

INTRODUCTION

By Representative Mary Schneider

HB 1403--POW/MIA State Holiday

House Government and Veterans Affairs Committee, Austen Schauer, Chairman

January 23, 2025

Good afternoon, Chairman Schauer and distinguished colleagues and fellow committee members. I'm here today to introduce and support HB 1403, which would make the third Friday in September of each year Prisoner of War and Missing in Action Day, a state holiday in North Dakota. It would not be a paid holiday, or a day on which schools and other entities are required to close, but it would be a precious day of respect, reflection, and remembrance with an annual proclamation issued by our governors in perpetuity.

HB1403 establishes a day of recognition for two very special groups of our veterans who sacrificed more for their country, and for us, than we realize, had a right to expect, or deserve.

There have been prisoners of war (or POWs) or service members missing in action (MIAs) in every war or conflict. The POWs who came home suffered unspeakable horrors and hardships in confinement that often impacted their lives, physically and mentally, ever after. To say American POWs were treated harshly is an understatement. Torment, torture, starvation, violence, untreated injuries, unmet medical needs, sadistic systems, exposure to the elements, psychological trauma, incessant indignities, and watching the suffering of their comrades, were just a few of the norms.

There were many who never came home. There are still over 80,000 who remain missing, and the pain to their families of their absence is compounded by the lack of closure, the cruelty of continued hope of return, the torture of trying to face reality without any certainty, and the inability to ever know their loved ones' stories and honor their achievements.

As legislators, we listen on the House floor with sadness, but with pride and great admiration too, when a bridge, a road, or a structure is named for one of our fallen North Dakota heroes. But the POW/MIA families may never have that chance. Their loved ones may have died as heroes or served in glory, but their stories remain unfinished, and largely untold.

So, a state holiday will at least give those POW/MIAs the dignity of a day they are recognized, remembered, and proclaimed. Perhaps it will be healing for those they left behind and who wish their loved ones back. We have an implied promise to those who fight for us--to bring

them home, to give them thanks, and to pay them tribute. The POW/MIA flag we fly and the holiday I hope you will proclaim will show we haven't forgotten, and that we continue our commitment to honor their sacrifices, answer their absence, and never stop trying to bring our heroes home.

The veterans who follow me will share some other information, but I will also be happy to answer your questions if I can.

Please honor these special service members who sacrifice so much to protect and preserve our lives and freedoms--by passing HB 1403.