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April 8, 2008

Hon. Joe Knollenberg

30833 Northwestern Highway

Suite 100

Farmington Hills, Michigan 48334

Dear Congressman Knollenberg;

There is something that has been bothering me regarding the Support Our Troops Event at Kettering High School two weeks ago and I want to share it with you in hopes that as a participant, you can come up with a reasonable solution. I trust that you will consider what I have to say and, if you wish, we can then have a reasonable discussion.

I have attended these events from the first year and felt uneasy before for the very reason I am mentioning here. This year, with the change in both my children's status to active duty in the U.S. Navy, it is with great discomfort that I sat through the "Support Our Troops and Their Families" event this time.

What I have noticed over the last several years is that the Troops and their Families get very short shrift compared to the saccharine mix of unbridled adulation poured upon Miss Alexandra McGregor by the various politicians, functionaries and group representatives. I did notice that the two ACTUAL War On Terror Veterans that spoke this year merely thanked Alex for her introduction and then went on to stress the sacrifices our troops are making and the importance of civilian support for the Troops.

To sit in the Kettering PAC and hear Miss McGregor, who has done nothing more than write some letters and make a few phone calls to create this special day referred to as a "hero" and a "patriot" makes me want to scream a string of obscenities. As the son of a WWII veteran and parent of two currently serving members of our military (One who has been to the Gulf already and one who will be going this Fall) I think the entry level price for the title HERO or PATRIOT is a whole lot higher than a possible paper cut or a broken fingernail from dialing a phone. I grant that Alexandra is a nice public spirited young lady whose heart is in the right place, but I find the possibility that she would ever join the military extremely remote.

I talked to many people after the event. They were as unsettled by the focus upon Alex in the event as I was. Many knew I have children in the service and were asking about them and other folks merely overheard our conversation or noted my 2 blue star pin and asked me what I thought of what had just transpired. All shared my opinion.

I appreciate that Alex had a good idea, but the evidence seems to illustrate that the event apparently cannot grow beyond her, which is truly sad.

Can you name the two women from Boalsburg, Pennsylvania who first had the idea in 1864 to decorate the graves of Union soldiers that has now become Memorial Day? Few can, because the thing grew beyond them.

Is Support Our Troops and Their Families Day even noted anywhere outside of Waterford and the immediate confines of Kettering High School? Why is that?

With Alex graduating this year (I notice she has gotten the Channel Seven Best and Brightest Award – so this, among her many other efforts have been well recognized), is it possible that this event can be reformulated and guided into a STEADY focus on the Troops and their Families, as it was (I sincerely hope) intended and advertised to be?

If it cannot, we must then question the motivations behind the creation of this event and it won't take long before it goes the way of the DoDo. THAT is when the Troops and Their Families will know where they really stand – As a mere backdrop for a political event and a kid who wanted something to add to her resume of high school accomplishments.

The following are my suggestions:

1. Increase the number of actual service members/veterans involved.
2. Recognize Alex if she is in attendance, but get an accomplished public speaker to be Master of Ceremonies
3. Next year is NOT an election year, so we may actually be able to cut back on the petition/resolution giving to Miss McGregor that seems to put the event "off the tracks"
4. Consider making a service member/veteran the main speaker of the event
5. Move the date of the event to the closest Saturday or Sunday to Alex's Grandfather's Birthday (The largest attendance I saw for the event was the first year when it happened on a Sunday – Weekday events, especially starting as early as 6 p.m. are going to suffer in the attendance column due to work and Waterford traffic)
6. Create a website for the event and see what can be done to "GROW" it beyond our community.
7. Move the event totally AWAY from Alexandra's Grandfather's birthday and move it into the month of May – National Military Appreciation Month and use the closest Saturday or Sunday to Armed Forces Day, May 17th. The weather will be better and it will be a fitting precursor to Memorial Day, which celebrates our Nation's military dead.
8. If we follow #7, we can utilize the National events website to assist the attendance of the event. http://www.nmam.org/

I have watched the attendance of this event shrink, year after year, as people have been exposed to it. I will not guess at their reason, but the one I cite has been mentioned to me before.

Can we, together with other people in the community of goodwill and vision, save this event and make it something we can ALL be proud of?

You may or may not have heard about the recent National tour of the Vets for Freedom. I have attached the address for a short video that they have developed:

Vets for Freedom – SSgt David Bellavia :

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_K417cGvLQ

I think we need to allow folks like these and their families to have a greater voice in the event.

Sincerely,

Bob Huntoon

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