

When General George Washington resigned his commission to the Continental Congress, he cited his pride in our nation, our independence and sovereignty, and the patronage of Heaven.

This week, I announced my intention to retire from the U.S. Congress – and I have come to understand a little bit better what Washington felt as he left the service of our nation not knowing how he might be called to serve in the future.

I can't express what my job in Congress has meant to me. Representing our district is a great responsibility. It is also incredibly rewarding work.

With 435 Representatives in Congress from all over the United States, I have had to occasionally explain to someone where the Eighth District is. I have never had to explain what we stand for in Southern Missouri. We are known and respected for our insistence on commonsense, our ideas to fix problems, and our civil approach to policy as well as politics. I couldn't be more proud in the halls of Congress than when I tell someone in Washington that I represent Southern Missouri.

I can cite the size of our district – three times the size of the state of New Jersey and roughly equal to the area of the country of Switzerland. I can point to the rolling hills, the Ozarks and the Bootheel. I can sing the praises of our agricultural diversity, our manufacturing sector, our schools and colleges, our veterans organizations and our chambers of commerce.

But the soul of our district rests with the people who work their hardest, every day, to preserve our tremendous quality of life, to assert our individual rights, and to create new opportunities for our future. Southern Missouri would not be the same place if we stopped believing in our small businesses, or if we allowed our amazing natural resources to be placed off-limits by the federal bureaucracy. It's the people of our district who inspire the service of their elected representatives in government.

I'm inspired by the Missourians who want to pass their family farms and ranches intact to the next generation, and by the next generation that wants to take on that challenge and to preserve their family's legacy. I'm inspired by the churches and food banks and non-profit

groups that leap to the aid of our neighbors when we are afflicted by disasters. I'm inspired by the veterans and their families who have come to me, over the years, asking for help getting a Bronze Star they earned as long ago as World War II.

All these examples of our strong community surround us every day. It is easier to see them, maybe, from the role of a representative. I know heroes big and small in every one of our district's 28 counties. But they can also be found living next door or down the block – humanitarians, servicemembers, and entrepreneurs – people putting their all into pursuits that make our communities and our country better places.

I'm deeply honored to have been a part of that, and I am full of thanks for the opportunity entrusted to me for more than 16 wonderful years.