

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



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VIETNAM VETERANS STILL STRUGGLING FOR ACCEPTANCE, DOLE SAYS

WASHINGTON -- Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.), in giving his full support and observance to Vietnam Veterans Week (May 28-June 3), said this week that much remains to be done to ensure that educational, health care and job problems for Vietnam-era veterans are alleviated.

Following is Sen. Dole's floor statement:

VIETNAM VETERANS' WEEK

Mr. President, last October, the President proclaimed, in accordance with a joint resolution passed by Congress, that the 7-day period of May 28 to June 3, be declared Vietnam Veterans Week. I am here today to declare my full support and observance of this most appropriate and long overdue commemoration of the brave men and women who sacrificed so much for us. It is, indeed, a fitting tribute to those who dedicated their efforts, and in many cases, their lives, to the service of their country.

There has been a continuing tendency in the last few years to let go of the Vietnam era; to put all the pain and suffering associated with the war out of our minds. This is certainly understandable, but not acceptable. It is important that we remember "honestly, realistically, and with humility" the courage and sacrifices of all Americans who served in our armed forces in S.E. Asia.

I have long been concerned about the situation with all of our war veterans and have spoken out on this problem in various forums in the past and introduced legislation to address this concern. Just a few months ago, I introduced a concurrent resolution in the Senate to establish a special investigatory commission to secure a full accounting of Americans still listed as missing in S.E. Asia. Past efforts to obtain a reasonable and accurate accounting from the socialist government of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia have not been productive. These governments have provided next to no cooperation in our demands for a thorough accounting. We owe it to the memory of those men and women who fought in the conflict to continue the efforts to seek out the whereabouts of these men still in question. We owe it to the families of these men, as we have an obligation to resolve the doubts and questions they must have. In doing so, we offer our respect and gratitude to them and the loved ones they left behind.

We also bear a responsibility to those brave men fortunate enough to return to the United States. To those who still bear the wounds, both physical and psychological, we must acknowledge our continuing responsibility to help them build new lives. They returned home only to be confronted with a vast number of difficulties which confound their efforts to assimilate productively and comfortably back into the mainstream of society. For one thing, they have been and are being denied adequate employment opportunities. Unemployment and underemployment have reached high rates among these veterans. The latest Census Bureau figures showed in a single year, 1 million Vietnam veterans were unable to find jobs that kept them employed all year round. Many failed to earn an adequate wage. Unemployment among minority veterans remains unacceptably high at 14.1 percent. In order to allow them to participate fully in American society on their own terms, they need and deserve better access and availability to a wide range of job opportunities.

The education opportunities are equally insufficient. Our veterans face increased costs of education and decreased available funds. For the third consecutive year, the President's budget has not included one cent for a cost of living increase for our Vietnam veterans availing themselves of the GI bill. Complicating and hindering the situation further, in 1966, when the Vietnam era had produced over 1 million veterans, the GI bill paid only \$100 per month for tuition and living costs. However, the law's requirement that veterans can only use these funds within a ten year period has made the benefits obsolete for those veterans that were in the war at the beginning.

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In the area of health care, there are presently many inadequacies and shortages due to the Administration's budget cutting. Last year, the VA budget saw drastic cuts in medical personnel, beds and additional facilities. The Congress appropriated funds to provide for the greatly needed beds and personnel for the efficient operation of our VA hospitals. However, the Administration did not use these funds for this purpose, and, consequently, 3,132 beds were cut and 1,500 personnel were cut. Outpatient clinics are understaffed and underfunded, and the overall staff/patient ratio is well below that of private hospitals. The trend seems to be continuing in this year's VA budget. It is a justified obligation and responsibility. We must remember that a man who performed special service to his country deserves special treatment from that country.

In addition to all the inadequate opportunities in these very vital areas that they are facing, they must also deal with the negative image that they have been stereotyped with because of the unpopular nature of the war and the misunderstandings and confusion the general public has had for our involvement in this war. It is essential and proper for the well-being of these men to counter and correct this image.

As these Vietnam veterans are struggling to be accepted into a society that would rather forget this period of history, it is imperative that they not be overlooked or forgotten. I am hopeful that this week will serve to encourage support for more active assistance for those who still suffer from their experiences in that war and to correct an inaccurate image of the Vietnam veteran that has unjustly been attributed to them. I would like to join all the other Americans and my fellow colleagues in observance of Vietnam Veterans Week as an expression of my respect and gratitude to those men who so bravely served our country in the Vietnam war. It is altogether appropriate and important that they be remembered.

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