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Keeping promises to our veterans

BY SENATOR LEAH VUKMIR

As a blue star mom, I know someday my son who serves as a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army will become a veteran. I am proud of my son and am thankful for his service – just as I am for the service of his colleagues in every branch of our nation’s military.

Those who serve our country and make the personal sacrifice to keep us safe deserve the certainty that government will honor its promises. This pledge applies to our soldiers while they serve, and also after they discharge and enter civilian life.

When we make promises to those who put their lives on the line for our country and for the freedoms we enjoy as Americans, it is our responsibility to keep those promises and give them the best of what our state and country has to offer. Mediocrity and careless oversight cannot and will not be tolerated.

Currently, the state of Wisconsin agrees to pay for undergraduate tuition for these brave men and women, and under no circumstances should administrative glitches prevent that from happening. I recently released a bill with New Berlin Rep. Mike Kuglitsch to ensure our veterans will be reimbursed the full cost of tuition under the Wisconsin National Guard Tuition Grant Program.

Under current law, it is unclear whether differential tuition, which universities can charge for some specific programs like business or engineering, is covered under the grant. On occasion, this has resulted in a failure to reimburse military service members for the additional cost.

Our bill will also ensure that service members will be reimbursed in a timely manner. By removing red tape in the reimbursement process, universities will be able to work faster to help our veterans receive their grant money in time for the next semester's tuition.

Not only will this help veterans avoid late fees, but it will also provide them with the flexibility to avoid taking out costly student loans. Inefficient government should not be the reason why veterans have to pay interest on loans, especially when they should have received their tuition reimbursement from the state in a timely manner.

Our veterans deserve lawmakers who listen to them and will go to bat for them as they have for us. When a problem is brought to our attention, it is our job to listen and fix the problem — never to ignore them. To disregard our veterans when they come to us with a problem would be the ultimate disgrace. Lawmakers who do that are not fit for office.

I'm proud to have authored this piece of legislation so our veterans will not have to worry when pursuing their hard-earned education. As Wisconsinites, as Americans, it's the least we can do to say thank you.

Leah Vukmir is a Republican state senator from Brookfield, Wis. She serves as the assistant majority leader of the state Senate.

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