

SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE RESOLUTION 507—DESIGNATING THE WEEK OF NOVEMBER 5 THROUGH NOVEMBER 11, 2006, AS “NATIONAL VETERANS AWARENESS WEEK” TO EMPHASIZE THE NEED TO DEVELOP EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS REGARDING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF VETERANS TO THE COUNTRY

Mr. BIDEN submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary:

S. RES. 507

Whereas tens of millions of Americans have served in the Armed Forces of the United States during the past century;

Whereas hundreds of thousands of Americans have given their lives while serving in the Armed Forces during the past century;

Whereas the contributions and sacrifices of the men and women who served in the Armed Forces have been vital in maintaining the freedoms and way of life enjoyed by the people of the United States;

Whereas the advent of the all-volunteer Armed Forces has resulted in a sharp decline in the number of individuals and families who have had any personal connection with the Armed Forces;

Whereas this reduction in familiarity with the Armed Forces has resulted in a marked decrease in the awareness by young people of the nature and importance of the accomplishments of those who have served in the Armed Forces, despite the current educational efforts of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the veterans service organizations;

Whereas the system of civilian control of the Armed Forces makes it essential that the future leaders of the Nation understand the history of military action and the contributions and sacrifices of those who conduct such actions; and

Whereas, on November 2, 2005, President George W. Bush issued a proclamation urging all the people of the United States to observe November 6 through November 12, 2005, as “National Veterans Awareness Week”:

Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) designates the week of November 5 through November 11, 2006, as “National Veterans Awareness Week”; and

(2) encourages the people of the United States to observe the week with appropriate educational activities.

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, today I am submitting a resolution expressing the sense of the Senate that the week that includes Veterans’ Day, corresponding this year to November 5–11, 2006, be designated as “National Veterans Awareness Week”. This marks the seventh year in a row that I have introduced such a resolution, which has been adopted unanimously by the Senate on all previous occasions.

The purpose of National Veterans Awareness Week is to serve as a focus for educational programs designed to make students in elementary and secondary schools aware of the contributions of veterans and their importance in preserving American peace and prosperity. This goal takes on particular importance and immediacy this year as we find ourselves again with uniformed men and women in harm’s way in foreign lands.

Why do we need such an educational effort? In a sense, this action has become necessary because we are victims of our own success with regard to the superior performance of our Armed Forces. The plain fact is that there are just fewer people around now who have had any connection with military service. For example, as a result of tremendous advances in military technology and the resultant productivity increases, our current armed forces now operate effectively with a personnel roster that is one-third less in size than just 15 years ago. In addition, the success of the all-volunteer career-oriented force has led to much lower turnover of personnel in today’s military than in previous eras when conscription was in place. Finally, the number of veterans who served during previous conflicts, such as World War II, when our military was many times larger than today, is inevitably declining.

The net result of these changes is that the percentage of the entire population that has served in the Armed Forces is dropping rapidly, a change that can be seen in all segments of society. Whereas during World War II it was extremely uncommon to find a family in America that did not have one of its members on active duty, now there are numerous families that include no military veterans at all. Even though the Iraqi war has been prominently discussed on television and in the newspapers, many of our children are much more preoccupied with the usual concerns of young people than with keeping up with the events of the day. As a consequence, many of our youth still have little or no connection with or knowledge about the important historical and ongoing role of men and women who have served in the military. This omission seems to have persisted despite ongoing educational efforts by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the veterans service organizations.

This lack of understanding about military veterans’ important role in our society can have potentially serious repercussions. In our country, civilian control of the armed forces is the key tenet of military governance. A citizenry that is oblivious to the capabilities and limitations of the armed forces, and to its critical role throughout our history, can make decisions regarding our military involvement that may have unexpected and unwanted consequences. Even more important, general recognition of the importance of those individual character traits that are essential for military success, such as patriotism, selflessness, sacrifice, and heroism, is vital to maintaining these key aspects of citizenship in the Armed Forces and even throughout the population at large.

The failure of our children to understand why a military is important, why our society continues to depend on it for ultimate survival, and why a successful military requires integrity and sacrifice, will have predictable con-

sequences as these youngsters become of voting age. Even though military service is a responsibility that is no longer shared by a large segment of the population, as it has been in the past, knowledge of the contributions of those who have served in the Armed Forces is as important as it has ever been. To the extent that many of us will not have the opportunity to serve our country in uniform, we must still remain cognizant of our responsibility as citizens to fulfill the obligations we owe, both tangible and intangible, to those who do serve and who do sacrifice on our behalf.

The importance of this issue was brought home to me several years ago by Samuel I. Cashdollar, who was then a 13-year-old seventh grader at Lewes Middle School in Lewes, Delaware. Samuel won the Delaware VFW’s Youth Essay Contest that year with a powerful presentation titled “How Should We Honor America’s Veterans”? Samuel’s essay pointed out that we have Nurses’ Week, Secretaries’ Week, and Teachers’ Week, to rightly emphasize the importance of these occupations, but the contributions of those in uniform tend to be overlooked. We don’t want our children growing up to think that Veterans Day has simply become a synonym for a department store sale, and we don’t want to become a nation where more high school seniors recognize the name Britney Spears than the name Dwight Eisenhower.

National Veterans Awareness Week complements Veterans Day by focusing on education as well as commemoration, on the contributions of the many in addition to the heroism and service of the individual. National Veterans Awareness Week also presents an opportunity to remind ourselves of the contributions and sacrifices of those who have served in peacetime as well as in conflict; both groups work unending hours and spend long periods away from their families under conditions of great discomfort so that we all can live in a land of freedom and plenty.

Last year, my resolution designating National Veterans Awareness Week was approved in the Senate by unanimous consent. Responding to that resolution, President Bush issued a proclamation urging our citizenry to observe National Veterans Awareness Week. I ask my colleagues to continue this trend of support for our veterans by endorsing this resolution again this year. Our children and our children’s children will need to be well informed about what veterans have accomplished in order to make appropriate decisions as they confront the numerous worldwide challenges that they are sure to face in the future.