

## Helping the Public Understand Veterans Day

For much of the media and general public, the two days set aside to honor veterans are virtually synonymous. This is not the case.

There is a big difference between celebrating service and commemorating sacrifice; remembering the fallen and paying tribute to the living. The difference is known as Veterans Day and Memorial Day.

The VA defines Veterans Day as the “day set aside to thank and honor all those who served honorably in the military – in wartime and in peacetime. In fact, Veterans Day is largely intended to thank living veterans for their service, to acknowledge that their contribution to our national security are appreciated and to underscore the fact that all those who served – not only those who died-have sacrificed and done their duty

Let’s talk about Memorial Day to further differentiate the two days. This sacred time perhaps has become the most distorted in many minds. First, especially since September 11, 2001, some have advanced the notion that the last Monday in May is intended to honor all uniformed personnel killed in the line of duty. To be clear, first responders have their own designated days of remembrance. Even more distant from the intent of Memorial Day is the idea that it applies to any and all Americans who have died from any causes. It is difficult to fathom how this view took root, but nothing could be further from the truth.

This brings us back to Veterans Day. Use this opportunity to demonstrate and spread the word about the immense contributions veterans have made to American life. The whole week surrounding Veterans Day is for Veterans in the classroom.

The more schoolchildren and college students are exposed to actual veterans, the better chances are that we can influence their thinking in a positive way. If we want adults to fully comprehend the true meaning of Veterans Day, there is no better place to start than in the educational system.

But don’t be limited to speaking merely about our roles in national defense. Long after the uniforms came off, untold numbers of veterans go on to make countless contributions to society. In every field- public service, science, industry, law, performing arts and professional sports – veterans have left a lasting imprint.

Far too often, this fact is overlooked by the news media. One need only look at the biographies of prominent Americans to see what short shrift their military service gets when reciting their life’s accomplishments. This is unfortunate because commonly their success was underpinned by their time in uniform.

So on Veterans Day proudly proclaim that veterans –past and present-have advanced America’s values and institutions well beyond the war’s end. Help the public understand that living veterans continue to make a difference every day.