Across the United States, homeless is a major problem, but there is a small percentage of the homeless population is deserving of our special attention. Don't get me wrong, ALL homeless individuals are important; however, the brave men and women that have served our country should be of utmost importance.

According to the Veterans Affairs, 37,800 veterans were experiencing homelessness on a single night in January of 2019. This number should not be this high, however, many cities and communities around the nation are working to help decrease this number. While this problem is nationwide, I would like us to focus on what we, as a community, can do to affect a change locally, specifically Austin and the surrounding areas. Even though the numbers of homeless veterans are constantly changing, there are always veterans that need our help.

Various programs are currently operating to reduce veteran homelessness. Most of these programs are organized by Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) and have experienced much success, particularly in the larger cities. There are three main programs that HUD and the VA are actively coordinating: rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing, and reliable local work. These programs give veterans the opportunity to receive support according to their level of financial, mental, and/or physical needs. By meeting the veterans where they are, they can receive the right amount of support to help them get back on their feet. I'm pleased to see that there are so many measures being taken to take care of the people who have sacrificed so much for our safety and security. While cities nearby, such as Austin, Houston and San Antonio, are reporting an end to veteran homelessness as of February 2019 according to a report from the VA office, I believe we could do more in our community.

Locally, I think it's important to truly find out the number of homeless veterans in our county, thus giving us a clearer picture of the steps we must put in place to ensure our veterans have a safe, secure place to live. After researching this issue, I found that there is a program named Built for Zero that is run by a company named Complete Solutions. Built for Zero is a national change effort designed to make sure every veteran has a house he can call home. Built for Zero has successfully housed over 65,000 homeless veterans. I would like to
see this program come to Bastrop County and help make a difference in the number of homeless veterans in our community.

Veteran homelessness can be easily identified if we open our eyes to it. There are many ways to repay the veterans for the sacrifices they have given this wonderful country. A quote by Dan Lipinski says, "On the battlefield, the military pledges to leave no soldier behind. As a nation, let it be our pledge that when they return home, we leave no veteran behind."