Every year the Department of Defense (DoD) joins the Nation in celebrating and honoring the cultures and contributions of Hispanic and Latino Americans. This year’s theme is: “Esperanza: A Celebration of Hispanic Heritage and Hope.”

On September 17, 1968, Congress passed Public Law 90-48, officially authorizing and requesting the president to issue annual proclamations declaring September 15 and 16 to mark the beginning of National Hispanic Heritage Week. President Lyndon B. Johnson issued the first Hispanic Heritage Week presidential proclamation.

On September 14, 1989, President George H.W. Bush became the first president to declare the 31-day period from September 15 to October 15 as National Hispanic Heritage Month.

“Not all of the contributions made by Hispanic Americans to our society are so visible or so widely celebrated, however. Hispanic Americans have enriched our nation beyond measure with the quiet strength of closely knit families and proud communities,” Bush said.

September 15 is significant because it is the anniversary of independence for Latin American countries Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. In addition, Mexico and Chile celebrate their independence days on September 16 and September 18, respectively.

The term Hispanic refers to people of any race who trace their ethnic roots to a country where Spanish is the main language, including Spain.

Latino refers to people of any race who trace their roots back to countries from the Caribbean, Mexico, and throughout Central and South America.

Today, thousands of Hispanic-American Service members throughout the world are protecting our nation.

Just as in generations past, we honor our Hispanic community—military and civilian—for their significant contributions to (or toward) protecting the United States and embodying the DoD values that unite us all as one team.