

1/27/25

SB38

Proponent

Written Testimony

John A Hauer (veteran; OIF 05-06 and 08-09)

To the chairman and members of the committee:

I joined the Army and went to basic training in May of 2004. I had been expelled from high school, dropped out of college, fired from my part-time job and was in general doing my best to find rock bottom. Suddenly, after my choice to join the Army, my family was proud of me, and being a dumb kid I soaked in all the positive attention. After basic training, my duty station was Fort Polk, Louisiana. I became tougher and more disciplined, physically and mentally. I learned respect, teamwork, all the things that parents who see their kids off to basic want them to learn. These are the true benefits of military training and there is no denying that more young adults could use a start like this.

My first deployment was to Iraq in 2005-2006. I volunteered to join the Convoy Security Team, mostly to help my friends if worst came to worst. I studied my first aid handbook extensively just to be ready. At this point in time big picture questions like the reasons for the war, why we were there, if we were even doing any good, never entered my young mind. I was just there for my brothers in arms, ready to do anything and everything to have their backs. Actually combat duty changed all that in a hurry. We had to ram vehicles out of the way, shoot out engines to stop vehicles, and were lucky to not have to directly take the lives of any Iraqi citizens. Now, we knew that these vehicles we were destroying were probably just innocent civilians not paying attention, but we had to follow the Rules of Engagement no matter what. Personally, I still deeply regret how we had to treat the people of the country we were supposedly there to help. The phrase we were told, that we were there to "win the hearts and minds" of the people sounded more hollow every time we smashed someone's car that they could ill afford to lose. The overall impression was that the people were trying their best to eek out a living and we were there just tearing things up. But we never "played nice" or let our guard down, because every IED that blew up or bullet that was fired down were reminders that we were targets too. My friend on a different convoy security team lost his life to one of these IEDs. Me and my friends were sad, angry, vengeful. His wife was pregnant back home, which made it even worse. These were the very negative sides of military.

Back in the states after that first deployment, I did very well for myself. I won the Warrior Brigade Soldier of the Year award and was quickly promoted to sergeant and became a squad leader. But soon we back in Iraq for a second deployment, from 2008-2009. This time, I was leading my squad on construction missions, and my one and only goal was to get them all back home alive. I witnessed massive military spending on all sorts of things none of us wanted or needed on the big base we were stationed on. What we really wanted was a purpose, a real reason for risking our lives every day, but instead we got lobster at the chow hall. My girlfriend was also a soldier, in another unit on the same base. She ended up taking her own life midway through her deployment, a tragic but commonplace event over there. I also struggled with depression and suicidal thoughts, as did most of us. More very negative sides to military service.

One day that I will never forget is when a couple military lawyers visited our work site and gave us an update on the Rules of Engagement. They were intelligent and knew their stuff, and I still hate them to this day. The premise of their talk was to always follow the ROE, and to ask questions later. To shoot women and children if they were in violation, and not to feel bad about it. They quoted the percentage of civilian casualties, which I believe was over 90% of Iraqis killed. So less than 10% of the people killed were actually combatants. Their message was correct but at the same time pure evil. I think this day is what turned me into an anti-war activist. All my soldiers and I wanted to do was get back home alive, without any blood on our consciences preferably. The confusion and anger we all felt after this particular speech was just another day of being confused and angry about what seemed like risking our lives for a confusing and useless cause.

Post military, I had matured a lot and was ready for the world. I bought a house, went to college, and in general was doing much better than I had been doing before the military. I had saved up a lot of money on my deployments, and was much more disciplined in my studying, eventually getting a degree in Elementary Education. Something I never could have accomplished without the GI Bill that I earned through my military service. A few of my friends were not so fortunate, and ended up deceased through substance abuse or taking their own lives. Not all of us could put the past behind us.

Here is why I strongly support the Defend the Guard legislation. All of the good and positive aspects of the military, of which there were many, can be obtained through service to our own country, and even locally. The sense of purpose, discipline, and physical and mental toughness don't necessary need to be battle tested in defense of....who knows what we were defending. The bad aspects of the military that I saw all came from our engagement in pointless conflicts with other nations, Iraq in my case. The lack of a sense of purpose, the PTSD, the suicides, the innocent lives lost, the post military substance abuse, all stemmed from a participation in something that at the very least didn't make any sense. And all the other bad stuff that comes from being put in harm's way gets added to that. There will always be a few flag waving patriots who blindly love their country and consider it their solemn duty to do what they're told by their commanding officers. Good for them, but most of us just aren't that stupid. We knew that our service wasn't to our own nation, or even to the country of Iraq that we were allegedly helping. We knew when our friends died it wasn't for any glorious cause. We knew if we had to kill the enemy it wasn't for the greater good of anybody. This is by far the mindset of the common rank and file soldier, and is mine to this day. If however, there was an actual threat to our freedom, to our families, and to our country, we would have wholeheartedly offered our lives for such a struggle. These petty conflicts for "American interests" and proxy wars and "peacekeeping missions" are a far cry from actually defending anything we hold dear, and every soldier knows it. So please , do your part, and keep us out of these extremely damaging and toxic conflicts, and only let the Kansas National Guard be deployed in the case of a real necessity! There's plenty to do right here until that day comes.