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# OPINION

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## Remembering Fallen Heroes

**Rick Girdler**  
State Senator

The arrival of Memorial Day has come to feel like the start of summer, especially with so many students' school years ending across the commonwealth. During the holiday weekend, families across our state will begin their yearly traditions and the memory-making we all enjoy.

These moments with family and friends would not be possible without the sacrifices of many who laid down their lives to bless ours. Properly honoring the memory of fallen service members demands a celebration with a heart of gratitude and a deliberate effort to educate our children on the significance of Memorial Day.

How fortunate are we to live as United States citizens and residents of our great state? As is evident in thousands having just cast ballots in the state's primary election, no other country boasts the freedoms and privileges we enjoy in America, a nation founded on religious liberty and the pursuit of happiness, no matter how one may define it. As chair of the Senate Veterans, Military Affairs and Public Protection Committee, I am honored to serve in a position in the legislature vital to making public policy benefiting our service members and military families. We cannot only memorialize and honor the memories of those lost. We must support and show appreciation through action for those among us today.

Protecting those freedoms requires a military force like none other. Memorial Day was established to honor those who perished in the Civil War, which claimed more lives than any conflict in our nation's history. In the late 1860s, Americans began holding springtime tributes to fallen soldiers, decorating graves, and praying together. These memorial activities became a tradition.

I ask you to join me in memorializing the brave servicemen and women who lost their lives in the line of duty.

Tragically, we experienced this here in Kentucky earlier this year. Nine Fort Campbell soldiers perished in March when two Black Hawk helicopters crashed. Join me in remembering these service members and the families and communities they left behind.

They were:

- Staff Sgt. Joshua Gore, 25;
- Chief Warrant Officer 2 Zachary Esparza, 36;
- Sgt. David Solinas Jr., 23 ;
- Staff Sgt. Taylor Mitchell, 30;
- Sgt. Isaac J. Gayo, 27;
- Chief Warrant Officer 2 Rusten Smith, 32;
- Warrant Officer 1 Aaron Healy, 32;
- Cpl. Emilie Marie Eve Bolanos, 23; and
- Warrant Officer 1 Jeffery Barnes, 33

As you create cherished memories with your family this holiday weekend, engage in conversation with the young people in your life to ensure the special tradition of Memorial Day is not lost. Express to them the magnitude of the holiday. Freedom isn't free.

Remember the words written by President John Adams to Benjamin Rush in 1808: "Our obligations to our country never cease but with our lives." Remember our fallen heroes who fulfilled their obligation to their nation more than most others ever will.

It is my honor to serve as your state senator. I encourage you to seek a Memorial Day ceremony honoring our fallen military members among your other family traditions. I wish you and yours a safe and blessed Memorial Day weekend.

## Center for Open Government: KY Supreme Court will have the final word on the Beshear administration's MCO mess



**By Andrew McNeill**

The Kentucky Supreme Court has decided it will have the final say on the Beshear administration's mishandling of Kentucky's multi-billion dollar Medicaid managed care contracts.

Last year, the Court of Appeals overturned a Franklin Circuit court decision that ordered Beshear's Cabinet for Health & Family Services (CHFS) to re-bid the contracts.

The Bluegrass Institute's Center for Open Government was the first organization to uncover the problematic role played by healthcare consultant Emily Parento in Molina Healthcare's

2020 bid for the state's Medicaid business. Parento served as a co-chair to the Beshear/Coleman CHFS transition team. After signing a non-disclosure agreement, Parento was granted access to review various documents that were part of CHFS's 2019 MCO contract awards during the Bevin administration.

In its decision, the Franklin Circuit Court revealed that Parento submitted a report to Beshear's office recommending rescinding the 2019 contract awards and issuing a new solicitation for bids. The questions surrounding the consultant's role intensified after the Center for Open Government uncovered that Parento's services were retained only after serving on the 2019 transition team.

Franklin Circuit Court found that the "appearance of impropriety" created by Parento's involvement warranted the invalidation of the Beshear administration's 2020 MCO RFP.

The appeals court disagreed, arguing that since the Kentucky Model Procurement Code (KRS 45a) doesn't explicitly provide that an "appearance of impropriety" is a justification for nullifying an agency decision, the circuit court's decision wasn't "support(ed) in the law."

And yet, as we wrote at the time, nothing in the Appeals Court decision exonerated Parento for her role in the controversy.

According to the circuit court, Ms. Parento discussed the 2019 RFP with Beshear's Executive Cabinet Secretary and Chief of Staff. (Source) Also, the court believed Parento helped craft Molina's RFP response based on work she performed for the transition team:

There was "a broad pattern of tailoring Molina's submission in a manner that would maximize Molina's chances of selection; while this is an appropriate course for a healthcare organization

to take when trying to obtain an MCO contract, these actions in this particular case raise concerns regarding Ms. Parento's level of knowledge and involvement while working on the transition team." (Source)

Kentucky Registry of Election Finance's records show Parento and her husband have been generous contributors to Andy Beshear through the years, contributing nearly \$10,000 to his election efforts since 2014. Parento maxed out to Beshear's 2019 gubernatorial campaign with \$2,000 contributions for both the primary and general election.

Billions of dollars — and more importantly — how hundreds of thousands of Kentuckians get their health care are at stake in this lawsuit. It will be months before the Supreme Court renders a decision. However, taxpayers and anyone who believes ethical standards matter in awarding government contracts should applaud the justices for taking the case.

## Changes to Hunting Regulations

People with five acre or smaller farms must buy a hunting license to hunt their property.

According to a statement from the Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife the legislature, "removed license and permit exemptions for resident owners of, and others who live or work on, small tracts of farmland."

They report that the bill made the following changes:

Kentucky resident owners of farmlands of less than 5 acres, their spouses and their dependent children must buy applicable licenses and permits in order to hunt or fish on their farmlands.

Tenants, their spouses and their dependent children also must buy

applicable licenses and permits in order to hunt or fish on farmlands of less than 5 acres where they reside and work.

KyF&W stated that persons to whom those changes apply must be able to show they are properly licensed while hunting or fishing on those properties smaller than 5 acres. Otherwise, they risk being issued a citation.

They stated the same bill also removed the requirement that an applicant under the age of 16 get written consent from a parent or legal guardian before applying for a youth statewide hunting license. It does not change the requirement in regulation regarding parents or other adults accompanying youths in the field.