

Hastings Marks Flag Day in Tieton
Prepared Remarks by Congressman Doc Hastings
Saturday, June 14, 2009

Thank you for inviting me here today. I appreciate the opportunity to join you in honoring the American flag and the millions of men and women who have, throughout our history, fought to protect all that it stands for.

On June 14th, 1777 the Continental Congress approved the design of a national flag. In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson issued a presidential proclamation to mark the anniversary of the Flag Resolution of 1777 by establishing a National Flag Day on June 14th. And, legislation designating today as Flag Day was signed into law in 1949.

The entry in the journal of the Continental Congress reads “Resolved that the flag of the thirteen United States be thirteen stripes alternate red and white: that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation.”

While the flag may have changed in appearance – with additional stars added as our nation has grown – the spirit of the Stars and Stripes has endured.

For over 230 years the Stars and Stripes has proudly represented America at home and abroad as a symbol of our unity, freedom and values. Whether displayed proudly at a county fair, carried by American troops to victory at Iwo Jima during World War II, or planted in a wire frame on the Moon, it has served as a beacon of hope throughout our nation's history.

Those who see our flag waving are instantly reminded of the unity and purpose of the people of the United States, and of the brave men and women who have defended it with their lives.

Our freedom was won by the 25,000 Americans who gave their lives during the Revolutionary War, and it has been protected over the course of our history by the millions Americans who have served our country. And today, we are blessed with men and women who are voluntarily risking their lives to protect America in the war on terror.

Throughout American history, our men and women in uniform have fought to protect the core values upon which our nation was founded – the values symbolized by the Stars and Stripes.

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Because of their sacrifice, we enjoy the right to choose our government; freedom from foreign tyranny; freedom to attend whatever church we choose; the right to freely express our views; and the right to raise our families free from government control.

As we look to the future, we must work hard to preserve the values of freedom, democracy and liberty that our troops have fought to defend. And, while these American heroes can never truly be repaid for their service, we must ensure that keeping our nation's commitment to our veterans is a national priority.

That means fully supporting the men and women on the front lines in the war on terror and providing all of the funding and tools they need to protect themselves and America.

It means providing our veterans with quality hometown health care. I know that too many Central Washington veterans have to wait too long and travel too far for even the most basic care. I've worked to open new VA clinics in Central Washington, I'm backing a plan to enable the VA to partner with local hospitals to provide health care closer to home – and there is more to be done.

Upholding our commitment also means modernizing veterans' benefits and updating the GI Bill so that it works for troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. We must make sure that as soldiers return from defending our nation abroad they have all the support and services they need when they return home.

And, in cases where members of the Armed Forces have made the ultimate sacrifice – we have a special responsibility to their families.

When I was invited to join you here today, I was asked to talk about my work with Congressman Earl Pomeroy, a Democrat from North Dakota, to protect the survivor benefits of soldiers killed in action.

We wrote a bill, that's been approved by Congress and is currently awaiting the President's signature, that closes a gap in current law to make certain that the families of National Guard and Reserve soldiers who are killed in action receive the full survivor benefits they are due.

The need for this legislation came to light after a soldier from Yakima County was killed in action and his state pension plan listed him as taking early retirement. As an early retiree, the soldier's widow was not entitled to the employer's contributions in the retirement fund.

Servicemembers who die protecting our nation deserve to have their time on active military duty counted into their employer's retirement benefits and not as if they voluntarily left their job.

When a member of our armed forces is killed in action, their family must be treated fairly – that means giving them the full benefits that the soldier earned...it's as simple as that.

The work of those in uniform is dangerous and difficult – requiring personal commitment and sacrifice, as well as the patience and support of their families, friends and loved ones.

Our flag helps us show solidarity and pride in what America stands for, and it serves as a reminder of the debt we owe to those who protect and defend us.

So, this Flag Day let us honor the Stars and Stripes by paying tribute to our veterans and the brave men and women currently serving in the armed forces

Thank you.