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## **AMERICA SHOULD HONOR WASHINGTON'S LIFE ON HIS BIRTHDAY**

Washington, D.C. (February 3, 2012) – February 22 marks the 280th anniversary of George Washington's Birthday. Will Americans pause on this day to remember the father of our country or will they continue to celebrate it as part of a three-day weekend in February?

Sadly, recent history has shown that too many prefer the latter, ignoring the birthday of our first president and the sacrifices he made for our country.

When February 22, 1732 dawned in Westmoreland County, Virginia, Augustine and Mary Ball Washington did not know that their son's birth would be celebrated by Americans for over 200 years.

Throughout his life, Washington was a natural leader. As a land surveyor, he mapped the interior of the rapidly expanding Virginia frontier. As a soldier during the French and Indian War, he served with distinction alongside General Edward Braddock as part of the ill-fated Monongahela expedition. As commander in chief of the Continental Army, he showed bravery in the face of enormous odds and the charge of British Regulars. As president of the Constitutional Convention and our country's first chief executive, Washington guided the creation of our system of government through much turmoil, political divisions and open insurrection.

As long as Washington led, whether in the saddle or at the seat of government, he was able to draw out the best in those who served with him. While Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton agreed on very little, they both agreed on the greatness of Washington.

It is these traits that we should properly honor each year on his actual birthday, February 22.

Yet despite his legacy of service to his country, Washington's birthday is not properly recognized by those who are the heirs of his many years of toil. The federal government has unwittingly contributed to this problem by recognizing Washington's Birthday on the third Monday of February instead of his actual birthday. This generic shopping holiday, commonly called Presidents Day, is an insult to Washington's legacy.

Renowned historian David McCullough was recently quoted in the *The Wall Street Journal* saying "we're raising young people who are, by and large, historically illiterate."

I ask how can we adequately explain the importance of George Washington to our children when we do not even take time to recognize his actual birthday?

We need to re-establish Washington's birthday on the actual day to honor his legacy, and in

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doing so, call upon schools across the nation to focus on Washington as the soldier, legislator and president who shepherded our young nation through war, political turmoil, rebellion and expansion as no other single individual was capable of doing.

I have introduced legislation to correct this dishonor by re-establishing February 22 as the official federal recognition of Washington's birthday. Identical legislation has been introduced in the Senate by Mark Warner (D-VA). The measure has the support of Mount Vernon and noted Washington historians and authors from across the country, including McCullough, Ron Chernow and Richard Brookhiser.

Mount Vernon President Jim Rees has said, "the holiday was far more meaningful when it revolved around George Washington, and schools were able to focus on his sterling example of character and leadership."

President Washington exemplified the best that America and Americans have to offer the world: principled leadership; personal bravery; a sense of duty and public service; patriotism, recognition of our unique role in world history, and a reverence for his Creator.

It is only right that we hold February 22 as a date of reverence to commemorate the unique person without whom the tide of American history may well have taken a different turn.