

Earlier this month we celebrated Public Service Recognition Week. Throughout the year, it is customary to show special appreciation to those who make a positive difference in our lives—we honor our veterans and active military on Veterans Day and Armed Services Day; we recognize our mothers and fathers on their respective days.

Not to be overlooked are the men and women who serve America as federal, state and local government employees to provide vital services on which we rely. They are our teachers, our postmen and women, our police officers, our local government workers ensuring our trash gets picked up and our streets are paved, and federal civilian employees who work side-by-side with military personnel to keep our nation safe and secure.

I am proud to say that I was a leading supporter of the original proclamation declaring Public Service Recognition Week in 1985. Since then, this special week has grown in size and scope. This year it will be celebrated in all fifty states and in over 1400 cities, every event intended to demonstrate the diversity and the high quality of the people who make the public workforce in the United States the best in the world.□

In order to maintain the caliber of talent that defines our public service workforce, it is essential that we continue to give them the resources they need to effectively do their jobs. Public Service Recognition Week is one way to do that by raising public awareness about the invaluable services provided by public employees across the country.

Also important is increasing the government's ability to recruit and retain the best and the brightest for a career in public service. This is why in 1990 I joined a bipartisan group in Congress to pass the Federal Employee Pay Comparability Act (FEPCA). The purpose of this act was- over time- to move federal salaries closer to those within the private sector.

Since the passage of FEPCA, we have made progress towards private sector comparability, although Administrations have consistently ignored it by not fully implementing the recommended salary adjustments. It is for this reason that I have routinely fought for a fair and equitable adjustment for both federal civilian and military employees. A competitive and reliable cost structure is necessary to retaining a high-quality workforce that keeps our air and water clean, our homeland safe and our government functioning.

President Lyndon B. Johnson once said, "So very much of what we are as a nation - and what we are to achieve as a people - depends upon the caliber and character of the federal career people." I couldn't agree more. Once again, I want to take this opportunity to thank all of our public service employees for all that you have done and continue to do on behalf of our great nation.