

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 787

By Tillis

A RESOLUTION to honor and commend Staff Sergeant Van Booth, United States Army (retired), upon his "Walking for Life" mission.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly take great pleasure in recognizing a native Tennessean who has dedicated himself to helping fellow veterans who are struggling with mental health issues; and

WHEREAS, Staff Sergeant (SSG) Van Booth, United States Army (retired), began his "Walking for Life" mission at Veterans Park in San Juan Capistrano, California, on February 23, 2019, and completed his trek in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, on December 31, 2019, after travelling 3,135 miles and traversing thirteen states on foot; and

WHEREAS, SSG Booth dedicated his incredible journey to increasing awareness about veterans' suicide and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); and

WHEREAS, this amazing walking trip saw him take 7.1 million steps across deserts, mountain ranges, and the hills and plains of this great nation; and

WHEREAS, he began this excursion with a guitar without any strings, adding a single string after every 500 miles to symbolize how veterans suffering from PTSD are "broken" but can learn to be whole again; and

WHEREAS, the guitar also represented two additional causes for which SSG Booth was raising awareness, Operation Song and Freedom Sings USA, both of which pair songwriters with veterans to write a song as a form of music therapy; he credits these organizations with saving his life after he retired from the Army in 2016; and

WHEREAS, a combat veteran who served twenty years in the United States Army, SSG Booth lost fifteen friends in the Middle East, including his best friend, Channing Bo Hicks, who was killed in combat in Afghanistan in 2012; and

WHEREAS, before beginning his historic journey, Van Booth delivered his song, "My Brother Bo" to the Hicks family in Greer, South Carolina; he returned there to visit Bo Hicks's grave on the final leg of his walk; and

WHEREAS, Van Booth has made it his mission to help fellow veterans who are struggling with suicidal thoughts or PTSD to seek help and to recapture the joy in their lives; and

WHEREAS, a PTSD survivor himself, he understands first-hand the difficulties that many veterans face when they are transitioning from a military career to everyday life in the civilian world; and

WHEREAS, SSG Booth avers that "Walking for Life" was therapeutic for him personally, as he reached out to veterans and civilians alike through social media and other outlets along the nearly 3,200-mile expedition, which included a visit to his hometown of Fayetteville at approximately the 2,500-mile mark; and

WHEREAS, Van Booth enlisted in the United States Army in 1994 during his senior year in high school and retired in 2016 while stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington; and

WHEREAS, he was deployed to Kosovo in support of Operation Joint Guardian from May-December 2000 and served two deployments in Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom; and

WHEREAS, during his first tour of duty in Iraq, SSG Booth served with the 2nd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division of the 303rd Iraqi Army, and in 2004, he served as an Embedded Combat Advisor with Command Advisory Group; and

WHEREAS, SSG Booth is a highly decorated combat veteran who has received the Combat Infantryman Badge, Meritorious Service Medal, four Army Commendation Medals, and the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal, among many others; and

WHEREAS, in the finest tradition of the United States armed forces, SSG Booth sacrificed his personal comfort and convenience to assist his fellow veterans who are in need of understanding, guidance, and treatment, and he is most worthy of our approbation; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor and commend Staff Sergeant Van Booth, United States Army (retired), upon his "Walking for Life" mission and extend to him our gratitude for his ongoing commitment to the health and welfare of his fellow veterans.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy and upon proper request made to the appropriate clerk, the language appearing immediately following the State seal appear without House or Senate designation.