A logo for a women's day

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**GFWC Legislation and Public Policy Quarterly Newsletter 2022-2024**

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**By Sally Harper, GFWC South Central Region Representative**

**Honoring Our Veterans**

Did you know that Veterans Day was formerly known as Armistice Day? It became a federal holiday on November 11, 1918, to honor the end of World War I.

In 1921, an unknown World War I American solider was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. This site, on a hillside overlooking the Potomac River and the city of Washington, DC, has become the focal point of reverence for America’s veterans. Wreath laying ceremonies take place daily at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and annually on Veterans Day at cemeteries across the country.

A group of women working on a wreath

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A person placing flowers on a grave

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Caption: GFWC Alabama du Midi Woman’s Club placed 736 wreaths on the graves of veterans at Huntsville Memory Gardens (HMG).

Many clubs also sponsor and will be laying wreaths on December 16, 2023, the National Wreaths Across America Day. This organization has a simple mission: "Remember fallen U.S. veterans; honor those who serve; and teach your children the value of freedom." When each wreath is placed, the servicemember's name is said aloud, ensuring their memory lives on.

A person placing a flag on a grave

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Caption: GFWC Woman’s Club of Point Pleasant (WV) members identified 390 veteran graves at Kirkland Memorial Gardens in preparation for Wreaths Across America Day.

GFWC has a history of supporting the men and women who have honorably served, and are currently serving, in our Armed Forces. Did you know that in 1919, in collaboration with the YMCA, GFWC created the Overseas Service Unit and sent 100 young women to Europe to assist wounded soldiers in the aftermath of World War I? Did you know that in 1944, through the GFWC Buy a Bomber campaign, state federations sold war bonds worth enough money to purchase 431 planes? GFWC Resolutions pertaining to the military and veterans include 110-040 Military Sexual Assault, 140-340 National Defense, and 140-430 Specially Trained Dogs and Other Animals for Individuals with Disabilities. Several GFWC Legislative Priorities for 2023 focus on issues facing the military, and you can find these priorities on the website at <https://www.gfwc.org/what-we-do/public-policy/>

In November, I listened to a congressional briefing hosted by Women’s Congressional Policy Institute which discussed women veterans' mental health, suicide prevention, and military sexual trauma (MST) research. I also learned about an evidence-based mental health care app (Beyond MST Mobile App) that anyone can download and use. Representatives from the Department of Veterans Affairs, IAVA (Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America) and other groups participated along with two members of the Bipartisan Women's Caucus, Representative Susie Lee (D-NV) and Representative Emilia Strong Sykes (D-OH). During the briefing, the Department of Veterans Affairs shared its efforts to address the unique challenges facing women veterans and their families, as well as personal stories from MST survivors. A recent IAVA survey showed 68% of women vets who experienced MST also experienced intimate partner violence.

Did you know that 110,000 veterans live with Parkinson's disease? Exposure to dangerous chemicals or brain injuries during military service can increase the risk of developing Parkinson’s. Advocates are championing increased funding for Parkinson's Disease Research, Educational and Clinical Centers to ensure that veterans with Parkinson’s have access to the care they need. Recently, after a decade of advocacy to protect our troops from exposure to toxic chemicals, the EPA has proposed a ban of Trichloroethylene (TCE), a chemical known to increase the risk of developing Parkinson's by 500 percent.

After coming home from war or deployment, many soldiers face physical, mental, and social issues that make them a vulnerable population. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, the suicide rate for women vets is nearly twice as high as those of male vets, and nearly 1 in 3 women vets have said that they have experienced Military Sexual Assault.

GFWC Affiliate Canine Companions reports that 4.7 million veterans are living with a service-related injury. GFWC activated the Legislative Action Center to urge Congress to pass the Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers for Veterans Therapy Act (PAWS for Veterans Therapy Act, H.R. 1448) which became law in August 2021.

A person smiling at camera

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Caption: In recognition of Veteran’s Day, Salem Woman’s Service Club (OR) gathered some basic kitchen items for the veterans at Tanner House to use with the microwaves in their rooms.

Thank you to all clubs for remembering those who served and advocating for our veterans in need. This poem, “It is the Soldier” speaks to what freedoms our servicemen and women allow us to enjoy.

IT IS THE SOLDIER

It is the Soldier, not the minister  
Who has given us **freedom of religion**.

It is the Soldier, not the reporter  
Who has given us **freedom of the press**.

It is the Soldier, not the poet  
Who has given us **freedom of speech**.

It is the Soldier, not the campus organizer  
Who has given us **freedom to protest**.

It is the Soldier, not the lawyer  
Who has given us the **right to a fair trial**.

It is the Soldier, not the politician  
Who has given us the **right to vote**.

It is the Soldier who salutes the flag,  
Who serves beneath the flag,  
And whose coffin is draped by the flag,  
Who allows the protester to burn the flag.



