



# KANSAS

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

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## **Governor's Column:** Giving thanks for Kansas' Military Family

*The following is a column by Governor Kathleen Sebelius:*

Like most Kansans, I celebrated Thanksgiving by sitting down for dinner with family.

Only, unlike most years, the family members I dined with weren't my husband and two sons.

Instead, they were our proud men and women in uniform – members of our Kansas military family – and we were 7,200 miles away from home.

There are nearly 2,000 Kansans serving overseas. I was honored to travel to the Middle East and personally thank them for their service to our nation. I also wanted to be certain they know how much all of us here at home support them and are praying for their safe return.

Though our state has a small population, there is no question Kansans are playing a vital role throughout the region.

I saw that from the moment I stepped off the plane in the nation of Qatar and was greeted by Kansans serving at the air base there, to the moment I left Pakistan after seeing how helicopter crews from Olathe are assisting with earthquake relief.

Kansas' own 891<sup>st</sup> Engineering Battalion is in Iraq clearing the roads of IEDs. Lt. Col. Lee Tafanelli and his soldiers said they are proud of what they've accomplished, and are also looking forward to coming home soon after nearly a year overseas.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 137<sup>th</sup> Infantry recently arrived in Iraq. It had been an honor to see them off at their deployment ceremony in Manhattan, but it was an even greater honor to be greeted by them upon arrival in Baghdad.

There are Kansans in Afghanistan, too, helping hunt down terrorists and support that emerging democracy. And there are Kansans in Pakistan, helping tens of thousands of people rebuild their lives after the devastating earthquake there.

One experience I won't forget was meeting a small group of soldiers on the darkened tarmac of the Baghdad airport. They were holding up a Kansas flag, shining a flashlight on it so it could be seen through the darkness. Their actions and those of their fellow Kansans serving around the world are a shining example of why we should all be proud to call this state home.

When Kansans gathered around their tables for Thanksgiving, they no doubt felt an overwhelming gratitude for the blessings of family. That's exactly how I felt, sharing Thanksgiving with our troops: A profound gratitude for these extraordinary men and women who place themselves in harm's way to defend our freedom. They seemed pleased their Governor had joined them to celebrate Thanksgiving, but let me assure you: The honor and privilege was entirely mine.

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