

Chancellor Weekly Brief – 5.22.2020

Dr. James Malm

MEMORIAL DAY.

Time certainly feels much different during this pandemic, and it's hard to believe that we are approaching the unofficial start of summer during this Memorial Day Weekend—when we traditionally are able to join together for those summer BBQs and other time-honored festivities to enjoy the nice weather and a little time off.

Importantly, we pause this weekend to honor those military men and women who have died while in service to this country—our treasured military personnel and their families who sacrifice for our freedom and continued way of life. We should also pause this weekend to give our prayers to veterans—and those currently serving in our military—who have been impacted by this pandemic. [Recent statistics published in the Military Times](#) show that over 1,000 veterans in VA facilities have died from COVID-19 related illness; and jobless numbers among our nation's veterans are approaching 1 million.

I'd like to give some UNM-Gallup kudos to our Veterans Resource Center (VRC). Since this pandemic hit our community, the VRC has been actively engaging impacted veterans and those in need within our community to ensure they have the resources needed to navigate this pandemic. VRC president Eric Thomas and vice president Christian Vasquez have also coordinated incredible outreach efforts through a nonprofit called Strengthening Nations, which Christian runs, and McKinley County Mutual Aid. Together, Eric and Christian have rallied our UNM-Gallup veteran community to volunteer at Strengthening Nations, which is serving as a local distribution center for much-needed food and supplies to our local community and the Navajo Nation.

According to Eric and Christian, this pandemic has greatly impacted local veterans—many of whom are students at UNM-Gallup—who rely on our VRC for a sense of community. The pandemic and stay-at-home orders have placed veterans into isolation without the mental health and other resources needed to overcome combat-related illnesses including PTSD. “Veterans already feel isolated, and this pandemic has taken an emotional toll on their well-being,” explains Christian. But, through volunteering at Strengthening Nations during this pandemic, they can now have a sense of belonging and the opportunity to once again serve. “We signed up to help people,” Christian says, “We help people out.”

Over the past few months, Strengthening Nations and these veterans have distributed over 800 food boxes—not counting all of the infant and cleaning supply kits they've gathered and passed out to those in need. “Right from the beginning, our veterans stepped up to volunteer and more have reached out to get involved,” says Eric.

I join with the UNM-Gallup community in sending gratitude to our veterans for their past and continued service to our community and nation. And, we honor those who gave the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom. I wish you all a wonderful Memorial Day Weekend.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'J. Malm'.

Dr. James R. Malm
Professor of Business
Chancellor