



Honoring Missouri Veterans

JEFFERSON CITY — Veterans Day is Nov. 11, a day to thank our living veterans for their service, and to recognize *all* who have served in defense of our country and proudly donned a U.S. uniform. As it so aptly states in this year’s national Veterans Day proclamation, our veterans “represent the greatest force for freedom in human history.” And today, hundreds of thousands of American military personnel are still answering the call to protect freedom by serving in Afghanistan and Iraq, in other parts of the world, and here at home.

This week (Nov. 9-15) also marks National Veterans Awareness Week — a week set aside to formally recognize the bravery and sacrifice of our men and women serving in the Armed Forces. These courageous men and women pledge to leave their homes, travel to foreign lands, endure great hardships, drastically alter their lifestyles, *and* are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to protect this country from threats of terror. These are the people we honor during this important week.

In the Missouri Legislature, we are dedicated to remembering and honoring our Missouri veterans. During the 2008 legislative session, we passed a number of bills to pay tribute to Missouri’s soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines.

For those who do not come home to their families, we passed Senate Bill 806. The bill requires that U.S. and Missouri flags be flown at half-staff for one full day whenever a Missourian is killed in combat. This legislation gives us a way to show the families of these brave service men and women that we are mourning with them. Another bill we passed is Senate Bill 830. Known as the Missouri Returning Heroes’ Education Act, the legislation lowers the undergraduate tuition at public institutions of higher education in Missouri for veterans who served in armed combat after September 11, 2001. A similar bill — House Bill 1678 — allows the spouse or children of a soldier killed in action after Sept. 11, 2001, or who became 80 percent disabled as the result of an injury sustained in combat action after that date, to be eligible for educational grants for tuition at public or private colleges or universities in Missouri. These measures serve to help repay veterans and their families for their sacrifice.

The General Assembly also passed a measure (Senate Bill 753) that designates certain stretches of highway after military personnel. Naming expanses of highway will serve to recognize these Missourians' brave service, and to honor their memory.

The Missouri Veterans Commission — which celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2007 — is committed to honoring and serving Missouri veterans. The commission operates seven state veterans' homes, five state veterans' cemeteries, and administers the veterans' service program. Almost every county in Missouri has a Veterans Service Officer to direct veterans to services close to home. To learn more about the many veterans' services and benefits available, visit the commission's website at www.mvc.dps.mo.gov.

Veterans are and always have been an important part of our state and country's history and framework. And they've never asked for much. But as a state and nation, we owe them much. It is my hope that you will continue to remember the men and women of the Armed Forces — our American veterans — and that you continue to hold their value and commitment dear as they proudly and selflessly serve to make the world a safer and better place.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

###