

## TRIBUTE TO ELKS

USA HON. IKE SKELTON OF MISSOURI IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 29, 2007

Mr. SKELTON. Madam Speaker, let me take this means to pay tribute to the Elks USA for their continued dedication to communities across the nation and their contributions to the veterans of this country.

Founded after the Civil War with a goal of promoting friendship and charity, the Elks are the nation's oldest and largest fraternal organization, with 1.1 million members and lodges in all fifty states. Last year, they donated 9.7 million hours and contributed almost \$263 million to a variety of charitable and philanthropic causes.

One of the major targets of the Elks, is a commitment to the military and its veterans. In 1918, the Elks built a 700-bed hospital in Boston to rehabilitate World War I wounded and gave it to the nation. Elks made a solemn pledge that so long as there are veterans, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them. This commitment still stands, through an extensive visitation program in VA hospitals and nursing homes. As the Veterans only source of leather, the men, and women of the Elks gather animal hides, pay for the tanning, and provide wheelchair gloves and leather used for therapy programs at VA medical centers nationwide. In 2005, they logged 1,037,932 hours visiting hospitalized veterans and taking many of the patients to baseball games, fishing trips, and other outings.

The Elks were among the first groups to endorse the World War II Memorial, donating \$1.2 million towards its construction. In addition, the Elks raised a similar amount to aid the victims of the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks.

During World War II and the Korean War, the Elks operated canteens for the troops. A decade ago, they gave \$100,000 to service chaplains to support the families of the Gulf War wounded at Walter Reed and other military hospitals. A current project, dubbed the Army of Hope, provides support for the families of reservists and National Guard personnel who have been called to active duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. For the citizen soldiers whose lives have been disrupted, Elks are helping with the kids, making minor home repairs, writing wills, and providing other assistance for their families.

The Elks were founders of Flag Day, a concept President Harry Truman (himself an Elk) signed into law. They promote the flying of the Flag, promote the observance of Veterans Day and Memorial Day, and sponsor parades along with other patriotic events.

Madam Speaker, I know the Members of the House will join me in commending Elks USA for their commitment to bettering our country and we thank them for their dedication to our military families.

Submitted by: Elks Government Relations