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Women Veterans Should Be Recognized

Veteran's Day is a day set aside to recognize the 23.4 million military personnel who have served our country, including more than 1.8 million women veterans. By 2010, women veterans are estimated to be more than 14% of the total veteran population. And according to the Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA), the number of female veterans is projected to rise from 1.1 million in 1980 to 1.9 million in 2020, while the population of male veterans is estimated to decline. Pennsylvania ranks 8th in the U.S. with 63,418 women veterans.

The increase in female veterans is attributed in part to the increasing number and proportion of women in the military and to a younger age distribution. As a comparison, there were 7,500 female troops in Vietnam and more than 160,000 in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2007, the estimated median age of women veterans was 47, as compared to 61 for male veterans. Only 10 % of male veterans, as compared to 30% of female veterans, are under age 35.

While many veterans face emotional and physical health problems, as well as employment pressures, upon their return home to their families and communities, women face some additional challenges.

According to the Department of Defense Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, in 2008 there were 2,908 reports of sexual assault; and the DVA reports that in 2007, 22% of women veterans who used the VA screened positive for military sexual trauma. Women who answer the call to duty should receive the dignity and respect they deserve, not the additional trauma of sexual assault. The Business & Professional Women's (BPW) Foundation supports

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HR 840, Military Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Act, which protects our soldiers and families from domestic violence and sexual assault. BPW Foundation also co-sponsored a Veteran's Day breakfast briefing, *Domestic Violence in the Military*, for Congressional leaders in Washington, DC on October 29th.

Reuniting with family can be difficult for all returning veterans, including women. Over half of all women veterans are married, and over half have dependents. According to the DVA, the top three diagnostic categories for women in 2006 and 2007 were post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), hypertension, and depression. BPW Foundation supports the Women Veterans Health Care Improvement Act (HR1211), which was passed in the House in June 2009 by a 408-0 vote and would equip the VA for the immediate and long-term health needs of women veterans.

Women veterans leaving the military also face misconceptions when reentering the workforce. Approximately 95% of all jobs in the military are open to women, and 81% of military jobs have direct civilian counterparts. According to BPW Foundation's 2007 survey of women veterans, numerous factors play a role in determining the success of a woman veteran's transition, including civilian employer and co-worker attitudes, educational level, marital status, and responsibility for dependents. Younger non-college educated women veterans were less likely than their older, college educated veteran peers to report a successful transition, value their military experience in the civilian workplace and have a positive job search experience. It seems that current programs and policies to support veterans' transitions are more suited to the needs of older veterans and should be strengthened to support our younger veterans. .

BPW Foundation is an avid supporter of women veterans and developed the *Women Joining Forces - Closing Ranks, Opening Doors (WJF)* program. The Foundation conducted a

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survey of women veterans, has a section on their website dedicated to women veterans, and has advocated on their behalf at the White House and in Congress.

Denise Clawson, President of BPW Pennsylvania stated, "Throughout our country's history, women have played an important role in our nation's wars and conflicts. On this Veteran's Day, do your part in showing all of our veterans, men and women, your appreciation for their sacrifice and their service to our country."

For more information about BPW, contact www.bpwfoundation.org or www.BPWPA.org.

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