

JOE HENJUM HONORING THE BRAVE AWARD NOMINATION
TERRI L. CLINTON
SUBMITTED BY CHELSEA J. JACO

I would like to nominate my mother, Terri L. Clinton of Westminster, Colorado, for this prestigious award because I know, more intimately than most, the sacrifices she has made for Veterans in the State of Colorado, and nationally.

My mother joined the US Army on January 14, 1988, leaving her small town of Mildred, Pennsylvania. A daughter of a Marine, she never thought about military service until a recruiter kept calling the house and her mother suggested she call him back. She attended boot camp at Ft. Jackson, South Carolina, and went on to attend and graduate from the longest training in the US Armed Forces, learning the Korean language (reading, writing and speaking proficiently) at both the Presidios of Monterrey and San Francisco. She attended Military Intelligence school at Goodfellow Air Force Base in San Angelo, Texas and, after successfully graduating, was stationed at the 25th Infantry Division, 125th Military Intelligence Battalion, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, where she separated honorably at the rank of E-4 on July 15, 1990.

Her journey in the space of Veteran advocacy started when she joined The American Legion in December 2003. For years, she enjoyed the camaraderie she found at Post 178 in Lakewood, Colorado, attending post events and membership meetings. She was the editor of their monthly newsletter for seven years (a project we all got to help with). It wasn't until her brother-in-law, Staff Sergeant Brett E. Walden, was killed in action in Iraq on August 5, 2005, that she became serious about her efforts in advocacy for Veterans and their families. As she likes to say, when she got done being angry at the world, she decided to use the Legion as the platform she needed to be a voice for Veterans. She ran every chair until she was elected state commander in 2017.

Her awards in The American Legion are too numerous to mention, including her recent award as Legionnaire of the Year, presented to her on July 21. Every time I walk into her house and see her accomplishments that literally cover every inch of her living room, I realize her sacrifices and that of her family – we have had to share her with the Veterans and families she has helped for two decades. Of course, we have come to realize the importance of her mission, we understand it now as adults, and we support her passion. We know if there is a Veteran event going on, she is probably going to be there.

My mother has attended too many Veteran events to mention, has volunteered tens of thousands of hours, chaired numerous committees, sat on boards and even testified before Congress to address a widow's tax bill. She has written legislation, partnered with our state representatives on important Veteran issues and, in April of 2022, really put her money where her mouth was by leaving a lucrative career to join VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System where she says she gets paid to do what she loves doing. Now, every morning when she walks through the entrance of the Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center in Aurora, Colorado, and makes her way to Building A as the health care system's Public Affairs Officer, she says she feels at home.

In her position at VA, and with her Veteran Service Organization background, she now has the contacts, knowledge and resources to adequately help Colorado's Veterans. If a Veteran needs help, they know they can contact my mom and if she can't help them, she knows somebody who can. She has a strong network with other Veteran advocates throughout the state and nation, other Veteran Service Organizations, city and state officials/representatives and local Veteran-centric non-profit organizations.

Veteran Legislation has become her passion, and for the past two years she has been The American Legion Auxiliary's Legislative Chair. She attends the Legion's Washington Conference and "storms the hill" to promote the Legion's legislative agenda. This past year, her and her team were able to visit both senators and all eight congressional representatives – a feat for any Veteran Service Organization. For the second year in a row, she has been selected as the Auxiliary's Northwest Division Legislative Chair of the Year.

All of these accolades and the recognition she receives seem well deserved, but she honestly takes it all in stride and I don't ever see her saying, "Well, I think I've accomplished enough, I guess I'll stop." She literally goes to bed and wakes up the next morning and picks up right where she left off. It's hard for me to put into words the rollercoaster of emotions I have when I look back over the years. I have witnessed the struggles along with the triumphs, and those wins haven't come easy.

I am nominating my mom for this award because she is the epitome of what it means to dedicate your life to honoring the brave. She made a promise to Brett posthumously, and she has gone through hell and back to keep that commitment to him, the families of those who didn't make it back, the Veterans who did and to all of those still serving.

