

PA10-40

HB5352

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**CONNECTICUT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
HOUSE**

**PROCEEDINGS
2010**

**VOL.53
PART 5
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call. Members to the chamber. The House is voting by roll call. Members to the chamber please.

DEPUTY SPEAKER O'ROURKE:

Have all the members voted? Have all the members voted? Please check the machine and make sure that your vote is properly recorded.

If all members have voted, the machine will be locked.

Clerk will take a tally.

Mr. Clerk, please announce the tally.

THE CLERK:

House Bill 5351 as amended by House "A."

Total Number voting	143
Necessary for passage	72
Those voting Yea	143
Those voting Nay	0
Those absent and not voting	8

DEPUTY SPEAKER O'ROURKE:

The bill is passed.

Mr. Clerk, please call Calendar 199.

THE CLERK:

On page 8, Calendar 199, Substitute for House Bill Number 5352. AN ACT PROCLAIMING MARCH THIRTEENTH TO BE WELCOME HOME VIETNAM VETERANS DAY AND MAKING

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"TAPS" THE STATE SONG OF REMEMBRANCE, favorable reported the Committee on Government Administration and Elections.

DEPUTY SPEAKER O'ROURKE:

Chairman Graziani.

REP. GRAZIANI (57th):

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

For the record, it's March 30th not the 13th.

Mr. Speaker, I move for acceptance of the Joint Committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

DEPUTY SPEAKER O'ROURKE:

Motion is on acceptance of the Joint Committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

Will you remark, sir?

REP. GRAZIANI (57th):

Yes.

Mr. Speaker, the Clerk has in possession LCO Number 3613. I would ask the Clerk to please call the amendment and that I be granted leave of the chamber to summarize.

DEPUTY SPEAKER O'ROURKE:

Mr. Clerk, please call LCO Number 3613 designated House "A."

THE CLERK:

LCO Number 3613, House "A" offered by
Representative Graziani.

DEPUTY SPEAKER O'ROURKE:

Representative seeks leave of the chamber to
summarize.

Hearing no objections, please proceed, sir.

REP. GRAZIANI (57th):

Thank you very much.

Members of the chamber, the purpose of this
amendment -- and I'll make myself very clear on this
-- is to remove the second section of the proposed
bill in front of us and that's making "Taps" the state
song of remembrance. By no way, this is perceived as
being disrespectful but the underlying bill to honor
the thirtieth to be strictly Vietnam Veterans Day has
a great deal of meaning.

But I can guarantee you, every in this chamber,
that this state remembrance of "Taps" will come on
another veterans' bill. Therefore, I urge adoption of
the amendment.

DEPUTY SPEAKER O'ROURKE:

The motion is adoption.

Will you remark? Will you remark on the
amendment before us?

If not, I'll try your minds.

All those in favor of the amendment, signify by saying aye.

REPRESENTATIVES:

Aye.

DEPUTY SPEAKER O'ROURKE:

Opposed?

The ayes have it. The amendment is adopted.

Will you remark on the bill as amended.

Representative Graziani.

REP. GRAZIANI (57th):

Members of the chamber, last month, March 30th, we held two welcome home Vietnam ceremonies, one in Coventry, Connecticut and one here in the legislative office building, which was attended by many of you. If you recall, the weather was horrific but we went on with it because all of us, who served, went through monsoons and we know what it's about. We're not asking for much. All we would like is a little recognition to say thank you for well -- a job well done.

We didn't run across the border to avoid being drafted. When the notice came, we answered that notice. And you know what? As far as the going away

ceremonies, we didn't have one. As a matter of fact, when you got your orders, you got two weeks at home before you went back to your company and then deployed overseas. There was nobody applauding us as you walked through the airport with your gear, quite to the contrary.

A lot of the parents, when the children used to watch to see us marching through the airport, they held the kids back. Thank God that has changed. Wouldn't it be nice, also, to have our parents knowing way back then that people respected what they were doing -- what we were doing for them. You never heard that we're proud of your son or your daughter for serving in Vietnam.

It was a terrible period in our time. It changed our vocabulary really quick. We knew about Gulf of Tonkin. We knew about the Tet Offensive. Charlie owned the night. We thought we owned the day and it never happened. Look what happened at the Battle of Khe Sanh, and the siege that occurred. Day in and day out.

All we're looking for is to say thank you. Our Vietnam veterans have made it to every send-off and welcome home ceremony to those that are currently

serving. Why? Because we don't have it happen to them what happened to us. Can you imagine serving your country, coming back to the states not knowing what was going on but you learned that real quick what this country was going through.

I, like many others, came back on June 6, 1968. This June will be 42 years and this will be a welcome home for all of us. But you can imagine serving the United States armed forces and immediately putting your fatigues away because you don't want anybody to know that you served over in Vietnam. What a tragic period of time for the greatest country in the world. And then we had Hanoi Jane. How demoralizing is that? To have Jane Fonda sitting on an aircraft going -- with the enemy.

We went through a lot. And when you look at the deaths that occurred; 612 of our men died in Vietnam. And you look at the ages. We lost 12 that were age 17; 3,103 that were 18; 8,283 that were 19. The largest was 20 year olds; 14,095. Look about us. Look at our interns. Think of them. Look how old they are. Really young. Really young.

A lot of us never had the opportunity to live the lives that we wanted to. Some of them never adjusted.

So this bill -- this bill goes a long way and I'm not speaking on behalf of Ted Graziani. I'm speaking on behalf of all Vietnam veterans, their families, their loved ones and the departed ones.

And particularly, I want to thank, Billie Culin, Vietnam president of the state of Connecticut for bringing this to our attention and when we had the public hearing, you could have heard the emotion. Was there a lot of anger? Absolutely. Was there a lot of bitterness? Absolutely. But it was way of them expressing the idea that we felt hurt and neglected by the country that we served so proudly.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I ask everybody here to vote yes on this and I know there were so many different variations or reasons why we shouldn't have gone in but you don't penalize the warrior. We learned to separate the politics from the warrior. With that, I urge passage. Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER O'ROURKE:

Thank you, Representative Graziani.

Will you remark?

Representative Sawyer.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First, let me thank Representative Graziani for his work on this particular bill and I would personally, on behalf of this side of the aisle and perhaps that side of the aisle, as well, thank him for his service to our country.

I'm a wife of Vietnam veteran and I have been active with a number of veterans' issues because of the experience I've had living with someone who was not thanked for his service, someone who came home after seeing some atrocities, seeing the horrors of war, having been shot down five times and he had to go on with his life as though he hadn't participated.

Representative Graziani has been such an advocate for the Vietnam veterans, as well as all the other veterans that have served this state. This is a very small gesture, Mr. Speaker, that we can do to honor them. They're an aging population and I think, as a chamber, we say to them we're so grateful that they went to war and represented our country proudly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER O'ROURKE:

Thank you, Representative Sawyer.

Will you remark?

Representative Nicastro.

REP. NICASTRO (79th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here in super strong support of this bill and I look to my left at my chairman of the Veterans' Committee and I say, yes, this bill is about you. And it is for you, Mr. Chairman, because you did what you had to do and this is long overdue.

Mr. Chairman, the Vietnam War will go down in history as one of the most misunderstood wars this country has ever been in and it's sad to say we lost 57,000-plus men and women in that war. Yet, the way they were treated, I saw them spit on. I saw them -- called baby killers. I saw water thrown on them. That's just the start of it.

When they were called to go do their duty, they did it and they didn't ask anything and they didn't deserve what they got when they returned. You know, I had the sad responsibility of playing Taps for several of our Bristol young men, who lost their lives in Vietnam. Tell it to them. Tell it to their parents. Try and explain it to them.

In 1998, we had the Moving Wall come to our city. I happened to be mayor at the time. And there was a woman in a wheelchair -- I'll never forget it, Mr.

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Chairman -- she asked to speak to me and I went over to talk to her and her son was missing in action in Vietnam and she said to me, do you think there's anything you can do because you're the mayor of the city to bring my son home. Mr. Speaker, I lost it. I had to go sit down because I felt the hurt that that woman was feeling at 90 years old and there were 57,000 of those woman throughout this country.

Yet, the way they were treated when they came home is a disgrace, is a shame. And I'm ashamed for the people who treated them that way. This bill is long overdue and I urge my colleagues to strongly support it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER O'ROURKE:

Thank you, Representative Nicastro.

Will you remark?

Representative Coutu.

REP. COUTU (47th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I also want to follow up with the members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. They are very passionate about this issue and I want to thank them for their service in Vietnam. We all know that our Vietnam veterans did not receive the welcome home that they

deserve and today Connecticut is recognizing this and we're going to make sure, for now and forever, March 30th is their day.

In all, over 58,000 soldiers perished during that war and there were 211,000 physical casualties. Hundreds of thousands had mental scars for the rest of their lives. So today, what we're doing is very important to say thank you for your service, welcome home and I'm proud to be a part of this body today while we do this.

I also want to recognize the other part of why this is important to the state of Connecticut. We are in the middle of one of the largest deployments in the history for the state of Connecticut. The 102nd Infantry and other units have somewhere around 1,000 soldiers overseas in harms way. And we know, as early -- as recent as last week, one of our soldiers perished, others were injured in a couple IED attacks.

And what this also does is lets all those veterans, who are serving around the country and who are serving in our great state, know that when they come home, they are appreciated, they will be welcomed home. And I think that's one of the greatest things about the Vietnam veteran legacy is that they went

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through something horrific. They weren't welcomed home but now every veteran after that war for the rest of our time is going to get the welcome home that they deserve.

And this is great legislation so thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to our Vietnam veterans and God bless America.

DEPUTY SPEAKER O'ROURKE:

Thank you, Representative Coutu.

Representative Thompson.

REP. THOMPSON (13th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, may I speak personally a few words about a Vietnam veteran. His name is Don Cook. He and I first met in 1952. I had been released from the Marines from the 1st First Division, where I had served in Korea for a year. Don was just a graduate of St. Francis Xavier High School in Manhattan and among his classmates, as an aside, was Judge -- Supreme Court Justice Scalia. Don was fresh out of high school and I was -- had a couple years under my belt.

Since he was from Brooklyn and I was from Staten Island, we traveled back and forth together during our

high school -- our college careers. Don and I later roomed together and when I married my wife, my late wife, he was my best man and we stayed in touch over the years. Don, after completing training and different assignment, was sent to the language school in Monterey, California.

In the meantime, he married Lorret, a girl he met in Burlington, Vermont and they began a family. I once asked him, Don, you were fluent in Italian, German and I think he learned French so that he could communicate in his wife's native language. Why Chinese, it seems to me such a difficult language to master. He said Jack, it was really easy. Just think of the man bites the dog. Well, the Chinese would say, man bites dog; much easier.

He was stationed in Hawaii, where he was interviewing people returning to the states and entering the states from behind the so-called bamboo curtain. He headed up an intelligence unit there. The last time I heard from Don, he called me to say to me that he was on his way to the far east. He'd make a stop in Okinawa. He was going to spend some time in Vietnam and I believe the Philippines and then he'd be home. I had no idea what was to come over that.

New Year's Eve 1964, Don was an advisor to South Vietnamese marine unit and went in to rescue -- there was a report of a helicopter shot down, and troops had to be rescued. It was on that rescue mission when they were jumped by the Viet Cong. Don was captured and dragged off into the jungle. Eye witnesses acclaimed that we was wounded. My brother-in-law was an Army major at the time and was in Vietnam and I wrote to him and he tracked down the unit Don was assigned to and confirmed what the eye witnesses said. And I was able pass that information on to Lorret, who told me the original version that was confirmed.

After that, Lorret became very active in the POWMIA organization and traveled throughout. Lorret had four children, four young children. I think the oldest at the time was seven, four young children. And Lorret finally came back to Vermont where she took up residence with her family in Burlington and raised her family up there and her four children grew up.

I contacted Senator Tom Dodd and Congressman Emilio Daddario. They worked discussions going on between -- in Paris between the North Vietnamese, South Vietnamese and the Americans and they both responded very promptly to me saying that there is

some hope that we will find out what happened to those captured.

Well, Don was officially declared missing but never died. So we hung on for hope. Finally, as the war ended, when people who had been in the prison camp with Don came back, they told stories about his heroism. One of those was state department official, where I later learned from Rob Simmons, who know Rob in the CIA I guess. He was at a boat launching for a boat that was named after Don.

Don was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. He was the first marine captured in Vietnam. There was a book about him. He went up from major, I guess, to colonel. They kept promoting him as is the condition in the Marine Corps. And the medal of honor was awarded to his widow, Lorret and their children. It was made out to Colonel Donald G. Cook, the first marine captured in Vietnam.

He was a hero then. He's a hero today. In my mind, he will always be a hero to this country. They named a ship after him and I had the honor of meeting the gentleman from the state department at the launching of that ship. Senator Patrick Leahy from Vermont, still around, was the principal speaker as

was other dignitaries. So I had this opportunity and I asked the gentleman from the state department, I said, Don had this gift for languages. Did he pick up anything on the Vietnamese? And he said, yes, he did. He knew what was going on.

Now, the stories of Don's heroism are well documented. So I'm very pleased that we are remembering these Vietnam veterans because, like Don, not only were all of the heroes but many of them received the recognition of the Congressional Medal of Honor but Don was the first marine. So I urge your support of this legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER O'ROURKE:

Thank you, Representative Thompson.

Will you remark?

Representative Roy.

REP. ROY (119th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this legislation. I don't have the war stories that we've heard. I was an army reservist at the time. My brother and my cousins were all regular Army, Navy or Marines. None of us went to Nam. I don't know why. Maybe our fathers gave enough in World War II but we

got skipped over.

I did lose a friend over there, a quiet young man. And to this day, we'll never know what happened because he was missing on Easter and the following Sunday, they found him. But I knew many guys who went over. They came back fortunately for us. But I do stand in tribute to them because of their work maybe that's one of the reasons why I stayed stateside.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER O'ROURKE:

Thank you, Representative Roy.

Representative Hetherington.

REP. HETHERINGTON (125th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very grateful to Representative Nicastro and Graziani for bringing this forward. This has a very personal significance for me in a way though not as described by the others. I -- I wore uniform but I didn't go to Vietnam. I was not sent to Vietnam and I am forever in awe, I'm forever humbled to be in the presence of those who did, who shouldered our country's burden, who followed the directives of our commanders and went to Vietnam.

I think I will always feel humbled to be in their

presence because there is no equivalent by any measure to what these soldiers went through on our behalf and at least it is some -- it is some constellation that they are now being recognized in this way. Because although I never went to Southeast Asia, I do remember well the conditions and I hope they never are replicated in our country again.

I remember the point at which our commanding officer advised us not to wear the uniform in public because you went through a risk of being insulted, assaulted, spit upon. I remember getting off the subway once, when I was going to a training center, and I got off because the conditions had become some hostile in the car that I felt that it was in everyone's best interest if I just left.

I can remember going with a couple of fellow service men to Disneyland, when we were training in California, and it was made pretty clear that it would be better if we left because we weren't welcome among the people for whom our soldiers were making sacrifice. So I will always be humbled to be in the presence of our real heroes because they really served. They really served. And I hope that measures, such as this one, in some measure, in some small measure

brings comfort and constellation to those who not only went through the unspeakable hardships of war but who also went through the unspeakable hostility and disrespect from our fellow citizens.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER O'ROURKE:

Thank you, Representative Hetherington.

Representative Cafero.

REP. CAFERO (142nd):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ladies and gentleman, there are times we come into this chamber -- I know I have over my 18 years of service here -- we're not exactly sure what bills might be called. Yes, we're aware that they're on the calendar and all of the sudden, you hear in the background, the bill being called and you hear a member or two stand to speak on it and it hits you. Maybe you weren't planning on saying anything and all of the sudden you realize, I have to, I have to say something.

When the Vietnam War ended, I believe I was 15 years old. I was not able to serve in the Vietnam War but I grew up as a son of a World War II veteran always respecting the men and women who served in our

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armed forces. It was the way I was brought up. So to a 10, and 12 and 13 year old kid, it was sort confusing when you turned on the television to see people angry at people who were dressed in our country's uniform.

Obviously, as I got older, I sort of understood people's objection to the war but I never quite understood why the people, who were defending us and fighting for us, were treated that way. Why were we taking it out on them? I didn't get it.

I was upset about it but to be honest, it didn't preoccupy my mind. I went about my business. I drove where I wanted to drive. Traveled where I wanted to travel. Got an education. Opened a business. Got married. Raised kids. Bought a home. Taking for granted the very freedoms that these men and women and all veterans have guaranteed myself and my family.

About three weeks ago, I had dinner with a friend. A friend I've known for quite some time. I knew that this individual had served in Vietnam but he never talked much about it. I knew all about his professional life and a little about his personal life but didn't know much about his war experience because he never discussed it. We were having dinner and the

conversation turned to his service. He was reluctant to say. I kept prying because of my curiosity.

In the course of about an hour and half, this gentleman, who I knew for quite some time, told me the stories that he had witnessed when he served in Vietnam. For most of the conversation, I sat there with my mouth open because even at age 52, to hear these stories, to hear what this man went through at that age was mind boggling. We cannot -- those of us who have not served cannot fathom, fathom what these men and women went through.

But worse than the atrocities that they witnessed, that this man witness, was his stories about his return home. How people would not sit next to him on a plane because he was wearing his uniform. How people would spit on him because he had served in Vietnam. He told me what he and other veterans deal with in their personal relationships decades after their service. Not just the scars of what they physically saw and went through but the emotional toll that it took on them that will be them for the rest of their life.

I feel totally inadequate when I say to these men and women -- and I try to as often as possible --

thank you so much for your service. It is so inadequate a statement.

So today I'm given a privilege, as a lawmaker, to cast a vote in favor of a bill that officially says on behalf of this body and on behalf of this state, thank you men and women who served in Vietnam. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts and we will never forget. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(Speaker Donovan in the Chair.)

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Thank you, Representative.

Would you care to remark further on the bill?

Would you care to remark further on the bill?

If not, will staff and guests please come to the well of the House. Members take their seats. The machine will be open.

THE CLERK:

The House of Representatives is voting by roll call. Members to the chamber. The House is voting by roll call. Members to the chamber please.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Have all the members voted? Have all the members

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voted? Please check the roll call board and make sure that your vote has been properly cast.

If all members have voted, the machine will be locked -- hold on.

Go ahead, Representative. We'll wait for you.

If all members have voted, the machine will be locked and the Clerk will please take a tally.

Will the Clerk please announce the tally.

THE CLERK:

House Bill 5352 as amended by House "A."

Total Number voting 145

Necessary for adoption 73

Those voting Yea 145

Those voting Nay 0

Those absent and not voting 6

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Bill as amended is passed.

Any announcements or introductions?

Representative Piscopo.

REP. PISCOPO (76th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For an introduction, please.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Please proceed, sir.

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THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

Calendar number 463, file number 367 and 630,
substitute for House Bill 5352, AN ACT PROCLAIMING
MARCH THIRTIETH TO BE WELCOME HOME VIETNAM VETERANS
DAY, as amended by House Amendment Schedule A,
favorable report of the Committee on Veterans Affairs
and Government Administration and Elections.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Maynard.

SENATOR MAYNARD:

Yes. Thank you, Madam President. It's a delight
to see you in the dais today.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you. Thank you, Sir.

SENATOR MAYNARD:

I move the joint committee's favorable report and
passage of the bill.

THE CHAIR:

Will you move to adopt, please?

Question on adoption. Are there any questions?

SENATOR MAYNARD:

I'd ask to remark on the bill.

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THE CHAIR

Please proceed.

SENATOR MAYNARD:

Thank you, Madam President. This bill is an important, a very important bill not only to our Vietnam veterans but to all people who wish to honor the service of our Vietnam veterans. The bill would seek to proclaim as the title indicates, March 30 to be Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day. As many of you know, today we welcome our veterans home with open arms and with great enthusiasm and gratitude for the service they've offered.

Regrettably, some years ago because of the contentious nature of that conflict and the times, our veterans were not honored and those wonderful men and women who served were not given the same treatment. This bill would seek to proclaim that day annually a welcome home day and to observe throughout the State appropriately a remembrance and a day of gratitude for our Vietnam veterans.

So, I want to point out too that our Vietnam veterans are among the most enthusiastic and supportive people with respect to returning veterans today. Many of occasions when we've all had the

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opportunity to go over to the armory or to go to other locations around to welcome our veterans back we're always joined by our Vietnam vets who realize the importance of honoring those who've served.

So, I'm pleased to say that Connecticut will be one of the leading states in proclaiming this: It's a national movement and I hope that we can unanimously endorse this.

THE CHAIR:

Will you remark further?

Senator McKinney.

SENATOR MCKINNEY:

Thank you, Madam President. And may I first say it's an honor to see you up there at the dais. Madam President, through you a question again to my friend, Senator Maynard.

THE CHAIR:

Please proceed.

SENATOR MAYNARD:

Thank you. Again, Senator, I think this is the second bill in a row which I commend you for. As someone who goes to as many veteran ceremonies as possible I often remark that at 46, you know I was too young to serve in Vietnam and too old and out of shape

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to serve in our current wars and conflicts yet many have sacrificed so I've had the luxury and luck of not serving in that capacity. Is there a reason why March 30, through you, Madam President, has been picked as the day?

THE CHAIR:

Senator Maynard.

SENATOR MAYNARD:

Yes. Through you, Madam President. I'm glad Senator McKinney asked that. I meant to indicate it in my remarks. It is a day that was agreed upon. It's generally thought of as the day when our troops departed the theater of Vietnam. It's the final day of what was regarded as the conflict. And so it has been embraced by the Vietnam community, Vietnam veteran community for that reason.

THE CHAIR:

Senator McKinney.

SENATOR MCKINNEY:

Thank you, Madam President. And let me just add that while we should thank all of our veterans every day and when I see someone in uniform if possible I try to just say hello and introduce myself and thank them. Clearly those who served and fought in Vietnam

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are deserving of even more praise and thanks from those of us, especially because of the difficulties they faced when they did come home. I also remember as a young kid we had those bracelets for the POWs and the MIAs. And so, while March 30 was the day that we've agreed they did come home, sadly, not everyone did come home from that war.

And we should honor those individuals and their families as well. And thank Senator Maynard for this. And I for one whether I'm back in the circle or not, look forward to coming up here next March 30 as we celebrate this for the first time. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Will you remark further?

Senator Meyer.

SENATOR MEYER:

I first ran for elective office in 1970 in New York. And the Vietnam War was being waged hotly in 1970. It had been waged hotly under two Presidents of the United States, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, both of whom had supported the war.

And yet by 1970, it had become clear that it was a war that we were not winning and that we were not making any friends. It was a negative, negative war

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somewhat like the war in Iraq that we saw too. We don't know the outcome of that war yet. But we did know by 1970 what a horrible mess we were in. We had Agent Orange being spilled on civilians. We had children being killed. We were fighting in rice paddies and rivers. A very, very difficult war.

But the one thing, and I came out as an opponent in my first race in 1970, an opponent of the Vietnam War. But the one thing that many of us recognize was that it was unusual public service by the soldiers in that war. And we had a split in this country when many of those soldiers came home as you remember. There were some absolute ignorance of those soldiers, not paying any attention to them at all.

There were, some of the soldiers were actually criticized and some were praised. I was in the group of people who praised those soldiers. That despite the immense difficulties of that war itself and the political problems of that war, they gave a lot of incredible service with over 50,000 American soldiers dying in Vietnam.

So, I just want to say to you, Senator, thank you for doing this. This is very, very meaningful and it's exactly what we should be doing.

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THE CHAIR:

Senator Fasano.

Senator McLachlan.

SENATOR McLACHLAN:

Thank you, Madam President. Nice to see you there today.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Sir.

SENATOR McLACHLAN:

I rise to support this bill and thank you to the distinguished Chair of the Veterans Committee for your work on this. The City of Danbury lost 22 service people during the Vietnam Conflict. And two of those were personal friends of my family that I knew as a child. I was just about ten years old I think when both of them were killed in action.

And Danbury is also the proud home of the Medal of Honor recipient, Commander LeGrande Cole from the United States Navy who was lost during the Vietnam Conflict. This is just a small selection of what the experience of our country, our State, and each of our towns was during the Vietnam Conflict. War is painful.

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But the Vietnam War was even more difficult. And as some of my colleagues have already said, the return home was a big challenge for those who served. So I think this is an appropriate thing to do for the State of Connecticut.

I think it's appropriate for us to recognize the service of our Vietnam veterans. And I ask this legislature to proceed and approve it. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Will you speak further? Comment further?

Senator Gomes.

SENATOR GOMES:

Thank you, Madam President.

The reason I get up to speak is I'm sort of like John McKinney. I was between wars. I was 17 years old when the Korean Conflict ended in 53 and I was getting out of the army in 63 when it was just warming up for Vietnam.

And some of the things that were done to some of these soldiers when they came back from Vietnam I thought were disgraceful. They sort of blamed the war on the individuals that were fighting the war rather than blame the war on the people who made the war.

And one of the things that really got me just a few

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years ago we buried my brother. And he's buried up in Middletown in a federal cemetery. And he came back from Vietnam and he never spoke about Vietnam. Not one word. He didn't tell us anything about Vietnam. And you couldn't ask him anything about it. He never talked about it. And I was surprised to learn when we buried him. We looked on his DD214 and he had a bronze star.

At that time, after all that time he was the only one of us that served in a war and he came home and they had just so much on their minds. Some of these guys came home and didn't even want to mention that war. And I was surprised to learn that after all that time that he had won a bronze star. And that's why I got up to say here because I never got a chance to tell anybody that. But I feel very proud. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator Gomes.

Senator Frantz.

SENATOR FRANTZ:

Thank you, Madam President. I would also like to thank Senator Maynard and the good work of that Committee to bring about this bill and see it passed into law. This was one of the most profoundly

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confusing and difficult wartime activities and experiences that the country has ever been through. I missed this conflict by the skin of my teeth age wise. I was very, very close to being eligible age to be drafted.

I was certainly old enough to monitor what was going on in the Vietnam War especially towards the end of the war. And for all of the reasons that Senator Gomes just outlined it was a very ambivalent set of reasons that were constantly changing that we remained over there in that faraway, exotic, south eastern part of Asia with so many of our troops over there, thousands of troops over there putting their lives on the line to protect the country, to protect freedom.

But the mission became quite convoluted over the course of time and caused a great deal of chaos back here. And as a result of that many of the soldiers who returned to the United States of America were not greeted with welcome arms and that wonderful time honored tradition of saying welcome home to a vet was not in practice during those years as they continued to return from Vietnam.

So I for one as someone who appreciates veterans of all wars but in particular the Vietnam War and we

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do a special event every year in our town right around the Fourth of July to commemorate the service of those who served in all wars to protect the United States of America throughout the world and in particular the Vietnam veterans.

I am really proud of what you all have been able to accomplish in this Committee and on March 30 of every year I will be very proud to join the group outside the Capital whether I'm in office or not up here to celebrate the service and the sacrifice of these fine gentlemen and women. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator.

Senator Boucher.

SENATOR BOUCHER:

Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, I rise to support this bill and to commend the members of the Committee for taking this up. And I do have a personal relationship with this era and this particular time.

While the conflict was at its height and the nation's angst was at its height I was dating a young man who became my husband and has been my husband for many decades now, who was at that time in flight

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school during the height of the conflict while I was on a college campus in Washington, D.C. at a time when there were hundreds of thousands of people marching on our Capital protesting the war. And it was a very difficult position to be put in.

It put him in a very difficult position because he was getting a lot of feedback from me, from my college campus when he would come to visit. There was a lot of anger, antagonism and in fact outright hatred. And wearing a uniform was almost a dangerous thing. When the conflict was over, when his tour of duty was over we were married.

I was in the Air Force almost with him for a couple of years during that time and I remember for many, many years thereafter there would be many Memorial Day parades and they would encourage members of the service to march in our local parades.

And I'd often mention it to him and say, you know, this would be a good thing for you to do. It would be good for the young people to know. It would be good for your own children, our three children that would be proud of their dad marching that parade. And for years it was very difficult for me to get him to come forward to do that because the lingering stings

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and the feeling of rejection during that time still stayed with him for many, many years thereafter. And there was a turning point when the first Iraq War was concluded and America became patriotic again. And there were yellow ribbons and there were flags everywhere. And there was this wonderful welcome home and a sense of pride again.

And the fact of the realization that these were soldiers that were just doing their job, doing their duty for their country not withstanding what the decisions at the top were being made whether they were right or wrong. And I remember seeing some of the Vietnam veterans that would be in the audience watching these soldiers get this warm welcome. Some of them were in wheelchairs.

And it was very bittersweet experience for them. But over the years I can thankfully say that my husband finally did decide maybe it was a good thing. And in fact he pulled out his old dog tags and started to put them around his neck.

And he did that without even telling me that he had done that. And now he's even a proud member of our VFW Post. And a lot of the other veterans now have come together feeling more of a pride than they

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had in the past. But I think what we do here today is going to go a long way to making them feel that they also served in the same way and had some dignity and honor.

So I think that this is a very important statement for our State of Connecticut to make. I'm very proud of this assembly for doing this. And I think it will instill a sense of pride in the gentlemen and now are quite a bit older that had to go through a very difficult period of time in our nation's history.

So again, I commend our good Senator Maynard and his Committee for this very good bill. And I'm hoping that a few more older soldiers seek out their dog tags, put them on and become a role model for other young people that in fact these are some of the most courageous and most dedicated and most loyal patriots our country could have. Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Fasano.

SENATOR FASANO:

Thank you, Madam President. First of all, I'd like to say to Senator Gomes, thank you for sharing that with the circle and my condolences for the loss

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of your brother. Senator Boucher, thank you for your husband's service.

I just want to throw some numbers that we heard at various meetings about Vietnam vets and echo the fact that a lot of them talked about the fact when they came back they really didn't understand the mood of the country or society.

And they didn't understand when they came off the plane why they were escorted by military to a hospital. Why they had to be protected from citizens of the United States as they made their way back home. They couldn't even comprehend that. To be yelled at, spat upon, cursed at. It was the mood of the country. You know, as they say, remember the warrior, not the war. And that's what that is about.

But during the time that we call the Vietnam Era 3,000 Americans served in uniform, 58,000 were killed, 304,000 were wounded and the average age of a wounded or dead soldier was 23 years old.

My daughter turns 22 in two weeks. I just can't imagine. Twenty three years old. Ninety seven percent of the veterans from the Vietnam War were honorably discharged. And if you take a poll today, 87 percent of Americans hold Vietnam veterans in high

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esteem. That's a great percentage. It should be higher but it's a great percentage.

So for us to take a first step I thank Senator Maynard and the Committee for taking the first step in picking a day to remember Vietnam, because that was a different war at a different time. And those people who served were, in my view, irreparably injured by the way we treated them when they came back.

So this is an easy bill for all of us. And it's a thank you for all that served. Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Will you remark further?

Senator Maynard.

SENATOR MAYNARD:

Yes. Thank you, Madam President. And I want to thank all of the members of the circle, particularly Senator Gomes for your thoughts on your brother. As we say and try to say as often as possible to all of our service men and women we want to thank them for their service.

And I encourage my colleagues, those who haven't thought of it before and who it might slip your mind when you see our men and women around particularly in

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proximity here, our soldiers next door. Take the time to thank them because they're doing extraordinary things on behalf of all of us. I want to say, I'd be remiss if I didn't thank Senator Fasano specifically, Ranking Member of the Veterans Committee.

Thank you for your constant support for our veterans. It's always a pleasure to bring out a bill like this. Obviously, I don't need to be thanked. It's our Committee and the veterans, the Vietnam Veterans of America, Connecticut Chapter and particularly President Billy Cullen who have done so much to advance this bill.

I also want to say for those of you who don't know it, my Co-Chair, Ted Graziani is a Vietnam veteran. And if you notice the passion with which Ted represents the Committee and urges passage of bills on behalf of veterans I think you'll understand that it goes quite deep and personally for him not only because of his own service but because of the high regard with which he holds all of our veterans.

So I want to say that this bill has passed unanimously in every committee that it's gone before. It passed unanimously in the House and I hope indeed we'll pass it unanimously here.

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Thank you very much, Madam President.

May I also ask for a roll call vote on this bill.

THE CHAIR:

Yes you may, Senator. There will be an immediate roll call. Will the Clerk call for a roll call.

THE CLERK:

Immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate. Will all Senators please return to the Chamber. Immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate. Will all Senators please return to the Chamber.

THE CHAIR:

The machine is open. Will all Senators please come in and vote.

If everyone has voted.

Senator Prague.

If all members have voted, the machine will be closed and the Clerk will take a tally.

THE CLERK:

The motion is on passing House Bill 5352.

Total number Voting	34
Those voting Yea	34
Those voting Nay	0
Those absent and not voting	2

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THE CHAIR:

The bill is adopted.

Senator Looney.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Yes, Madam President. Thank you very much. If the Clerk would return to the call of the calendar of the bills previously marked beginning calendar page eight, Calendar 272.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator.

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

Calendar page eight, Calendar number 272, file number 382, substitute for Senate Bill 199, An ACT CONCERNING THE STATE PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT, favorable report by the Committee on Planning and Development.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Coleman.

SENATOR COLEMAN:

Thank you, Madam President. And might I say it's a delight to see you at the dais.

I move acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

**JOINT
STANDING
COMMITTEE
HEARINGS**

**SELECT
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Do you have -- I know you said when you take out the number of veterans and then the number of families who own homes and then the number who actually on a given year sell a home, do you guesstimate it somewhere at a couple hundred, or you really don't know?

CHRISTOPHER ASHE: I don't have any hard numbers on it. I'd like to, but I honestly don't. I do thank you for your support.

REP. COUTU: Uh-huh.

Well, thank you for your testimony.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. GRAZIANI: Thank you.

Any other questions?

Thank you, again, for taking the time here on this important matter.

CHRISTOPHER ASHE: You're welcome.

REP. GRAZIANI: With that, I just need to deviate due to -- someone has a commitment, and that's Billee Cullin from the Vietnam Veterans of America.

Billee.

BILLEE CULLIN: Good morning.

Thank you, Representative Graziani and the Veterans' Committee of the House -- Special Select Committee on Veteran's Affairs. I'm new at this, so bear with me.

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REP. GRAZIANI: You're doing fine.

BILLEE CULLIN: Okay.

REP. GRAZIANI: I haven't seen you since yesterday.

BILLEE CULLIN: I am here to request 100 percent support of the committee for the House Committee draft of a bill to designate March 30th annually as Honor Vietnam Veterans Day. The motto of the Vietnam Veterans of America is "Never will another generation of veterans be forgotten or left behind."

The Vietnam veterans have taken all vets of all wars under our wings. It's about time that we, the citizens of Connecticut, thank our men and women for their service during Vietnam. It is long overdue. Over two-thirds of the soldiers who served in Vietnam were volunteers. They were not forced to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces. They chose to serve, but were spat upon and dejected upon their return home by the citizens of America.

Legislation has been passed in California, Oregon, New York and other states designating Honor Vietnam Veterans Day on March 30th every year. Massachusetts has recognized Vietnam Veterans Day since 1978. I sincerely request we, in Connecticut, pass this group's legislation.

I thank you for all the Vietnam veterans in the state of Connecticut.

REP. GRAZIANI: Billee, thank you very much. And I -- I know that this wasn't on the agenda. We talked about it and your feelings were so strong, as I think everybody is, particularly those who served during that time. So thank

you again, Billee, and --

BILLEE CULLIN: Just for those who don't know, I am a Vietnam veteran of the Army.

REP. GRAZIANI: That makes two of us. We're in good company. Thanks. Thank you very much.

With that, Robert Kimball with the Connecticut Association of Realtors.

Good morning.

ROBERT KIMBALL: Good morning.

Good morning, and I want to thank Mr. Chairperson and the members of the Select Committee for their interest in Senate Bill 209 and for this opportunity for public comment as well.

My name is Robert Kimball. While I speak for the Connecticut Association of Realtors as a member of its Executive Committee, I am also a four-year veteran of the Air Force, and my personal view is enhanced from long experiences working in the eastern part of the state, home to the U.S. Submarine Base and the United States Coast Guard Academy.

I hasten to add that the Bill has far wider geographical impact since so many Connecticut citizens from towns all across the state are now mobilized as members of the National Guard and Reserves.

Simply put, Senate Bill 209 makes a bad tax less harmful. The real estate conveyance tax is widely recognized as regressive and extremely unstable as a revenue source. Connecticut did quite well without it for most

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 sh/gbr SELECT COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
 March 2, 2010
 9:30 A.M.

CHAIRMEN: Representative Graziani
 Senator Maynard

MEMBERS PRESENT:

SENATORS: Slossberg, Fasano

REPRESENTATIVES:

Nicastro, Guerrera,
 Sayers, Conroy, Coutu

REP. GRAZIANI: -- to either give testimony verbally or to submit written testimony. So with that, I'll ask my cochair, Senator Maynard, and the other members if they have any comments now or later.

SENATOR MAYNARD: And I'll just say good morning. Welcome to all of our veterans who are here to offer testimony and others in support of our agenda today. We're delighted to welcome you all and I believe my esteemed cochair will welcome our first witness.

REP. GRAZIANI: Let's start with Commissioner Linda Schwartz.

Good morning, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER LINDA SCHWARTZ: Good morning. The acoustics. Okay.

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chairman. And members of the committee. The Department of Veteran's Affairs is offering testimony today on two bills. The first one is Raised Bill 314, AN ACT CONCERNING MILITARY OR VETERAN STATUS ON STATE-ISSUED FORMS AND PUBLICATIONS.

While I do fully support the intent of this

I would say, too, we have in our office at Rocky Hill the copies of everyone's discharge paper. I'm going back to 1990. Anyone who left the military after 1990 and declared that they wanted to have the state of Connecticut have a copy of this DD214. We have it. However, the currency of the address is very questionable. I mean, people use their home record. People use their mother's address and that may not be where they are today.

REP. GRAZIANI: Thank you very much, Commissioner, as always.

Any questions for our esteemed Commissioner?

I have one.

COMMISSIONER LINDA SCHWARTZ: Okay.

REP. GRAZIANI: The other -- and it's --

COMMISSIONER LINDA SCHWARTZ: Something else.

REP. GRAZIANI: It's a softball question, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER LINDA SCHWARTZ: Okay.

REP. GRAZIANI: Okay, I've never put on a spot like that.

We also have on our agenda House Bill 5352, AN ACT PROCLAIMING MARCH THIRTIETH TO BE WELCOME HOME VIETNAM VETERAN'S DAY. And I know how strongly you feel, so, I know it is in your written testimony. Would you be good enough to --

COMMISSIONER LINDA SCHWARTZ: Well, let me say this, that having served during Vietnam, I certainly

hope -- I think this has the support of the Vietnam veteran's community and I would only echo the need to set aside a day.

I was thinking about this when I first read this legislation. And let me just share with you because I know you served in Vietnam. It would be important for people to remember the Vietnam War and by calling attention to it on people's calendars and allowing maybe, you know, the Vietnam veterans to create whatever ceremonies they would like. But I think it's important to have it on the calendar so people don't forget.

REP. GRAZIANI: Thank you. I knew the answer before. Now it's on record, Commissioner. No, thank you.

COMMISSIONER LINDA SCHWARTZ: I -- I did want -- I -- I did want to say something too. I know that we discussed this, but I would like to enter it for the record about the -- the 5351, AN ACT CONCERNING PRESCRIPTION DRUG BENEFITS FOR VETERANS IN NURSING HOME FACILITIES.

Several people have contacted me about this and -- and have urged that we proceed -- that you proceed with this and pass this legislation.

As you may know, we at Rocky Hill are able to buy in bulk form medications for our veterans from the VA. I would just say that the concept of putting medications in bubble packs is something that some states -- it -- it depends on how the VA sells it. In some states they do have bubble packs. And so, that was -- that would be one of the safety -- safety nets under this whole program.

their -- and their hard-earned rights.

So thank you very much for bringing your story and that of your father. We're appreciative as always -- my father was also a World War II veteran, so I'm always appreciate of anyone who has had a parent who served in -- in that war. And thank you for taking the time to be here with us.

REP. GRAZIANI: Thank you very much, Senator Maynard.

And John, thank you once again. And, you know what? This is what it's all about. You bring a problem to light and we do the best we can to resolve it and to make it fair for our veterans. And, obviously it's, you -- you know as well as I, you know my father gets his prescriptions from the VA and it's every 30 days. And when you go to an assisted-living nursing home, it doesn't work that way.

So there are definitely some cost benefits associated with it. It's a win/win type situation we're -- we're trying to do. And your story will go a long way.

Thank you very much for your time.

JOHN DIAKUN: Thank you.

REP. GRAZIANI: Next, if I recognize the name, Billee. Billee Culin.

BILLEE CULIN: Before I say anything else, my last name Culin.

A VOICE: (Inaudible).

BILLEE CULIN: Thank you, Senator Maynard,

(HB 5352)

Representative Graziani and the members of the committee for allowing me to speak to you on House Raised Bill 5253.

About five years ago, I met a fellow Vietnam veteran in Dunkin Donuts in Simsbury. I greeted Fred with, Welcome home. Fred looked at me and said that I was the first person to ever welcome him home since he returned from Vietnam. What's wrong with this picture? Forty-three years ago I entered the Army following in my dad's footsteps. I was a very naive young woman and thought that I could end the war -- the war in Vietnam by joining the Army. Boy was I wrong. Two-thirds of the men who served in Vietnam were not drafted, they were volunteers. They decided to serve their country and they did honorably. They went thousands of miles away from home. Six hundred twelve were killed or are missing from Connecticut. And that is one too many.

They came home, including myself, to fellow Americans despising them. Called our young men who became men too soon, baby killers. They were spat upon. They were dejected amongst their peers. Some went to the Legion or the VFW and were told that they could not join their organizations. There were no ticker tape parades or large groups welcoming our men and women home. We were told not to wear our uniforms. We could literally sneak home.

Today, the Vietnam veterans have a motto. Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another. Vietnam veterans are at the sending off and coming home of our present-day soldiers. Vietnam Veterans of America has worked with our young men and women to start Veterans of Modern Warfare, and are helping them to understand the ins and outs of Congress

and benefits due to them. We are helping veterans.

Vietnam Veterans of America has started the Veteran's Health Organization, along with the pharmaceutical companies and medical personnel, to help veterans of all generations get the best medical assistance as possible, by informing doctors and hospitals of their particular needs. Vietnam Veterans of America works with the Connecticut Department of Veteran's Affairs at Rocky Hill with Sand Bound, that assists the homeless veterans and the needy veterans of the state of Connecticut, and with other programs.

We have four homes in Connecticut that we have provided for the homeless veterans in Connecticut. We go into the classroom and speak with our young children so they know what it means to be a veteran.

Ladies and gentlemen, I beg of you to give our men and women here in Connecticut the welcome home that they proudly deserve and have never received. It is a long time coming and rightly due. To those of you sitting before me and behind me that are Vietnam veterans, I personally welcome you home. Thank you.

REP. GRAZIANI: Billee, thank you very much for your service to our country.

BILLEE CULIN: Thank you.

REP. GRAZIANI: And welcome home as -- as well. Very well said. But we shouldn't have to beg for recognition.

BILLEE CULIN: Yes. Thank you.

REP. GRAZIANI: I hear you.

Any questions?

Thank you very much. Oh, please, raise your right. We have a question for you.

BILLIE CULIN: Committee Chairman. Yes, sir.

REP. GRAZIANI: Vice Chairman Nicaastro has a question for you.

BILLEE CULIN: Yes, sir.

REP. NICASTRO: It's actually not a question. I -- want to thank you for bringing this bill forward, and recommending this.

You know, I -- I served during the Vietnam era, but I wasn't in Nam itself, but then I put --

BILLEE CULIN: Okay, before you go any further, sir.

REP. NICASTRO: I'm sorry?

BILLEE CULIN: You are a Vietnam veteran. There's no such thing as a World War II era veteran. There's no such thing as a Korean era veteran. You are a Vietnam veteran. We all had jobs to do.

REP. NICASTRO: No, what I'm -- what I'm trying to say. Okay. What I'm saying is I wasn't in Nam. While I served during the time of Nam, I wasn't in Nam, itself. I was in the Navy on a destroyer. But I spent 24 years in the National Guard, also, afterwards.

I can recall walking down the street, in uniform, being spit on, okay, during the Vietnam era, and -- and, it disturbed me

greatly. And I -- I didn't understand why people could be so vicious and so cruel to the men and women who were serving our country here and overseas and in Nam at the time.

This proposed legislation, I strongly support, not because of me personally, but because of all of the men and women who sacrificed. You know, 1998, we had the Moving Wall come to Bristol, and I was mayor at the time. And -- and the reason why I tell you this story is because it stayed in my mind for the last 12 years and probably will stay with me until I go to my grave. And there was a woman there. She was in her late eighties. And she asked to see me and I went over to talk to her and she was in a wheelchair. And she said to me -- I'll never forget this, she said to me, my son never came home from Vietnam. You're the mayor. Can you do something about it?

I just lost it, totally. I mean, I -- I just broke right down. Because, here she was the -- all these years later, still hoping the hope of hopes that her boy would come home to her. And unless you've lived that experience or seen it firsthand or been involved like that, it's tough to understand. But I'll tell you, I'll never forget that, Billee, as long as I live.

It -- and that's just one episode of the thousands of the 58,000 or 59,000 lives that were lost. The men and women who served there deserve our praise, deserve to be recognized and I strongly support any type of legislation that can go through this House and Senate and be signed by the Governor to do so. It's long overdue.

Thank you.

BILLEE CULIN: Thank you.

done three tours, Iraq, Afghanistan. I was fortunate enough to get a good welcome home, and I thank all the Vietnam veterans and everyone else for giving me that, because if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't have received that.

Back to the bill. We're not asking for anything. We just want -- we want the opportunity. The -- there's -- there's set-asides for minorities. Minorities that just came to our country. They didn't put their life on the line for their country. They're not dealing with problems, but they're getting opportunities that we're not. And I just, personally, I don't feel it's right. So I -- I just, I wanted to -- to say how I feel.

And then, if I can just go off. The TBI, I've lost friends from roadside bombs. TBI itself, when they got back home years later. And it sucked. We need committees to take care of all of that stuff. I -- I can't talk.

Sorry.

REP. GRAZIANI: David, you did fine, buddy. You did fine. And thank you again for your service. Remember, you're surrounded by good people.

Any questions?

If not, I think that concludes. Whoa, I see one more here. At the very bottom. Debbie Newton.

DEBBIE NEWTON: Good morning, Representative Graziani and members of the Select Committee on Veteran's Affairs. Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of several important proposals before you today.

SB 313

SB 314

HB 5353

HB 5388

HB 5350

HB 5352

My name is Debbie Newton and I am the Legislative Chair for the National Guard Association of Connecticut. I have served in that capacity for seven years and am a 30-year member of the Connecticut Army National Guard.

Let me briefly touch on a couple of bills before you, then I will discuss more fully two specific bills.

Raised Bill 313, AN ACT CONCERNING THE ACCEPTABILITY OF CERTAIN CLAIMS FOR THE VETERAN'S PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION is a bill that is needed. Many veterans over the age of 70, my mother among them, lost their Military Discharge Papers in the 1974 fire that destroyed the storage facility holding all those -- those all-important documents. Without them, many veterans are forced to either do without benefits they are entitled to or to jump through hoops to try and prove they are indeed eligible for them. This loss of records was through no fault of their own and they should not have to suffer the consequences of an event that was far outside of their control.

Raised Bill 314, AN ACT CONCERNING MILITARY OR VETERAN STATUS ON STATE-ISSUED FORMS AND PUBLICATIONS will assist in the collection of data and inform our state's veterans of all their benefits and entitlements.

Yesterday, a friend of mine, a former member of the U.S. Naval Reserve, was in Newington to fight for educational benefits he had been told somewhere along the line he was not eligible for. Not only did he find out he was eligible to have his master's degree paid for, but the VA is going back and reburse -- reimbursing him for all his eligible expenses for his

Many of our service members go to military schools to become plumbers, electricians, carpenters, mechanics, diesel mechanics, aircraft mechanics and spend months doing nothing but learning their chosen crafts or professions, with some training lasting more than year. When they complete their training, they are deemed as professionals by the United States Government and are sent around the country and the world to practice their specialties.

But when they return to a National Guard or Reserve Unit or come home after completing an active duty tour, they are told that what they have learned, what they have been doing, doesn't count and they have to go to tech schools, they have to become apprentices, they have to pay to take training that our tax dollars have already paid for them to have.

What this bill does is give credit for that training towards licensure and certification in the State of Connecticut. It does not alleviate the need for these service members to take any state-specific courses that deal with such topics as state building codes, nor does it alleviate continuing education, nor does it negate the need to pay for licensing or certification fees.

What it does do is give credit for training and schooling already completed through the military and has the potential to put many people into the employable workforce much quicker than they might otherwise be. NGACTION urges your full support of this bill.

Finally, I want to speak to Raised Bill 5352,
AN ACT PROCLAIMING MARCH THIRTIETH TO BE

WELCOME HOME VIETNAM VETERAN'S DAY.

I am, quite frankly, embarrassed and ashamed to be speaking about this bill today. I have been in the military for 30 years. The last Vietnam veteran came home a few years before I enlisted in the military and we're now just talking about welcoming them home? I realize the people in this room are not responsible for out -- this outrageous delay and, in fact, at least two of you on the committee are Vietnam vets. And I want to thank you for your service, for helping preserve my right to wear the uniform of the United States military, today.

As a young girl, I remember being in a car with my parents and two of my young brothers, heading to Little Neck Long Island to visit relatives. It was late at night because we had to wait for my dad to get out of his second job so that we could go. Suddenly, my dad pulled the car over on the side of the highway and asked the young man that was along -- walking along where he was headed. That young man was a U.S. Navy sailor and was walking home from the train station because he didn't have the money to go any further on the train or to get a bus ticket home.

He had been walking along the highway for an hour and no one had stopped to help him. He told -- my dad told the sailor to get in the car and we drove him home, an hour out of our way to get to visit our family. That's the kind of example I was brought up with on how to treat veterans and our service members. As a young child, that's how I thought everyone treated our military. Sorry, I'm a little emotional in this one.

As I grew a bit older and started watching and understanding the news, I realized not everyone in America was like my dad. So many people were angry at our government and our leaders, but took it out on our troops. Even as a preteen, I knew what was happening was wrong and I joined Voices in Vital America, an organization dedicated to supporting our troops. I wore the POW/MIA bracelets proudly, and still do. I just couldn't understand how everybody wasn't a member, wasn't wearing a bracelet, wasn't supporting our troops. I still don't understand it and I don't think I ever will.

A few years ago, what was billed as the official Connecticut Welcome Home of Vietnam Veterans was held in Goshen on the 30th anniversary of the return of our troops. I was there. Many others were there as well, some of them are sitting in this room right now. Most of those there were Vietnam veterans, their families, or politicians. But it was an amazingly healing day for a great many of us that were there. For some the healing is still ongoing. For some it may never completely happen.

I'm not even sure I will ever heal from watching our heroes being treated the way they were. And if I'm in pain from that experience, I can't even begin to imagine what pain our Vietnam veterans are feeling, are recovering from, and from -- and are still dealing with.

Americans are finally starting to understand how much damage we did to our troops. We, as a nation, may have done more harm to them than the enemy in the jungles of Vietnam did. So many of our Vietnam veterans died never knowing that the American public was realizing the

error of their ways and we're finally starting to thank and honor our Vietnam veterans.

And who has been leading this revolution? Who's been ensuring that no other veterans are ever forgotten or treated the way our Vietnam veterans were? The very people who were treated so poorly. Those that were spat upon, those that were treated as less than second-class citizens. Those who know first-hand the pain and devastation that was caused by the American public. The Vietnam veterans, themselves.

One day a year to recognize them, their sacrifices and all that they did and continue to do for this country, their country, is certainly the least of what we owe them. It will never be enough in my eyes, but it is sorely overdue and needs to be done.

I want to thank you for indulging me in my testimony today. I know that this bill will be passed by the House and Senate and signed into law by the Governor, probably in time for the first Welcome Home Vietnam Veteran's Day to be held on March 30, 2010, but this has been inside me waiting to be said since I was a 14-year-old girl and knew what it all meant.

And while I still have the floor, I want to ask everyone that hears or reads my testimony to do one thing. Any time you see one of our great Americans somewhere, you can tell them usually by the baseball caps so many of them wear or their jackets, take a minute to walk up to them and say thank you.

I was in the Florida Keys this past November and while visiting a wild bird sanctuary, I saw a very frail older man standing off by himself

in the shade, smoking a cigarette. I smiled but kept walking by him. I was busy. I was with my family and I wanted to go see the birds. He was wearing a Korean War veterans baseball hat. Two hours later, on my way out, I saw him still standing in the same place, but noticed how sad and bent and broken he looked. I was standing not ten feet away from this man, having a cigarette, myself, and sharing his shade tree. I had trouble looking him in the eye.

The poor man had been in the same spot for two hours and it was Veteran's Day. Ashamed of myself, I finally screwed up the courage to walk up to a man I had been staring at with pity and I extended my hand to him and thanked him for his service to our country. Suddenly, this frail old man seemed anything but. He stood tall. He smiled. Color returned to his ashen face. His handshake got stronger, firmer, and more friendly. And he wouldn't let go of my hand.

He looked at me -- he looked me in the eyes and as I looked back, I could see his tears as mine started to come as well. He smiled again and said thank you. It was my duty and I served proudly. It was a simple thing I did. Five little words and a handshake. Thank you for your service.

If I may be so bold as to speak for our Vietnam veterans, that's all they want. That's all they wanted 35 years ago, for someone to say thank you for your service. Passage of this bill and honoring them one day a year, will help do that.

Again, I want to thank you for the opportunity to come before you on behalf of my fellow

Guardsmen, veterans, retirees and their families. And thank you for all you do for them. I know it and this committee is appreciated, even though you probably don't hear it enough.

Again, thank you and I am available to answer any questions you may have.

REP. GRAZIANI: Debbie, thank you very much for your testimony. In particular, relating your own personal story with your family. It's -- it certainly resonates.

You know, like, I'll just deviate for a little minute, it brings back memories that we all have in certain shapes, form or manner. But one of the things that a lot of us could relate to, I was in a conversation, this is like five, six years ago, and happened to say that I was in Vietnam, and we talked a bit. And the person that I was talking to never had the opportunity to wear a uniform. And when I started talking about some of the things, the response given to me was, can't you just forget about it? It was so long ago. How the hell can you say anything like that?

But, thank you very much.

Any questions or -- Senator Coutu.

REPRESENTATIVE COUTU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just want to say, as a young veteran, we all are proud of our veterans who served in the past and returned home.

Because, when we now return, we're greeted and welcomed home. And unfortunately sometimes it takes, sometimes some unfortunate situations to

make it -- put things in reality and perspective for the future generations. So I look at every veteran who returns home. We know what our other veterans went through.

Additionally, I have an interesting perspective. I've been able to travel around the world, really, and visit other countries and militaries. And what we notice is that a lot of countries, they don't -- a lot of people don't wear their flags. America's patriotic. Whenever I see that flag, I know a lot of people look up to it and they're proud because of what it means. Not only the freedoms that we have, but also that we have a great military that's really, 80 percent of their effort and work around this world is to provide safety and rights for people that have no rights and no safety, vaccinations around the world.

So, you know, from one veteran to another, we appreciate all that our veterans have went through in the past because we know we wouldn't have really the homecomings that we have every time we return.

So thank you to our Vietnam vets and other vets, who didn't experience what you've given us now.

REP. GRAZIANI: Thank you for your words, Representative Coutu.

Any other?

Yes, Representative Conroy.

REP. CONROY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, it's -- it's just some comments also. Debbie, thank you for your testimony and

everyone else that was here. You know, it's so moving and touching to sit on this committee and I'm really honored to be able to your stories. I'm a retired VA nurse, so although I'm not a military person, I've heard a lot of stories.

I mean, I wish -- I just wish that maybe a lot of veterans can just reach out and just share a little bit. And I know there's things in people's minds that you can't share. But if you can start that process, it's such a healing process.

I had a veteran that volunteered over at the VA with me for -- well he's in his eighties and he died a couple years ago. And I got to know his personal stories from World War II. And he was almost like a second father to me. And when he died a couple a years ago, he was in hospice, and I was with him and I was saying, it's okay to go. And this man was afraid to die because he didn't think he was going to go to heaven.

And when I look at you guys out there that are so young, I just don't want more people to be feeling that their whole life, they -- they've never had a life, you know, you just reliving that. So, anything that I can do up here on this committee to help you through some of that healing process, you have my support for that.

And I want to just thank you all for the service that you've given to our country and our state.

DEBBIE NEWTON: Thank you, Representative.

REP. GRAZIANI: Thank you, Representative Conroy.

Is there any other comments?



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March 2, 2010

Testimony in Favor of Raised Bills 313, 314, 5350, 5352, 5353 and 5388

Good morning Sen. Maynard, Rep. Graziani and members of the Select Committee on Veterans Affairs and thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of several important proposals before you today. My name is Debbi Newton and I am the Legislative Chair for the National Guard Association of Connecticut. I have served in that capacity for the past seven years and am a 30-year member of the Connecticut Army National Guard.

Let me briefly touch on a couple of the bills before you, then I will get discuss more fully two specific bills.

Raised Bill 313, ACC the Acceptability of Certain Claims for the Veterans' Property Tax Exemption is a bill that is sorely needed. Many Veterans over the age of 70, my mother among them, lost their Military Service Discharge Papers in a fire that destroyed the storage facility holding those all-important records. Without them, many Veterans are forced to either do without benefits they are entitled to, or to jump through hoops to try and prove they are indeed eligible for them. This loss of records was through no fault of their own and they should not have to suffer the consequences of an event that was far outside of their control.

Raised Bill 314: ACC Military or Veteran Status on State-Issued Forms and Publications will assist the Department of Veterans Affairs collect data and inform our state's Veterans of all of their benefits and entitlement. Yesterday a friend of mine, a former member of the US Naval Reserve, was in Newington to fight for educational benefits he had been told somewhere along the line he was not eligible for. Not only did he find out he was eligible to have his Masters' Degree paid for, but the VA is going back and reimbursing him for all his eligible expenses for his bachelor's degree, and he found he may be eligible for an increase in his disability from 10% to 70%. Imagine how much stress this man would have avoided while going through school if he were not worried about paying his bills. 314 will help others avoid this situation. By providing a check off box on state forms, you avoid the privacy issue associated with having the military provide the names and addresses of veterans getting out of the military, and as veterans move into the state, it enables us a way to identify them and provide them the information they need as well.

Raised Bill 5353: An Act Establishing a Task Force on Traumatic Brain Injury and Raised Bill 5388: ACC Homeless Female Veterans are very much needed in light of the past several years. Both groups of Veterans and Servicemembers are growing daily and their needs are not being fully met. It is not because of a lack of caring or the lack of desire to help, it is because of the overwhelming numbers and the fact that we were not prepared to provide the care and attention these heroes need. The Task Force and Study these bills establish could go a long way in helping us understand and provide assistance to our Veterans and Servicemembers in need.

NGACT fully supports Raised Bill 5350: ACC Licensure and Certification Credits for Military Training, and has proposed this bill for the past two years. Last year we took a step in the right direction with passage of the CDL bill giving credit for CDL training and licensure in the military for civilian CDLs. This bill continues that common sense application. Many of our Servicemembers go to military schools to become plumbers, electricians, carpenters, mechanics, diesel mechanics, aircraft mechanics, medical professionals and spend months doing nothing but learning their chosen crafts or professions, with some training lasting more than a year. When they complete their training, they are deemed as professionals by the United States Government and are sent around the country and the world to practice their specialties. But when they return to a National Guard or Reserve Unit or come home after completing an active duty tour, they are told that what they have learned, what they have been doing, doesn't count and they have to go to tech schools, they have to become apprentices, they have to pay to take training that our tax dollars already paid for them to have. What this bill does is give credit for that training towards licensure and certification in the State of Connecticut. It does not alleviate the need for these Servicemembers to take any state-specific courses that deal with such topics as state building codes, nor does it negate the need to pay any licensing or certification fees. What it does do is give credit for training/schooling already completed through the military and has the potential to put many people into the employable workforce much quicker than they might otherwise be. NGACT urges your full support of this bill.

Finally, I want to speak to Raised Bill 5352: An Act Proclaiming March 30th to be Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day. I am, quite frankly, embarrassed, and ashamed, to be speaking about this bill today. I have been in the military for 30 years. Thirty years. Let me say that one more time... 30 years. The last Vietnam Veteran came home a few years before I enlisted in the military and we are just now talking about welcoming them home? I realize the people in this room are not necessarily responsible for this outrageous delay, and in fact, at least two of you on this committee are Vietnam Vets, and I want to thank you for your service, for helping preserve my right to wear the uniform of the United States Army.

As a young girl, I remember being in the car with my parents and two of my younger brothers heading to Little Neck Long Island to visit my aunt and uncle. It was late because we had to wait for my dad to get out of work so we could go. Suddenly, my dad pulled the car over to the side of the road and asked a young man where he was headed. That young man was a US Navy sailor and was walking home from the train station because he didn't have the money to go any further on the train or to get a bus ticket. He had been walking along the highway for an hour, carrying his duffle bag before my dad stopped. He told the Sailor to get in the car and drove him over an hour out of our way to get him home safely and it was after midnight when we stopped. I was brought up with that kind of example of how we treat our veterans, our troops. As a young child, I thought that's how everyone treated our military members.

As I grew a bit older and started watching and understanding the news, I realized not everyone in America was like my dad. So many people were angry at our government and our leaders, but took it out on our troops. Even as a pre-teen, I knew what was happening was wrong and I joined Voices in Vital America, an organization dedicated to supporting our troops. I wore the POW/MIA bracelets proudly, and still do. I just couldn't understand how everybody wasn't a member, wasn't wearing the bracelets, wasn't supporting our troops. I still don't understand it. I never will.

A few years ago, what was billed as the official Connecticut Welcome Home of Vietnam Veterans was held in Goshen on the 30th anniversary of the return of our last troops from Vietnam. I was there. Many others were there as well, some of them are sitting in this room right now. Most of those there were Vietnam Vets, their families, or politicians. But it was an amazingly healing day for a great many of us that were there. For some the healing is still ongoing. For some it may never completely happen. I'm not even sure I will ever heal from watching our heroes being treated the way they were. If I'm still in pain from that experience; I can't even begin to imagine what pain our vets are feeling, are recovering from, and are dealing with.

Americans are finally starting to understand how much damage we did to our Troops. We, as a nation, may have done more harm to them than the enemy in the jungles of Vietnam did. So many of our Vietnam Veterans died never knowing that the American public was realizing the error of their ways and were finally starting to thank and honor our Vietnam Veterans. And who has been leading this revolution? Who has been ensuring that no other veterans are ever forgotten or treated the way our Vietnam veterans were? The very people who were treated so poorly. Those that were spat upon. Those that were treated as less than second class citizens. Those who know first-hand the pain and devastation that was caused by the American public. The Vietnam Veterans themselves.

One day a year to recognize them, their sacrifices and all that they did, and continue to do for this country, their country is certainly the least of what we owe them. It will never be enough in my eyes, but it is sorely overdue and needs to be done.

I want to thank you for indulging me in my testimony today. I know this bill will be passed by the House and the Senate and signed into law by the Governor, probably in time for the first Welcome Vietnam Veterans Day to be held on March 30, 2010, but this has been inside me waiting to be said since I was a 14-year-old girl and knew what it all meant.

And while I still have the floor, I want to ask everyone that hears or reads my testimony to do one thing. Anytime you see one of our great Americans somewhere, you can tell them usually by the baseball caps so many of them wear, or their jackets, take just a minute to walk up to them and say thank you. I was in the Keys this past November and while visiting a wild bird sanctuary, I saw a very frail older man standing off by himself in the shade smoking a cigarette. I smiled but kept walking past him. He was wearing a Korean War Veterans baseball hat. Two hours later, on my way out, I saw him still standing in the same place, but noticed how sad and bent and broken he looked. I was standing not 10 feet away from him having a cigarette, sharing his shade tree. I had trouble looking him in the eye. The poor man had been in the same spot for two hours and it was Veterans' Day. Ashamed of myself, I screwed up the courage to walk up to a man I had been staring at with pity and I extended my hand to him and thanked him for his

service to our country. Suddenly, this frail-old-man-seemed anything but. He stood tall. He smiled. Color returned to his ashen face. His handshake got stronger, firmer, and more friendly. And he wouldn't release my hand. He looked me in the eyes and as I looked back, I could see his tears as mine started to come as well. He smiled again and said thank you, it was my duty, and I served proudly. It was a simple thing I did. Five little words and a hand shake. Thank you for your service.

If I may be so bold as to speak for our Vietnam Veterans, that's all they want. That's all they wanted 35 years ago. For someone to say thank you for your service. Passage of this bill and honoring them one day a year, will do that.

Again, I want to thank you for the opportunity to come before you on behalf of my fellow Guardsmen, Veterans, Retirees and their families. And thank you for all you do for them, I know it, and this committee, is appreciated, even though you probably don't hear it often enough. Again, thank you and I am available to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,
Debbi Newton

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