

Republican Senator's Ill-Conceived Plan to Block Vegetarian Options in the Military

Across the United States and most of the developed world, there is a growing awareness of the problems caused by overconsumption of meat, and an attendant growth in vegetarians and vegans. One of the many campaigns to help spread awareness and moderate our diets is Meatless Monday. This program, [endorsed](#) by many public and private organizations, encourages people to forego meat at least one day a week in favor of plant-based alternatives. The Department of Defense, one of the largest and resource-heavy organizations in the world, is considering adopting the practice in military dining facilities.

Jodi Ernst, a first-term senator from Iowa and retired lieutenant colonel in the Iowa National Guard, has recently [introduced legislation](#) into the United States Senate to actually block the Department of Defense from implementing "[meatless Mondays](#)" in military chow halls. She claims that daily meat consumption is necessary to satisfy nutritional needs. This is so facile and disingenuous that only a [caveman](#) could defend it. If you actually read the [official Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#), it is suggested to eat less meat and eggs. But for legislators like Ernst, facts and logic cannot get in the way of their gut instinct.

If we dig deeper, it turns out that Iowa is actually the nation's largest pork- and egg-producing state, and the agribusiness industry contributed at least [\\$200,000](#) to Ernst's 2014 Senate campaign. That is a good return investment for an industry whose [2014 sales](#) were \$186 billion. Because this

isn't about nutritional needs, obviously—it is about cold, hard cash. Like everything in America. Everyone knows that meat is [not necessary](#) for proper nutrition. It has actually been [clearly linked](#) to cancer, and the enormous consumption of meat in America has helped create not a healthy and balanced population, but one with an uncontrollable obesity epidemic.

I was in the US Army for four and a half years and spent [two years deployed](#) to Afghanistan. In this time of my life I was still a typical American meat-eater. I ate meat nearly everyday while deployed, and I can attest that the quality of the food was low, and it was in no way necessary to offer meat everyday even to highly active soldiers. In retrospect, I wish there had been more variety of food offered in the chow hall like meatless Mondays that would have given me different options and helped me lower my meat intake earlier.

I became vegetarian and then vegan after leaving the army, and I have not eaten any meat or animal products in [over four years](#). I am light and healthy and energetic, and I practice rock-climbing several times a week with better physical performance than I ever felt during many years of army training with a heavily carnivorous diet. Senator Ernst is either ignorant or willfully lying on this issue. Neither is a good look for an elected politician.

Furthermore, Ernst, like all of her Republican colleagues, loves to completely dismiss either that climate change is happening or that it is caused by humans, saying things like "I'm not a scientist." On every other issue, they are experts, however. On abortion, they are medical experts; on gay marriage, they have a direct line to God; on guns, they are all enthusiastic hunters and potential freedom fighters. It's all hypocrisy. Everyone who studies the issue knows that not only is climate change the most urgent crisis humans have faced since the last ice age, but that intense industrial meat production is one of the largest single causes of pollution and climate change (I've written about climate change [here](#)).

Factory farms, like the ones that are concentrated in midwestern states like Iowa, are enormously [inefficient](#) and [harmful](#) to the environment. And that is to say nothing about the ethical question of raising billions of sentient, emotional creatures to live short brutal lives in cramped metal cages, pumped full of steroids and antibiotics before being slaughtered. It has been said, with no irony or exaggeration, that modern factory farms are humanity's [biggest crime](#).

Senator Ernst was elected on a platform of freedom and her military experience. She deployed to Kuwait as a combat tour. She has also [falsely claimed](#) that National Guard duty is the reason she missed over half of the votes in the Iowa State Senate. She thinks these things make her an expert on military matters, and that all military personnel and veterans will support her no matter her policies. As a veteran myself with two years of deployment on a remote outpost in Afghanistan, I can say that most veterans see through self-serving and corrupt politicians quite easily. That is why Bernie Sanders' [top contributors](#) are active duty military members. This is also important because Ernst is one of the people who will be considered for the Republican Vice President nomination because she is a woman and a veteran. Too bad she is also a corrupt fraud like most of her party's standard-bearers.

The Republican Party, which has long made "freedom" its watchword, does not seem to understand what it actually means. It often tends to conveniently ignore freedom for people that disagree with them. It does not take a [political philosopher](#) to realize that freedom does not count if it only means restricting other people's freedom. The Republican Party, which claims to want "smaller government" while insisting that government should be able to regulate and block the most personal individual choices in people's lives, has struck again with an absurd logic-bending proposal about people's most personal individual choices.

Eating is one of the most personal things we do. Just like religion, sexual preference, whether to have a child or not. In all these cases, the supposed party of individual freedom wants to restrict freedom. In the spirit of 1984, the Republicans would operate a Ministry of Freedom that insures everyone eats what they told to eat and prays how they are told to pray. It is hypocrisy, unmasked, not even trying to be masked, in fact. Like many Americans, I'm tired of it and want to change the system. One important way is to follow political campaigns, be active, and vote. Arguably even more important is to vote with your wallet with the products you buy, and get involved and stay involved in local or personal issues that you are passionate about. That is why I do not take it lightly when I see a hypocrite try to spread lies about meat consumption in order to help prop up a hundred billion dollar industry, or spreading lies that it is necessary to eat meat to be healthy when it is clearly the opposite. Veganism is an idea whose time has come as more and more people are learning that it is better for their health and for the planet (and for the animals). Fortunately, people have more freedom to do as they please than people like Senator Ernst realize.