

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
82R6126 MMS-D

S.C.R. 16
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Administration
3/8/2011
As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Each year, Americans pause during the month of March to pay special tribute to the contributions that women have made to our national life, and outstanding among the myriad roles that women have assumed over the course of this country's history have been those undertaken as part of the nation's armed forces.

Long before they gained regular admission to the military, thousands of women assisted the uniformed branches in a variety of ways. They worked as nurses, water bearers, laundresses, and cooks; sometimes they served as spies and saboteurs; and, on occasion, they even took up arms.

In 1901, the United States Army broke new ground by creating an actual nurses corps, and the navy followed in 1908. The ranks of these units swelled during World War I, when nearly 23,000 women served as nurses with the American military; the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps enlisted nearly 13,000 additional women as yeomen and reservists and assigned them to duty stateside, to free their male counterparts for combat at sea and abroad.

The participation of women in the military surged during World War II, with more than 400,000 filling posts at home and overseas. To more fully utilize their abilities, the army established the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, later known as the Women's Army Corps and commanded with consummate ability by the Texan Oveta Culp Hobby. The army also created the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), while the navy organized the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES), the Marine Corps established the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, and the Coast Guard created a reserve unit known as the SPARs. In spite of widespread misgivings about their suitability for the work, women proved themselves in a wide array of assignments, and in 1948, an Act of Congress granted them permanent status in the regular and reserve forces.

Barriers to the participation of women in the military continued to fall. Legal provisions placing a two percent cap on the number of women serving and a ceiling on the highest grade a woman could achieve were repealed in 1967. By 1972, the various ROTC programs were opened to women, and in 1976, women were admitted to the service academies. They are now eligible to enter more than 90 percent of all career fields in the armed forces.

Women have continued to deploy in times of conflict: some 1,000 served in theater during the Korean War and 7,500 during the Vietnam War; hundreds saw duty in operations in Central America in the 1980s; and in 1991, 41,000 women served in theater in Operation Desert Storm.

Today, approximately 344,500 women are serving in the U.S. military; they constitute about 14 percent of active duty personnel and about 10 percent of the American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The operations focused on those two countries have placed enormous demands on all who have taken part. Like their male compatriots, many women have served multiple tours, and large numbers have been injured, many grievously. As of mid-January 2011, 136 women had given their lives in those two wars.

The increased involvement of women in the military is reflected by the number of women veterans, which now totals 1.8 million. Texas is home to more than 150,000 women veterans, the second highest number of any state in the nation.

Texans have always honored the selflessness and sacrifice of those who perform military service, and these women are indeed worthy of that recognition. It is also fitting that needs they have incurred in connection with that service be acknowledged and alleviated, whether they concern physical or psychological wounds or the challenges of caring for their families or reintegrating into civilian life.

The women who have served in the United States armed forces have demonstrated tenacity, courage, and professionalism, and they are deserving of their fellow citizens' deepest gratitude and unfailing support.

RESOLVED

That the 82nd Legislature of the State of Texas hereby designate the month of March each year from 2011 through 2020 as Women Veterans Month in tribute to the immeasurable contributions that women in the military have made to this nation.