Opinion



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I am very glad rescued prisoner of war Bowe Bergdahl did not get prison time at his court martial Nov. 3. I'm not in favor of anybody going to prison except if they are a risk to public safety. And Bergdahl certainly was punished enough during his five years of Taliban captivity in Afghanistan.

But what Bergdahl loses in his dishonorable discharge is access to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs health care system. Everyone agrees he was a troubled military recruit and that, seen in the very best light, his desertion from his post in Afghanistan was because of disordered thinking.

Bergdahl brought his troubles with him to the Coast Guard and then to the Army, but they accepted him and put him into situations that stress the healthiest minds. I think the Army and we, U.S. citizens, owe Bergdahl mental health care from the VA, the agency with the most experience caring for post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental traumas caused by war.

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Which takes me to the case of Devin P. Kelley, the shooter at the Sutherland Springs First Baptist Church. His bad conduct discharge from the Air Force precluded any access to VA benefits, including, of course, health care. Kelley too may have carried a disturbed mental state into the Armed Forces, but our military accepted him.

I suppose the Pentagon sees cost savings in denying health care to service men and women with less than honorable discharges. But the denial itself is dishonorable. And it is reckless.