

"Sadly, Missourians have laid to rest several of the best, brightest, most selfless, most patriotic of our young Americans in the last decade. They are our countrymen and women who serve in the uniforms of our nation's armed services. On these devastating occasions for families and communities, some of the funerals have also been marked by a group intent on pouring salt into the wound by desecrating the flag and protesting the funerals.

Of course, being disrespectful isn't against the law, but these protests have struck fear into the hearts of the families who have lost loved ones in war. They have marred the sanctity of somber events for our entire nation: the burial of a soldier who made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our freedoms on the field of battle. It is a shameful display at a time when the utmost show of respect is called for.

So it makes sense that Missouri, like many states, has a law prohibiting a protest at any church, cemetery or funeral home before, during or after a funeral. Protesters must also keep their distance from ceremonies and processions along the way. These laws protect against the desecration of the funerals that honor those who have served our nation and lost their lives.

A federal judge doesn't see it that way, and the Missouri law will not be enforced under the order handed down in late November. It is the second federal ruling against Missouri's law, and it may not be the last.

Still, there is every reason for Missourians to energetically defend this state law, made with good reason, to preserve the dignity of our fallen soldiers. The deep tradition of military service depends on the support of every member of our community for the brave Americans who volunteer to wear the uniform of our nation into some of the most dangerous conflicts on earth. This tradition cannot survive without parents and grandparents who served, without families willing to bear the absence of a loved one who is deployed away from home, and without Americans prepared to sacrifice our safety.

If we do not honor these things, if we do not place a sacred value on them, then Americans will slowly cease to contribute to the security of our country, its citizenry, and our freedoms.

With such a powerful sense of duty and honor in Southern Missouri, we must continue to protect our tradition of proud military service to the nation. I hope that, on appeal, our Missouri Attorney General will make the arguments necessary to keep our state laws in force to allow dignified, respectful remembrances of the patriots who have lost their lives in service to our country.

For my part, I will continue to press forward in Congress on a constitutional amendment to prohibit desecration of the American flag, a measure endorsed by veterans organizations at the state and national levels.

Our ability to preserve these laws will set an important precedent for other states which have taken similar actions to protect American military families at their most vulnerable hour."

