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John A. Scocos Column: Moving Wall Comes to Wisconsin to Pay Tribute to Wisconsin's Vietnam Veterans

For a conflict that has played such a large role in the formation of American culture, Vietnam is significantly different from both earlier and later wars. Most veterans of our nation's military received a warm welcome when they returned home, except those from Vietnam. Those who fought in the world wars, and more recently in the gulf war, received well deserved accolades from the public. The unpopularity of the Vietnam War was taken out on those who served in it by the general public.

That lack of recognition impaired their readjustment to civilian life. We saw this clearly among the veterans of not only Vietnam, but Korea as well.

It took many years after the war, but the sentiments have changed. Even those who staunchly opposed the war can support the very veterans who fought it. As a nation, we have come to recognize and commemorate the actions of those brave servicemen and women who sacrificed so much in Vietnam.

The Vietnam Veterans War Memorial on the National Mall in Washington D.C. is one of the lasting testaments we have to our public memory of the Vietnam War. Its polished granite slabs, each representing a year of conflict, descend below the surface of the mall. As you move along the memorial, the walls grow taller, and quieter, as the list of soldiers killed each year expands. The mirror-like walls also quietly reflect the faces of those who visit, including those who supported the war, those who opposed it, and those learning about it for the first time.

As our country observes the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War, the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs is overseeing a two-year statewide commemoration named *Operation Welcome Home* in 2015 and 2016.

As part of *Operation Welcome Home*, we are fortunate to have the travelling version of the Vietnam memorial, the "Moving Wall," coming to us here in Wisconsin in September. The Moving Wall is inscribed with the 58,307 names of those who gave the ultimate sacrifice. Among the names are 1,161 Wisconsin soldiers.

The wall will be in New Richmond September 10-14. On September 12 in Freedom Park my predecessor, former WDVA Sec. Ray Boland, who is also a Vietnam veteran and co-chair of Wisconsin's Vietnam War Commemoration Committee, will be a featured speaker.

The wall will then be in Edgar from September 23-27. On September 24 in the Edgar High School Gym, I will be speaking at the opening ceremony to introduce the wall to the Edgar community and thank those who made the effort to host the wall in their town.

We are honored to have the Moving Wall in Wisconsin. It helps us to pay tribute to our Vietnam veterans and to all the veterans in Wisconsin. It reminds us of the scars of battle. The wall reminds us to thank our military personnel for putting themselves in harm's way and for the pain and suffering they may have endured. And it reminds us to think of the families of these men and women, their worry and anguish, and to be grateful for their sacrifice.

Fortunately, time has brought perspective and our country is proud of all of our service men and service women. I hope that you will find the time to attend one of these events and show your support for Wisconsin's Vietnam veterans.

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(John A. Scocos is the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. He is an Iraq War veteran.)