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MICHIGAN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Written testimony in support of SB 242 to designate August 21st as Robert G. Heft Day

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Chairman Kirk Schuring and members of the General Government and Agency Review Committee,
Ohio Senate:

I come to you today, first as a proud American, and as an individual who has more than a passing interest and knowledge of the inspirational story of Robert G. Heft. I was a close, trusted friend of Mr. Heft for several years prior to his death in Saginaw, Michigan in 2009, where I solemnly served as the funeral director for his funeral service.

Bob, as he preferred to be called, simply set out to complete a U.S. History class project by redesigning our country's flag, but, instead, became its own history-making event. Bob would retell his story to countless people all around the world for over five decades.

Bob was born on January 19, 1942, exactly 78 years to the day of this writing, in Saginaw, Michigan. Soon after, Bob was moved from Saginaw to be raised by his grandparents in Lancaster, Ohio, who Bob always referred to as his parents.

I came to know Bob upon his retirement and return from Ohio to his birth town of Saginaw in late 1998 to be close to the very few relatives he had. He had so few family members that his friends became his family.

I had the pleasure of hearing Bob's unique story countless times through the years. His greatest enjoyment came from speaking in front of school children, scouting troops, and veterans groups, teaching them about the history of our flag. While Bob never served in the U.S. military, he highly respected those who did. Bob was a true Patriot.

Bob's delivery of his story was as special as the message itself. He caused you to be drawn into each precarious moment.

While a junior at Lancaster High School in Lancaster, Ohio, Bob worked 12-1/2 hours over the course of one weekend at home in the Spring of 1958 when he secretly tore apart his parents' 48-star flag – a gift for their wedding – and refashioned it into his 50-star design with an additional \$2.87 of new cloth and iron-on material he purchased from Wiseman's Department Store. But not before teaching himself how to sew on his mother's Singer sewing machine. It wasn't until the following Monday when it was time to turn in the project to Stanley Pratt's history class when Bob learned that his friend, Tim, spent only a few moments that morning picking up tree leaves as his project. Tim received an A grade. Bob then confidently delivered his flag to teacher Pratt, only to be told that his flag had "too many stars" for a country that had only 48 states.

Despite Bob explaining that he predicted Alaska and Hawaii would become the next states, Pratt gave him a grade of B-minus. Heft was furious. Pratt said he would consider changing the grade if Congress would accept his design. For the next two years Heft would continuously write his Congressman and President Dwight Eisenhower to capture their attention of his flag design.

In 1960, while working at a new job for a company that held a government contract, Heft received a page over the PA system to take a personal phone call – something not allowed. His boss was deeply concerned about the reason the White House was calling his new hire. Heft took the phone. It was President Eisenhower informing Heft he had selected his design by virtue of Executive Order No. 10834, signed on August 21, 1959, and asked Heft if he could come to the White House to attend a flag-raising ceremony. Heft then put the president of the United States on hold to ask his boss for time off. As Heft reconnected with the president to confirm his attendance, he informally asked, "Dwight, are you still there?"

Following the ceremony on July 4, 1960, in Washington, D.C. to mark the 50-star flag as the official banner of the United States, Heft immediately returned to Lancaster High School where teacher Pratt made good on his earlier statement by declaring to Heft, "If it's good enough for Washington, then it's good enough for me. I hereby change the grade to an A."

Heft's life after designing the flag included working as a high school teacher, a college professor, was mayor of Napoleon, Ohio for 28 years, met nine presidents, visited the White House 14 times, flew on Air Force One multiple times and toured with Bob Hope. Heft received many accolades and recognitions, including, Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame of Lancaster High School; in 2003, the Ohio Historical Society commissioned a historical marker to be placed at Lancaster High School; in 2005, *Ripley's Believe It or Not!* featured Bob and his flag story; on December 25, 2006, Bob was featured as a topic on the television game show *Jeopardy*.

Then on July 4, 2007, Bob's 50-star flag design became the longest serving version in our country's history. At 12:00 Noon, the flag was raised at Michigan's Own Military and Space Museum in nearby Frankenmuth, Michigan to commemorate the historic moment. It was one of Bob's proudest moments as an American.

Bob died on December 12, 2009, in Saginaw. Since every American should know how our 50-star flag became part of our country's history, I have permanently memorialized his unique story on my company's website at <https://www.wakemanfuneralhome.com/local-info-and-resources/bob-heft-and-the-50-star-flag>.

Chairman Schuring and members of the committee, on behalf of all residents of Saginaw County, Michigan, and from my office as Representative of the 94th House District in Saginaw County, Michigan, I wholeheartedly **support SB 242** to designate August 21st as Robert G. Heft Day in the state of Ohio. I look forward to also presenting language in the Michigan Legislature to designate August 21st as Robert G. Heft Day in the state of Michigan.

Sincerely,



Rep. Rodney Wakeman
94th House District
Michigan Legislature