



Untying the Yellow Ribbon: Transforming How Veterans and Communities Thrive

Ms. Gretchen Gail Martens

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“A compelling proposal for a new American social contract that prevents the loss of another generation of Veterans and heals our communities from more than a decade at war” America is welcoming home nearly 12 million post-9/11 Service Members, Veterans, Guard, Reserve, and military family members. Our Federal systems are not meeting their transition needs and these systems can’t adapt rapidly enough. Fortunately, there is a safety net to prevent losing another generation of Veterans to homelessness, suicide, and substance abuse. There is a way to safeguard their families from divorce, domestic abuse, and child maltreatment. There is a solution: It’s called COMMUNITY. As citizens, we genuinely want to help but the issues seem so complex. The good news is that this is how Americans have always solved our problems. It’s our history and our spirit...from the pilgrims to the pioneers, from women’s suffrage to the civil rights movement, from the Minutemen to Rosie the Riveter. This little book breaks the issues down into easy to read pieces and gives every American a way to step up and help. Good or bad, right or wrong, fair or unfair, transition takes place at home and the burden of care for this generation of Veterans will impact local budgets as well as exacting a serious human toll on Veteran families and communities. If we act now, we may contain some of these costs while preventing divorce, domestic violence, and child abuse. It is unlikely that we will receive much, if any, meaningful help from Federal government. It’s up to us to design and implement our own solutions. Consider how we survived the Great Depression and sacrificed during World War II. Isn’t that how America has always worked best? As American citizens, we are bombarded with negative messaging about today’s transitioning military and their needs. Scandals among our top military leaders and the epidemic of military sexual assault have caused us to question our entire military system. In the process, we have lost sight of the tremendous skills and experiences our transitioning military bring home: commitment to service; leadership and teamwork; work ethic; and entrepreneurship. So, if we really want to say “Thank you for your service” in a meaningful way, we will engage in a mindset shift where we no longer look at our military coming home as a sorry rucksack of needs but as a much needed battalion of community leaders and volunteers who can help us rebuild America. Everyone wins! So, we have a tsunami of needs that will cost us billions of dollars. Meanwhile, we have the opportunity to tap into an ocean of potential. And, we all still have hopes and dreams for America. But, that will require us to work together. The bad news is that we have forgotten how to BE community. We have forgotten how to roll up our sleeves, solve our own problems, and take care of our own people. We have allowed ourselves to become polarized as citizens and it paralyzes our ability to work together for the common good, where everyone wins. The good news is that there is one issue that everyone agrees on, perhaps the only issue: no one in America wants to lose another generation of Veterans like we did after Vietnam. So, if we can ALL agree on this one issue, can this be our rallying point? Can we support our military coming home in a way that strengthens community, generates cost savings in local government, creates economic development, and lays a foundation to rebuild an America everyone is proud of? We ALL have something at stake here. We may have misplaced some of the best parts of ourselves, but we have not completely lost our American values. It is not too late for us to reclaim what has always been one of America’s greatest strengths: our ability to reinvent ourselves and our commitment to take care of our own. It’s time to shift our paradigm. It’s time to move into action. Read Untying the Yellow Ribbon. Join the movement. Do your part to rebuild America!

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