

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 144

BY SENATOR JOHN SMITH

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

To commend the Fort Polk Heritage Families and the Heritage Family Association on the occasion of the tenth anniversary celebration of the Heritage Family Day Reunion.

WHEREAS, between 1940 and 1945, the United States War Department, now the Department of Defense, took possession of privately owned land in Vernon Parish, displacing more than six hundred families and over three thousand people from their homesteads, livestock, and the graves of cherished loved ones, and they were faced with building their lives anew; and

WHEREAS, a portion of the property was condemned and the land acquired through the powers of expropriation and eminent domain, powers allowing states and governments to seize private land for government or public use, as the threat of a looming world war necessitated the building and improving of military bases and airfields; and

WHEREAS, the Fort Polk heritage families occupied land that is currently the site for the Fort Polk Army Installation and Peason Ridge artillery training range; and

WHEREAS, in April 2007, the leaders of the United States Army Joint Readiness Training Center for Fort Polk became concerned about the potential risk of losing an aspect of American history by failing to preserve the stories of these families who were uprooted and dispersed throughout the country; and

WHEREAS, the Joint Readiness Training Center convened a cultural resources workshop to develop plans for preserving the rich cultural heritage of these families, their ancestors, and their descendants; and

WHEREAS, from that workshop and with the plans having been developed, the Heritage Collection Project proceeded, beginning with the original settlement of the area in the 1820s through the resettlement that took place in the first half of the 1940s as the country readied for world war; and

WHEREAS, the Heritage Family Collection of Fort Polk's displaced families was created and it was determined that the collection would be housed in the Fort Polk archeological curation facility and a second copy of the items in the collection would be lodged at the Northwestern State University archives in Natchitoches, Louisiana, where all the items are preserved and many are available to the public; and

WHEREAS, a portion of the collection is currently available online and this compilation of photographs, documents, and firsthand accounts have contributed to the important historical record; and

WHEREAS, the Louisiana Region Two Folklife Center at Northwestern State University has conducted oral interviews to include in the collection and research material, such as conveyance records, marriage licenses, and death notices, all public records, and have been added to the documents and records donated by the heritage families; and

WHEREAS, the resilience and determination of the subsistence farmers who were resettled from Fort Polk came from a strong faith and a belief in the importance of family, both values which have been exhibited by their ancestors who have committed both time and energy to the Heritage Family Association and the compilation of the collection; and

WHEREAS, these heritage families have continued to display their dedication to their community and their country and, to date, there have been more than two hundred members of those families who have served in this nation's armed forces; and

WHEREAS, the integrity and cultural richness of the collection is greatly dependent upon the interest and contributions of the heritage families and their commitment to the history and heritage of Fort Polk and Vernon Parish; and

WHEREAS, the Fort Polk Heritage Families and the Heritage Family Association can be proud of the contribution they have made to maintaining the history of the sacrifices made by the families who were displaced from their homes and their very roots and allowing these sacrifices to be honored through the annual celebration of the Heritage Family Day Reunion; and

WHEREAS, Fort Polk and the Joint Readiness Training Facility created a Heritage Family Day Reunion to recognize, honor, and memorialize these families, and the first event was held in November 2007, and the tenth annual event will be celebrated later this year.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby commend the Fort Polk Heritage Families and the Heritage Family Association on the occasion of the tenth anniversary celebration of the Heritage Family Day Reunion.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to Mr. Gene Haymon, a representative of the association.

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES