

Daniel Parra: Military families shouldn't have to rely on food stamps

By Daniel
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As our society and elected leaders debate raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, the debate can and should also focus on our military personnel and the disparity between their pay and the cost of living at their posting. According to CNN Money, a review of Department of Defense-run stores (called commissaries) found that in 2013, nearly \$104 million of food stamp benefits were utilized by military families nationwide.

In addition, veterans are also affected by low wages. A 2012 study from NBC News states that 27 percent of veterans have faced food insecurities. The freedoms we enjoy every day come from the sacrifices these brave men and women make for our country. The least we can do to show our gratitude is give them the financial support they deserve.

Fowler Mayor Pro Tem Daniel Parra Special to The Bee

For married military personnel with children (E-1 through E-4), reliance on social programs has become the norm versus the exception. Base pay for these entry-level employees is \$20,000 per year (roughly \$9.61 per hour if they work a 40-hour workweek, but they actually work much more). There is supplemental income if the serviceperson is married, has children, is sent overseas, etc., but that meager amount does not cover the real cost of rent, food and transportation for a family at home plus support for the deployed serviceperson.

In addition, the constant relocation of military families makes it difficult for spouses to find employment and contribute to the family's income. In 2012, the unemployment rate for military spouses was 30 percent, according to the Military Officers Association of America.

I was fortunate that while I was in the military, I was stationed in Sacramento, only three hours away from both mine and my wife's parents. When my wife and I would visit, our parents would send us back with an ice chest full of food. We stretched out the food as long as we could and were very careful with our expenses. If it were not for this support, we would not have made it; we had to live paycheck to paycheck. Not much has changed since I joined the military 30 years ago. Sadly, these men and women still cannot sustain a family on these wages.

It is appalling that these brave men and women must rely on social programs to take care of their families, while they take care of ours. We need to financially support those individuals defending our nation every day. No one serving in our military should be on food stamps.

Although I strongly believe that the minimum wage needs to be raised, our first priority needs to be to provide our military personnel with a wage that they deserve. These courageous men and women have dedicated their lives to protect us, and it is time we give them the respect and support they are due.

Daniel Parra is a veteran, mayor pro tem of Fowler and a Democratic candidate for the 21st Congressional District seat.

