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On November 11th as we observe Veteran's Day, we are privileged to show our gratitude to the brave men and women who have served our country in our armed forces. Since 1919, at the proclamation of President Wilson, we have celebrated what was originally called Armistice Day. At the urging of President Wilson, the day was to be a day of public observance to proudly honor and show our gratitude with celebratory parades, public meetings and a brief suspension of business beginning at 11 a.m. The eleventh day of the eleventh month in the eleventh hour was significant in that it marked the beginning of a temporary cessation of hostilities in World War I between the allied nations and Germany. Although originally to honor the veterans of World War I, in 1954, Armistice Day was changed to Veteran's Day and became a day to honor American veterans of all wars.

To augment our voter education program, my staff and I are using this national day of remembrance to inspire our youth on the importance of voting. All 5th graders were recently invited to participate in an essay contest focusing on the theme that, "Freedom Requires Responsibility." This contest is being co-sponsored by all of the Chambers of Commerce in Pasco County. Also, Judges from the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) will determine first, second and third place winners with prizes to be awarded to each. Representative Will Weatherford will present the prizes at the Central Pasco Chamber of Commerce General Membership Meeting on Veteran's Day, November 11, 2009, at the Residence Inn Tampa Suncoast Parkway. I am really looking forward to reading the interpretations of how freedom requires responsibility from the perspective of our county's ten and eleven-year-olds.

We will also be honoring our Veterans by presenting our "Vote in Honor of a Vet" program in Pasco County High Schools during the Great American Teach-In on November 18th. To encourage young citizens to vote, we have recruited veterans who are willing to speak in classrooms about their personal sacrifices for the sake of our nation's freedom. Students will be provided with biographical information about a veteran they will be asked to "vote in honor of", and will receive commemorative dog tags to signify their commitment and to serve as a daily reminder of those who gave so much for the preservation of our country's founding ideals.

These are two very important ways my office plans to carry out the tradition of a day of observance to the veterans of our nation. It is with great pride and gratitude that we dedicate our time and efforts to these causes.