

City Councilwoman Janet Miller Torpedoes Veteran-Vietnamese Meeting  
June 15, 2009

After a great deal of research, it is clear that the Wichita Park Board, when it was headed by Janet L. Miller, created the problem surrounding the Vietnamese Soldier's War Memorial. The Park Board's insensitivity to the needs of the American Veteran community and the Vietnamese American community has forced these two groups into an unnecessary conflict. The American Veterans and the Vietnamese Veterans were not at odds before the Park Board forced this issue on them. They had fought as allies in the Vietnam War and lived as friends and neighbors in Wichita. They had no hostility toward one another, but shared a mutual appreciation and respect.

The problem arose when the Vietnamese community asked the Wichita Park Board for space for a Vietnamese Soldier's War Memorial in the downtown area of Wichita. The Park Board first offered them a space north of the downtown area on 25th & Arkansas Street. This location did not fulfill the expressed needs of the Vietnamese community to have a centrally located space. The Park Board then offered space for the memorial in the American Veterans Park to the Vietnamese soldiers who fought to defend South Vietnam. When the Park Board made this offer, they knew full well that the American Veterans would be truly offended that the service of foreign nationals to a foreign county was to be treated as equal to the service of the American Military to the United States of America. The sentiments of the American Veterans were well and often expressed at the multiple hearings that the park board and the city have boasted they held. The needs of the American Veterans for simple respect were summarily dismissed. The needs of the Vietnamese community for a community memorial in the downtown area of Wichita were ignored. The Vietnamese community has now been told by a City Council member, through the press and in the media, that they have been disrespected by the American Veterans.

At the invitation of a representative of the Vietnamese community, a group of American Veterans who are representative of a broad range of American Veterans Organizations attempted to meet on Monday morning, June 15th 2009, to resolve this issue. That meeting has been squelched. In canceling the meeting, it has been reported that the Vietnamese community has been told by City Council member Janet Miller that a meeting that is not conducted by the city officials would not be appropriate and perhaps would be "illegal." This move, in and of itself, is an outrage in a democratic society. That those who hold either elective or appointive office would suggest that a meeting of citizens may result in some negative result for one party is contrary to every principal of our American way of life. In addition, Janet Miller has assured the Vietnamese Community that they should not discuss this issue with anyone outside of the city and that on July 14 they will have their Vietnamese Soldier's Memorial approved in the Wichita Veterans Park.

At the City Council meeting on June 9th, the Mayor charged the Veterans and the Vietnamese community alike to discuss these issues and reach a mutual agreement. When Janet Miller, who as the park board chairman first approved this inappropriate placement in Veterans Park, in her official capacity as a member of the City Council, discourages and even forbids discussion among citizens, she has stepped beyond the bounds of permitted partisanship and become an embarrassment to the entire City. Mrs. Miller needs to resign her position as a City Council.

The American Veterans ask the Vietnamese community to understand that the ground upon which the memorials to those who have lived and died in defense of the United States of

America is sacred ground to all American Veterans. Yes, in Vietnam we fought for the same ideals, freedom and independence, and against the same foe, tyranny and communism. But the Veterans Memorial Park is about more than just the Vietnam War. The park memorializes the service of the men and women in the American military in upholding the Constitution of these United States throughout our entire history as a nation in all past and present wars and conflicts. It is about those Veterans risking their lives for their oath and those ideals even when we are not fighting on our home land. The Vietnamese soldiers could not have pledged themselves to that fight when they were Vietnamese citizens.

The lack of understanding and sensitivity of the members of the Park Board and of the City Council regarding the critical role of the United States military in maintaining our American way of life and the need to publicly acknowledge that role has caused hardship and embarrassment to both the American Veterans and the Vietnamese community. The City owes both groups sincere apologies. In addition, the Vietnamese Community needs to be reassured that if the two groups meet outside the control of the City Council they need not fear some negative consequence regarding their Vietnamese Memorial.

Kansas Veterans Action Committee (KSVAC) [www.ksvac.info](http://www.ksvac.info)

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