

## **THE CARLSON CHRONICLE**

### **Senator Mike Crapo and Idaho's Veterans**

Idaho's senior senator, Mike Crapo, spent a large part of the August Congressional recess listening to Idaho's veterans. He deserves genuine kudos for doing so, especially when one realizes he is neither a veteran nor a member of the Senate's Veterans Affairs committee.

Asked if there was something in particular that had motivated the interest, such as a member of his extended family who was ill-served by the VA, an aide replied "nope." The aide said it was a function more of the senator having encountered too many stories of average citizens who had served their country not being treated in a manner consistent with their service and sacrifice.

Additionally, with national attention focusing on the deficiencies of many VA hospitals around the country, the senator saw Congress typically reacting with a "just throw more money at the problem approach."

Not necessarily doubting that in some instances more money might help, the senator, who soon may be in a position to chair the Finance committee when (not if, folks) the Republicans take over the Senate, nonetheless wants to know if the tax dollar is being spent wisely, efficiently and is effectively bringing about the changes many veterans say the overly bureaucratic, paper-heavy system needs.

(Somewhat surprisingly, Senator Crapo's colleague, Senator Jim "No" Risch, also voted yes on the final funding increase bill for the VA .)

A good way to do that is to establish a baseline poll and then measure the audience a year or two down the road. Thus, Senator Crapo has on his website a short six question survey which can be filled out online or by folks who obtain a copy at the various town hall meetings he held as he traveled around the state.

Taking proper care of veterans should not be a partisan issue, either, the senator rightly says. For a number of years the committee chair was Washington state's senior senator, Patty Murray. The ranking minority member was Idaho's Larry Craig. He and Murray did work well together.

Murray was especially eloquent when speaking about the heavy emotional toll the Iraq and Afghan engagements were having on families. The divorce rate among those serving overseas was an astronomical 75%. Few marriages survived and the toll on children as well as spouses was devastating and costly.

What Senator Crapo has astutely done is establish a grass roots focus group and baseline of over a thousand veterans and/or family members. When he next surveys them he will have a good idea whether reform has really come to the VA and services are uniformly being delivered efficiently and effectively.

One other action the Senator might want to consider in his outreach to veterans is to invite a "drop by my office" from former Marine Captain Karl Marlantis, the author of the best-selling book, *Matterhorn*. It's a searing account of his experiences as a platoon leader in Vietnam. Many consider it to be better than *Fields of Fire*, the fine novel by Senator Crapo's former Senate colleague, James Webb, of Virginia.

The book though that he should really read is Marlantis' much shorter *What It Is Like to Go to War*. In it he lays out the thesis that the American military is great at instilling "muscle memory" in its Marines and soldiers that trains them to be efficient riflemen, and in reality, efficient killers in combat.

Where we fail these young people is we do not deal at all with the spiritual component of killing another human being. Its an oversight that has to be corrected he believes or it will only compound the issue of post-traumatic stress syndrome. He's absolutely correct.

We as Americans want our men and women coming back from combat not as heartless, conscienceless killers, but in fact people who

are distressed at having to kill even if necessary and justifiable. What sets us apart from other societies is we do care more about life and worry about so-called collateral damage that is a code phrase for killing innocents while killing combatants.

We also should want more senators like Mike Crapo who, out of compassion, see a problem that needs addressing and work to correct it; unlike his colleague, Senator Jim Risch, who hides behind D.C. polarization as an excuse to do nothing.

Just exactly where was Senator Risch during the recess? He should have been right beside Mike Crapo.