



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 110th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2008

House of Representatives

APPLAUDING THE HONOR FLIGHT NETWORK!

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I rise today to support House Resolution 1287, a resolution commending the Honor Flight Network, its volunteers, its donors and friends for enabling World War II veterans to travel to our Nation's Capital to see the World War II Memorial created in their honor. It is a pleasure for me to stand before you today to pay tribute to the Honor Flight Network.

This is a nonprofit organization that was created solely to honor America's World War II veterans for all their sacrifices by bringing them to Washington, DC without charging them a penny. The visit for them is to reflect at the World War II Memorial and visit with their fellow veterans.

The memorial, as you all know, honors the 16 million veterans who served in the Armed Forces of the United States during World War II, the more than 400,000 that made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our Nation and the millions who supported the war effort at home.

The memorial itself is a testament to the spirit, sacrifice and commitment of the American people to the common defense of our Nation and equally important to the broader causes of peace and freedom from tyranny throughout the world. Above all, the memorial stands as an important symbol of American national unity, a timeless reminder of the moral strength and awesome power that can flow when free people are united and bonded together in a common and just cause. I sincerely hope that every World War II veteran will eventually be able to experience this great memorial, which we specifically created in their honor.

I am saddened, Madam Speaker, that not all veterans will be able to see this remarkable site. But, fortunately, the Honor Flight Network has made this dream a reality for many veterans by helping them see firsthand the memorial, an experience that certainly live with them and their families for the rest of their lives.

This program was conceived by Earl Morse, a physician's assistant and retired Air Force captain, to honor the veterans he has taken care of for almost three decades. After retiring from the Air Force in 1998, Earl was hired by the Department of Veterans Affairs to work in a small clinic in Springfield, Ohio.

In May of 2004, the World War II Memorial was finally completed and dedicated in Washington, DC, which quickly became the topic of discussion amongst his World War II veteran patients. Earl repeatedly asked these veterans if they would ever travel out to visit the memorial. Most felt that eventually somehow they would make it to D.C., perhaps with a friend or family member.

As summer turned to fall and then winter, these same veterans returned to the clinic for their follow-up visits. Earl asked if they accomplished their dream of visiting the World War II Memorial.

By now, for most of the veterans who were asked the question, reality had settled in. It was clear to most of them that it was simply not financially or physically possible for them to make the journey. Most of these heroes were in their

eighties and lacked the physical and mental wherewithal to complete a trip of their own. Families and friends lacked the resources and time to complete a trip to D.C.

Earl could tell that the majority of the veterans had given up all hope of ever visiting the memorial that was specifically created to honor them, their sacrifice and their service. That is when Earl decided that there had to be a way to get these heroes to D.C. to see this memorial.

In December of 2004 Earl asked one of his World War II patients if he could personally fly him out to D.C. free of charge to visit the memorial. The patient, Mr. Loy, broke down and cried. He said at his age he would probably never get to see his memorial. He accepted the offer, and soon thereafter Earl received help from other pilots to make these hopes and dreams a reality for other veterans.

At the end of the first year, Honor Flight took 137 World War II veterans to their memorial. The mission and ideals of the program began to spread across America. One individual, Jeff Miller, from Hendersonville, North Carolina, led the expansion into areas not serviced by direct commercial flights to the Washington, DC area, and HonorAir was born.

In February of 2006, Earl and Jeff combined efforts and cofounded this Honor Flight Network. By the end of 2006, almost 1,000 World War II veterans realized their dream of

visiting their memorial. The program presently has 69 hubs in 30 States, and by the end of this year, the Honor Flight Network hopes to have a hub in all 50 States.

One veteran who was able to have this experience, Ed Vitikas, put it best. He said, "It's the trip of a lifetime." In the future, Honor Flight plans on paying tribute to America's other heroes that served during the Korean and Vietnam Wars, followed by veterans of more current wars.

Today, by passing House Resolution 1287, we express our gratitude and heartfelt thanks to an organization that has given so much to our veterans by commending the Honor Flight Network, its volunteers and donors, for enabling World War II veterans to travel to our Nation's Capital to see the World War II Memorial created in their honor.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank our colleagues, Jerry Moran from Kansas, David Hobson from Ohio and Heath Shuler from North Carolina, for submitting this resolution. I ask that all my colleagues from both sides of the aisle support this resolution.