to travel to her daughter’s naval base and say ‘good bye’ before the daughter leaves for Iraq?

That question was at the heart of a public hearing on SB 173 the Family Military Leave Act. This bill I authored at the request of a local couple and their daughter, Megan, who is on her third deployment to Iraq as part of a mobile security detachment.

The bill was written to relieve some of the chaos and stress that military families feel when preparing for deployment – a time many local families have lived through. Megan’s mother was not given time off to visit her daughter. Megan later discovered a law from another state that would have helped her mother. A copy of that law was forwarded to her father who then gave it to me.

The Family Military Leave Act would allow military personnel called to active duty or their parents, or spouse, to take time off to be with loved ones and to prepare for deployment. The time would be limited to 15 days unpaid leave with 14 days notice or 30 days for those working for an employer with more than 50 employees. Employers could require the employee to bring military certification verifying the period of active service.

I introduced this piece of legislation as my first effort at writing a bill. Four other states including Minnesota have similar laws. The bill has bipartisan support with 29 co-sponsors including Republican Terry Musser who introduced the bill in the Assembly. I never dreamed the bill would become controversial.

Major David Dziobkowski from the Department of Military Affairs helps military personnel prepare for deployment. He testified that such preparation can’t be done on the weekend. Others explained the details needed to prepare for deployment - apartment leases and cell phone contracts; wills and other legal papers; arranging care for care of children and family. Families need time to deal with many details.

But the state’s largest business group, Wisconsin Manufactures and Commerce, attacked the bill because of the “inconvenience” of extra paperwork tracking employees taking leave and “lost productivity”. They said military families might use the leave as an “excuse” to come in late or call in sick.

The “inconvenience” of helping military people and their families? I was appalled at the greed and selfishness of this group who represents large multinational corporations. We are asking the military and their loved ones to give their lives; children to give their fathers; mothers to give their daughters. They complain of the “inconvenience” of paperwork? What about the “inconvenience” of going to war?

It is an honor to help out military families by giving time off to an employee to prepare for deployment. The very least we can do, as civilians, is support our troops by working a little harder so their families may enjoy a few precious days with those they love. This is our opportunity to give back, in a very small way, to those who have given so much.

There is a heck of a lot of political rhetoric about “families” but when it comes right down to it, far too often families are on their own when they need help the most. Those who talk the most about ‘family values’ are the ones who oppose real help to families – health care, child care, minimum wages, military family leave – real support that helps keep families together.

Time is precious. Family time is very important. For military families, and for all of us, time together cannot be taken for granted. There may be no tomorrow.

The least we can all do is share the “inconvenience”.

Do you have ideas on how to help support our troops and our military families? Let me know! Write: State Capitol; P.O. Box 7882 Madison, WI 53707-7882 or sen.vinehout@legis.wisconsin.gov; call Black River Falls (715) 284-1730; Eau Claire at (715) 838-0448 or Madison at (877) 763-6636 (toll free). Visit my website at <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/senate/sen31/news/>