

## In Our View: Every day should be treated as Veterans Day

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Following a contentious election that focused on our differences, Veterans Day arrives to remind Americans of what we share.

The holiday, originally called Armistice Day and founded in the wake of World War I, honors those who have served in the U.S. military. That includes about 18 million living Americans, including more than 500,000 Washingtonians. They are our neighbors, co-workers, friends and family members, and they served during times of peace and war to help protect this nation and her interests around the world.

This year's Veterans Day is unlike any in memory, with the coronavirus pandemic leading to the cancellation of traditional ceremonies honoring the occasion. But the lack of public

gatherings does not diminish the importance of the holiday or the reverence with which we recognize those who have served their nation.

That reverence is particularly notable this year. While last week's election demonstrated the divisions within the United States, we are grateful for having the right to vote and for a trustworthy election process that serves as the foundation of our representative democracy. Americans past and present have served in the armed forces to help protect that democracy, preventing the United States from falling under the spell of despots and tyrants who have ruled other nations.

As President Woodrow Wilson wrote for the first observance of the holiday, on the anniversary of the Armistice: "Out of this victory there arose new possibilities of political freedom and economic concert. The war showed us the strength of great nations acting together for high purposes, and the victory of arms foretells the enduring conquests which can be made in peace when nations act justly and in furtherance of the common interests of men."

Since then, Americans have served with honor in World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. And while there is room to question the reasoning behind some of those conflicts and to criticize the leaders behind them, it is essential to honor those who were sent to fight.

It also is essential to honor those who have served during times of peace, providing the United States with strength that helped to avoid additional wars.

Yet while we recognize the diligence and sacrifice of those who have served, we stress that appropriate recognition must not be limited to a single day.

Exact numbers are impossible to determine, but an estimate last year suggested that more than 65,000 veterans were homeless; another study found that about 240,000 veterans were living in poverty.

The 2020 defense appropriations bill passed by Congress called for \$738 billion in spending; about \$220 billion of that was for the Department of Veterans Affairs. When preparing future defense budgets, lawmakers must consider the long-range implications and this nation's moral obligation to care for those who have served.

As Dr. Sudip Bose wrote for HuffingtonPost.com in 2017: "What many people who haven't served in the military don't really understand, is that after veterans stop fighting the enemy, they continue the struggle fighting against injuries or illness sustained while on active duty — either physical or mental, or both. In many instances, their battle continues."

That, too, is part of Veterans Day and the people we honor today. We must sufficiently honor them throughout the year, not just in the middle of November.

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