KATHLEEN VINEHOUT
STATE SENATOR

Testimony in Support of SB 75 and 76
Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs, Biotechnology, and Financial Institutions
Wednesday, April 1, 2009

Good morning Chairman Sullivan and members of the Committee. Thank you for today's hearing on two bills honoring veterans. SB 75 and SB 76 were introduced at the request of constituents in my district. I thank Mr. Alan Wright of Sparta, who is here today, for working with me on these important bills.

The purpose of this legislation is to perpetually honor all those who served in the Korean and Vietnam wars.

Senate Bills 75 and 76 require the Governor to issue a proclamation for the observance of Korean War Armistice Day and Vietnam Veterans Day, asking the public to contemplate the sacrifices members of the U.S. armed forces made during these wars. These bills honor our veterans and do so without imposing a cost to taxpayers and obligate no days off for schools or employees.

Throughout history, our brave men and women in uniform have endured some of the worst physical conditions imaginable. They have faced death and injury to protect our freedoms. They have selflessly put the needs of our country before their own.

After the Revolutionary War, President George Washington said, "we owe these veterans a dept of gratitude, indeed a debt of honor."

Senate Bills 75 and 76 designating July 27th as Korean War Armistice Day and March 29th as Vietnam Veterans Day provide us an opportunity to remember and begin to repay that 'debt of honor'.

These important bills are part of Wisconsin's testament to the sacrifice of our fellow Wisconsinites who served. It is a call for us all to pause and salute their devotion to our country and ensure their service will not be forgotten.

I respectfully request the committee recommend these bills for passage and many of your colleagues in the Senate and the Assembly agree. Each bill is co-sponsored by 13 state Senators and 68 Representatives. I urge you to give full consideration to these bills.

I thank you on behalf of our Korean and Vietnam veterans.

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Department of Wisconsin

Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States

To: Senate Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs, Biotechnology, and Financial Institutions

From: Jason Johns, on behalf of the VFW of Wisconsin

Re: Support for SB 75 & SB 76

Date: April 1, 2009

Chairperson Sullivan and Members of the Committee;

Thank you for allowing me to appear in front of you today to express my support for SB 75 & SB 76. As a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Commander of Oregon Brooklyn VFW Post 10272, and as a pro-bono representative of the VFW Department of Wisconsin I can say that these bills are well overdue. Veterans of the "Forgotten War" in Korea and the "The War We Lost" in Vietnam have long felt that their service was not recognized by the people of Wisconsin as on par with veterans of World War I and II. It has only been with the outpouring of support for our troops in the War on Terror that these long time veterans have started to be rightfully recognized by the people of our state. SB 75 & 76 is the final step in this recognition by having the State Government formally express its appreciation of their sacrifice. I applaud Senator Vinehout for authoring these bills and all co-sponsors who have signed on. I hope this committee will unanimously support its passage.

Thank you,

Jason E Johns

Commander

Oregon-Brooklyn VFW Post 10272

VFW Department of Wisconsin

March 31, 2009

Dear Committee,

My name is Thuy (pronounced twee) Smith. I am the one who proposed passing this bill to designate a Vietnam Veteran's day. War takes its toll on many lives, including families, friends and more specifically the veterans who serve. The Vietnam veterans are a group of individuals who have never received the same recognition and honor as veterans of other conflicts. As a young woman of Vietnamese heritage and the daughter of a Vietnam veteran, I am committed to doing my part and asking you to consider in doing your part too.

My father is a Vietnam Veteran who served three years in Vietnam. My father and other Vietnam Veterans experienced a lot of negative treatment when they returned home. These men were expected to just put everything behind them and move on. Nobody wanted to "hear about it". Dianne Fineman, a woman whose brother served in Vietnam, tells the story of her bother and many other veterans who share a similar story. She said after her bother returned home, "His pride quickly turned toward guilt, worthlessness, and shame. Like others, he struggled in anger and solitude with what to believe in and how to fit into an unwelcome society".

I've been involved with Vietnam Veterans though my organization for the past 11 years. We host an Annual Vietnam Veteran's Appreciation Dinner and veterans come from areas through out WI and MN. Last year was our first gathering we put on in the Eau Claire area. Representative Jeff Smith was at our dinner and was able to witness how powerful of an impact it made on the men and their families that came, especially when I opened up the mic for them to share. Seven men came forward and courageously shared their experiences in Vietnam and the impact it made on their lives. This gathering was healing. The word has since spread and now more vets plan to attend in the future.

Having a Vietnam Veterans Day can bring great healing and recognition to those who sacrificed so much for their country, yet were never given the proper recognition they rightly deserve. The least any of them did was their duty. Having a Vietnam Veteran's Day can help increase public awareness and create a platform for education. Five other states passed a similar bill, including Minnesota last year. 22 other states are in the process. Passing this bill is one way to honor and pay our respects to our Vietnam Veterans. Vietnam was something many vets ran from, not something he could feel proud of. Let's continue to change that by showing how proud we are of them.

Please, do the right thing and support this bill.
Thank you.

Thuy Smith
Proud Daughter of a Vietnam Veteran

Vet Center

405 East Superior Street
Duluth, Minnesota 55802
(218) 722-8654
Fax (218) 723-8212

March 31, 2009

Dear Thuy,

I am writing to support Wisconsin's bill to declare a day set apart to recognize and honor Vietnam veterans. As you know, I have worked at the Vet Center for almost 25 years and during that time talked to hundreds of Vietnam veterans who suffered the second wounding of coming home to a public who did not welcome them – who in fact shamed them actively or by their silence - for their participation in a very unpopular war. This is as painful to most as the most horrendous combat inflicted emotional trauma, and the reminders of that continue to be tender territory. Not every Vietnam veteran is in favor of formal ceremonies that are happening more and more – the 'too little too late' response. However, for the ones who are willing to give the public one more chance – who in effect stick their neck out expecting nothing but pain and humiliation again – the result is a gradual and growing sense of pride and camaraderie.

We owe them no less. Please pass this bill.

Sincerely,

Cindy Macaulay

Cindy Macaulay M.Ed.
Readjustment Therapist

Dear Thuy,

Re: Viet Nam Veterans Day in WI

To finally have something like a VN Veterans Day to finally honor the sacrifices made by these great men and women is not only long overdue but so necessary for the healing of many veterans. It would give them some sort of validation for the sacrifices they've made. For me personally, it's all about getting vets together and the camaraderie. Only a VN veteran can understand what another vet has gone through and then to have come home and have our country turn her back on us. I guess it still rankles me at 63 yrs. old when we did our duty for our country when so many were going across the Canadian border. We weren't the murdering baby killers that some portrayed us to be. I find it ironic the Vietnamese people whose country we fought in have more respect for us than our own countrymen. I haven't experienced this myself yet, as I haven't gone back, but maybe someday I'll have the opportunity. I do know of no finer men and women than those I had the honor to serve with. So yes it would be great to have a VN veterans day and who knows, maybe something positive can grow from us vets coming and working together.
John Soleim
Superior, WI

THUY,
IT IS HARD FOR US TO SEE HOW THE IRAQ VETS ARE BEING TREATED, NOT IN THE SENSE THAT WE BEGRUDGE THEM. IN FACT WE ARE PLEASED THAT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE CAN NOW SEPARATE THE WARRIORS AND THEIR COMMITMENT TO OUR COUNTRY FROM WHAT HAS BECOME AN UNPOPULAR WAR. WE AS VIETNAM VETS SERVED NO LESS HONORABLY BUT WERE NOT AFFORDED THE SAME TREATMENT WHEN WE CAME HOME. HAVING STATES RECOGNIZE THE CONTRIBUTION THAT WE MADE TO OUR COUNTRY WILL GO A LONG WAY IN HELPING HEAL THE EMOTIONAL WOUNDS WE ALL SUFFERED BY OUR REJECTION WHEN WE CAME HOME.
CLINT HAINES
C TROOP
7/17TH AIR CAV IST AVN BDG
(RIDERS OF THE PALE HORSE)
VIETNAM 70-71 CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

See page 2

It goes beyond words....Our Vietnam Veterans served gallantly and returned home to far less "Than a heroes welcome" Yet they continually hold their heads high and serve in Veterans of Foreign Wars Groups helping each other. The Vietnam Veterans are proud they served where they were planted to up hold the Freedoms the "Greatest Generation" fought for. Isn't it time we give them some measure of dignity and recognition?

Carolyn Olkives,- Eau Claire, WI

(Regarding our annual Vietnam Veterans gathering / dinner)

"A dinner for camaraderie and exchanging private thoughts among us who served was fitting and timely and important. Some never came. I understand. I nearly turned around and went home, fearing I was unable to
come face-to-face with those who suffered too long, and too alone.
But, I found companionship and compassion instead. I'll always have a "hole in me that will never heal" and it aches when past memories surface. But now I know why. And decades later,a simple dinner helped a little with the healing."

John Hoffland, Eau Claire (Vietnam Veteran)

"Designating one day for rememberance and tribute is a small thing to ask for a lifetime of pain and sorrow." John Hoffland, Eau Claire

Lott, Hannah

From: Carolyn [olkac56@charter.net]

Sent: Tuesday, March 31, 2009 1:05 PM

To: Nilsestuen, Joel; Lott, Hannah; Vinehout, Kathleen; Sen.Taylor; Rep.Smith; Rep.Berceau; Peterson, Ilsa; Rep.Pocan; Rep.Radcliffe

Subject: Korean Remembrance Day

Follow Up Flag: Follow up

Flag Status: Red

"Our Greatest Generation that ever Served" are passing on. Korean "The Forgotten War" is not the way we want to remember the veterans who served just as well. A State Korean War Remembrance Day would be a remarkable way to begin to recognize they vets who served just as honorable. Please support passage of this honor in the state.

Carolyn Olkives
109 E. Tyler Avenue
Eau Claire, WI 54701
715-852-0339
olkac56@charter.net

Lott, Hannah

From:	Carolyn [olkac56@charter.net]
Sent:	Tuesday, March 31, 2009 12:44 PM
To:	Nilsestuen, Joel; Lott, Hannah; Vinehout, Kathleen; Sen.Vinehout; Sen.Taylor; Rep.Smith; Rep.Berceau; Peterson, Ilsa; Rep.Pocan; Rep.Radcliffe
Subject:	Vietnam Day
Follow Up Flag:	Follow up
Flag Status:	Red

It goes beyond words....Our Vietnam Veterans served gallantly and returned home to far less "Than a heroes welcome" Yet they continually hold their heads high and serve in Veterans of Foreign Wars Groups helping each other. The Vietnam Veterans are proud they served where they were planted to up hold the Freedoms the "Greatest Generation" fought for. Isn't it time we give them some measure of dignity and recognition? A state designated Vietnam Day would be a start. Please support this measure.

Carolyn Olkives

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Eau Claire, WI 54701

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Veteran behind bill that honors Korean veterans

By SAMANTHA MARCUS | La Crosse Tribune

SPARTA, Wis. — Allan Wright barely wades into the nostalgia of the 13 months he spent in the Korean peninsula when he tells his story of war.

The 79-year-old veteran is matter of fact. It's not about him, his experiences or his life in the 55 years since he returned from the 38th parallel.

But on Sunday, Wright surely reflected on the historic day, an anniversary that passes with little din.

It's a date most wouldn't recognize, he said. But it was on July 27, 1953, that a ceasefire was declared, bringing an end to three years, one month and two days of violence that claimed the lives of 34,000 Americans and 729 from Wisconsin.

The armistice brought peace, but not victory, to the forgotten war.

Flanked by World War II and the Vietnam War, the Korean War often is overlooked in the nation's collective memory and in history books.

Wright's dad served in World War I and his brother in World War II. They came back heroes, Wright said, adding "There's not that same awareness for the Korean War."

Now it's time, he says, for the men and women who served in Korea to receive the recognition that's more than a half century past due.

Wright of Sparta is behind a bill declaring July 27 Korean War Armistice Day. His efforts are backed by State Rep. Terry Musser, chairman of the Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs.

Wright was moved to action after reading this spring that the Minnesota legislature unanimously passed an act honoring the anniversary of the armistice.

"I have no idea why no one did anything like this before," he said.

It was too late to get it into the Wisconsin legislative cycle, Wright said. But together, he and Musser prompted a proclamation by the governor to that effect.

"During the three years of war alongside 20 coalition nations, approximately 132,000 Wisconsin men and women were among the 1.7 million members of the U.S. Armed Forces who endured harsh combat and austere climactic conditions at grave personal risk, including of being killed, injured or captured, in order to help prevent the spread of communism and preserve freedom throughout the world," the document says.

Wright hopes by next year the honorary day will be a law.

The U.S. engaged in Korea in June 1950, after a North Korean invasion into the south.

"We went to war because Harry Truman thought if we didn't go to war right then, it would start World War III," Wright said. And he enlisted, he said, "because I imagine I thought I was going to be drafted."

He served three years in the Army, 13 months as a staff sergeant in Korea. He talks about it with minimal fuss or outpouring of reflection.

"It was cold," he said.

Wright was charged with wiring the peace pagoda in Panmunjom and building tents in Freedom Village where prisoners of war would be exchanged after the ceasefire.

"We knew this day was going to come eventually," he said. He recalls North Korean POWs pulling away in trucks headed back to North Korea, peeling off their clothes in protest.

He returned to the U.S. one month after the armistice. Two years later, he bought a Dairy Queen in Sparta, which he owned for the next 30 years.

"I always wanted to go into business for myself," explained the La Crosse native. For 17 years after that, he sold ice cream mix for a dairy.

Today, there are 56,000 living veterans of the Korean War in Wisconsin, according to the Wisconsin Department of Veterans' Affairs.

"Another 92,000 American troops were wounded, and more than 8,000 have been listed as missing in action or taken prisoner," according to Wright's proposed bill.

He's not asking for anything special, he said. "No days off with pay. No days off period," he said.

"This bill calls for nothing else special, other than to honor these veterans," he added. "It should make all Korean veterans feel good to be honored in this way. It should make all citizens of our state feel they have taken the responsibility to do something nice."

Wright also initiated a similar day to honor Vietnam veterans in Wisconsin on March 29.

According to Veterans' Affairs, Wisconsin lost 1,239 people in the Vietnam War.

Samantha Marcus can be reached at (608) 791-8220 or ***smarcus@lacrossetribune.com****.*

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