Resolution No. 110: Support For Congressional Gold Medal For Signal Corps Female Telephone Operators Of WWI  
Origin: Convention Committee on Internal Affairs  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Internal Affairs

WHEREAS, On April 6, 1917, the United States declared war against Germany, but was unprepared to fight a technologically modern conflict overseas; and

WHEREAS, The United States called upon American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) to provide the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) with modern equipment and trained personnel for the Army Signal Corps in France; and

WHEREAS, From May to November of 1917, the AEF struggled to develop the telephone service necessary for the Army to function under battlefield conditions; and

WHEREAS, On November 8, 1917, General John J. Pershing cabled the War Department and wrote, “On account of the great difficulty of obtaining properly qualified men, request organization and dispatch to France a force of women telephone operators all speaking French and English equally well”; and

WHEREAS, More than 7,600 women volunteered for only 100 positions and the first recruits took the Army oath as members of the United States Army Signal Corps Female Telephone Operators Unit on January 15, 1918; and

WHEREAS, Telephone operators were the first women to serve as soldiers in non-medical classifications whose job it was to help win the war, not mitigate the harms of the war; and

WHEREAS, These women arrived in France on March 24, 1918 before most infantrymen of the armed forces in order to facilitate logistics and deployment and spent their first night in Paris under German bombardment; and

WHEREAS, The Army quickly recruited and trained five additional contingents of female Signal Corps operators, increasing calls to 150,000 each day, with simultaneous translations between American and French military officers, and these women under popular parlance were known as the “Hello Girls”; and

WHEREAS, When the war ended on November 11, 1918, 223 female operators served in France and had connected 26 million calls for the AEF; and

WHEREAS, Upon arrival in The United States, and despite the objections of General George Squier, the top-ranking officer in the Signal Corps, the Army informed all female veterans that they had performed as civilians, not soldiers, even though they had served in Army uniform in a theater of war surrounded by men who were similarly engaged; and

WHEREAS, After 60 years, on November 23, 1977, President Jimmy Carter signed The GI Bill Improvement Act of 1977 that allowed United States Army Signal Corps Female Telephone Operators to apply for, and receive, veteran status and honorable discharges as members of the armed forces; and

WHEREAS, The United States Congress has a proud tradition of recognizing other classes of veterans who served under difficult wartime conditions; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on August 28, 29, 30, 2018, That The American Legion fully supports legislation to award the Congressional Gold Medal to members of the Signal Corps Female Telephone Operators Unit who served in Europe from January 1918 until January 1920.