



Honoring All of America's Veterans on Independence Day

Every Independence Day is a time to celebrate America and the freedoms we hold dear. This year, however, holds special significance. As our first Fourth of July since September 11, we should make a special effort to thank the men and women who secured the blessings of liberty.

From the Minutemen at Lexington and Concord to the members of our armed services in Afghanistan, these brave Americans form an unbroken chain of American patriots dedicated to defending the principles embodied in our Declaration of Independence.

World War II marked one of the greatest challenges to those principles. As the forces of Nazism and Imperialism spread in Europe and Asia, America stood virtually alone. Again, thousands of brave men and women - many from Iowa - rose up to defend America.

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Among them were eight members of the Sac and Fox tribe, traditionally known as the Meskwaki, who served as "Code Talkers." Code Talkers, who have now been made famous by the new film, "Windtalkers," were critical in the Allied victory in WWII because of their ability to communicate crucial messages using their native language.

During World Wars I and II, American Indian languages were used to develop military codes that proved extremely difficult to intercept, and impossible to break. Use of these codes - the most well known being the Navajo code - is credited with saving countless lives as enemy forces found themselves unable to understand our military's messages.

Until now, Congress has recognized only Navajo Code Talkers, even though some 17 other tribes participated. That's why I've introduced legislation that would allow President Bush to present Congressional Gold Medals to all Native American Code Talkers, including Iowa's Meskwaki, in recognition of their service.

While seven of the eight World War II Meskwaki Code Talkers have since passed, Frank Jonas Sanache, still lives on the Meskwaki settlement in Tama County. Frank and his fellow Meskwaki Code Talkers served unusually long shifts due to the fact that there were only eight of them who could transmit messages in Meskwaki. There were times when they had to man the radios for 24 hours.

We must honor all of America's veterans - including Frank and the Meskwaki Code Talkers - for their service to America. Our freedoms are not defended with speeches or slogans, but through the willingness of brave Americans to serve, and sometimes lay down their lives. This Independence Day, let us take a moment to say a special thank you to the defenders of our freedom.