

This July 4th, Support our Troops -- July 2005

By: Delaware Congressman Mike Castle

It's that time of year again when American flags decorate people's lawns and the celebration of the freedoms we enjoy as Americans ring as loud as the fire trucks in the Fourth of July parades. This weekend exudes patriotism, celebrates the principles of our great country, and this year, should honor our troops who allow us to maintain our free and democratic lifestyle.

Although I know that we, as American people and Delawareans, all support the troops that are fighting for us throughout the world, we are being told by the soldiers returning from overseas, that sometimes they do not always feel that support as strongly as they would like. They see the negative reports and images on our major news stations, not reports of the positive work they are doing for us. They see protests to the war, not people collecting care packages to send over to the troops.

Therefore, this is my challenge to you. Make a promise to yourself to show our troops your support through any of the available ways made possible by the Armed Services or the government. I want to specifically point out a program run by the Department of Defense called 'America Supports You' that has a website that will show you every possible avenue of action. By going to www.americasupportsyouth.mil or to my website www.house.gov/castle, you will see a host of options for visibly showing support for the troops. It can be as simple as going online and writing a general message of appreciation to the men and women in the services, which they can read from abroad. Another program that requires a little more effort, but hardly any cost is Operation Homelink, which provides free, refurbished computers to family members of deployed service men and women. These computer donations allow families to stay in touch through e-mail with their loved ones deployed outside the continental United States. Other programs consist of sending gift certificates to the military that can be used at AAFES, NEX, and the Coast Guard Military Exchange Retail Stores, sending phone cards so that soldiers may stay in touch with their families, sending packages of things they might be missing from the States and contributing to scholarships for military children. Additionally, there is the program 'Operation Hero Miles', where civilians can donate their frequent flyer miles for injured service men and women and their families.

All of these efforts can be made by individuals OR corporations, although businesses can obviously provide more with larger funds and resources. I see this plea for assistance from the Dept. of Defense as an opportunity. Delaware is a small state, but we can do big things as a population by putting forth a strong effort. If each of us makes a promise to ourselves to show support through some medium, the response will be immense. Remember that children also can help in this initiative. On www.americasupportsyouth.mil, there is an opportunity for children to post messages to the soldiers, in addition to other ideas for their efforts. After speaking to troops in the past, I know how it gives them the renewed confidence and pride to serve our country after hearing from the American people. As with anyone, they need to know they are being appreciate for the sacrifices they are making.

While you are enjoying your holiday weekend with family and friends, think of the service men and women who cannot be with their loved ones this time of year. Think of the sacrifices there are making and remember to thank them for that.