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Our veterans are true patriots who embody the American Spirit. They sacrifice time with their families and put their lives on the line to ensure we continue to live in liberty. Since they have served us so honorably, it is incumbent upon us to take care of them after they have fulfilled their tour of duty.

This is a value all Missourians share, and the reason we included it in our Blueprint for Missouri. This week, in a bipartisan effort, we came together to take care of our veterans by passing HB 1731, a bill ensuring our veterans continue to receive the care they deserve.

Our veterans' homes are currently facing a funding crisis. If the necessary funding isn't found, the Veterans' Commission will have to start closing homes in 2013. Here in the Missouri House we have been working hard to find a dedicated funding source for our veterans to fix this funding problem and keep our veterans' homes open for business.

HB 1731 provides a steady stream of funding to our veterans by giving them the casino admission fees they originally received in the 1990s. Under this provision, our veterans will receive an additional \$30 million which is enough money to keep our homes open and viable for years to come.

We are currently operating seven homes that serve 1,350 servicemen and women, and there is a waiting list of around 1,700 who are desperately in need of care. HB 1731 not only provides the operating funds for our current homes, but also provides enough funding to replenish the Veterans Commission Capital Improvement Trust Fund so we can fill the needs of those on the waiting list.

For us to give the casino admission fees back to our veterans, we had to find a new stream of revenue for early childhood education. HB 1731 protects this priority by giving them a percentage of the lottery proceeds paid out to education. By funding early childhood education through the lottery, we can continue funding these vital programs while ensuring that the lottery's constitutionally mandated mission to fund education continues.

It is important to note that we are not taking money away from early childhood education, and we are not taking money away from our public schools. We actually increase funding to each of these departments with an extra \$4.5 million going to early childhood education and \$6 million going to our public schools. On top of that, the legislation ensures that education will continue receiving at least 30.5 percent of all lottery proceeds in the future.

When we come together to solve a problem, we can accomplish the unthinkable. Both our veterans and our children are priorities here in the Missouri House. With HB 1731, we were able to fix the funding crisis of our veterans' homes while protecting our education priorities. As some might say, it was a win/win situation.

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