

This piece was written for a local newspaper, *The Olympian* while serving as a member of the Diversity Panel from 2007 through 2008.

## **Without food stamps, many military families wouldn't survive**

By David Whitfield | The Olympian's Diversity Panel • Published March 21, 2008

I write this with anger, frustration and defiance because today, yesterday, and the day before, veterans either died or were injured for our freedom, after taking the oath to “... defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic, and to obey the orders of all officers appointed over me, so help me God.”

I have taken this oath more than once. I have also administered it more than once. It is not just words written on paper, to paraphrase our commander-in-chief regarding the Geneva Accords. This oath says that I commit to give the ultimate sacrifice for all; and as an ethnic minority, I still commit to put my life on the line, knowing that in the end, I will not be treated with equality — and yes, there it is again, ladies and gentlemen because it is a part of Old Glory's fabric.

My defiance tells me to knock on the door of every general, colonel, sergeant major, and our commander-in-chief and ask each: Why do we dishonor our veterans? Why the feckless and gutless leadership?

An example of such leadership was demonstrated during the Walter Reed Medical Center incident, when the colonel in charge spouted, “I don't do barracks!” To that I ask, “Why should anyone be led by you, Colonel?” Of course he doesn't do barracks; he has a staff. I think Gen. Patton would have fired him on the spot.

What many of us don't realize is that there is a razor-thin line between the veterans fighting over there and the safety of our rear ends over here. To a veteran, freedom is never free. There is a huge price paid so that you and I are comfy today.

As a country, the gratitude we show our veterans (with some exception) is disgusting. Many veterans lack basic resources the rest of us take for granted: warmth, food, shelter and peace of mind. I agree with President Eisenhower's comment, “Every gun that is made, every warship that is launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed.” As a Vietnam veteran, I can relate.

The millions of dollars spent daily in Iraq is a theft from the military families, especially families of the enlisted women and men — the veterans.

President Eisenhower's quote is still timely, especially when it comes to veterans. The rockets fired, the warships launched constitute a theft from those 200,000 houseless veterans who sleep under bridges and over manhole grates each

night, hungry, cold, needing a warm bed, medical care, etc. And let's not forget their spouses or families.

According to the Defense Department, our country has more than 700,000 military spouses across all services, and 93 percent are women, with almost half married to enlisted men who make less than \$20,000 a year. Often food stamps are the order of the day; for without food stamps, many military families would not survive. And many of us veterans, if asked, would go right back and perform again.

