Veterans Day
2010
In a celebrity-obsessed culture where shows like “Dancing with the Stars” and “American Idol” generate large followings, it is important to remember just who the real stars of America are.

Commentator Ben Stein wrote several years ago, “The real star is the U.S. soldier who was sent to disarm a bomb next to the road north of Baghdad. He approached it and the bomb went off and killed him. A real star, the kind who haunts my memory night and day, is the U.S. soldier in Baghdad who saw a little girl playing with a piece of unexploded ordnance on a street near where he was guarding a station. He pushed her aside and threw himself on it – just as it exploded. He left a family in California and left a little girl alive in Baghdad.”
Veterans Day is a time to honor not just the heroes that Mr. Stein describes, but, in fact, all of the outstanding men and women who served in our nation’s Armed Forces since our founding more than 234 years ago.

President Calvin Coolidge was known as “Silent Cal” because he didn’t say very much, but he was positively profound when he said, “The nation which forgets its defenders will be itself forgotten.”

Not all veterans have seen war, but a common bond that they share is an oath in which they expressed their willingness to die defending this nation.

Perhaps most significant in preserving our way of life are the battles that America does not have to fight because those who wish us harm slink away in fear of the Coast Guard cutter, the Navy aircraft carrier or the Army soldier on patrol.
They have heard the stories of great American heroes like the late Jack Lucas, who earned a Medal of Honor fighting on Iwo Jima at age 17. Although he lied about his age to enlist in the Marine Corps, his family, friends and classmates were properly awestruck when he enrolled in high school after World War II, already possessing the nation’s highest military decoration.

The valor that defined warriors from previous generations continues today. Thousands of people lined the streets of Fitzgerald, Georgia, October 6th, to pay tribute to Senior Airman Michael Buras.

A member of an Air Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal Team, Airman Buras made the Supreme Sacrifice on September 21, in Kandahar, Afghanistan.
He died at age 23 because of wounds inflicted by an IED. He leaves behind a wife and one-year-old daughter.

We must be there to support not just the families of the fallen, but also the loved ones of those still deployed and those who return permanently changed by the wounds of war.

While we are happy to be here today to express our appreciation for our veterans, true appreciation is expressed through deeds – not words.

If you’re an employer, give extra weight to the experience and skills of the sailor-turned-job-applicant. Veterans preference is a requirement for government jobs, but it is also smart business for the private sector as well.
When an American Legion Auxiliary member asks for a donation for a poppy, remember the Korean War veteran in a hospital bed.

When a member of Congress complains about the cost of a veterans program, remind the lawmaker of the cost of being a veteran.

And don’t underestimate the power of simply saying “thank you” to veterans that you encounter. There are approximately 23 million living Americans that have earned the title, including those who continue to serve in uniform.
According to recent U.S. Army statistics, more than 665,000 active-duty soldiers have deployed for a year of combat in the Global War on Terrorism and nearly 300,000 active-duty soldiers have deployed twice of more. DoD recently estimated that nearly 40,000 U.S. service personnel have been wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan since hostilities began.

And while the military is undoubtedly stretched-thin, the burden is shared by men and women.

Women are major contributors to our military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan and many have given their lives in the War on Terrorism. VA must recognize the unique needs of our women veterans. They need to adequately treat breast and cervical cancer as well as trauma that resulted from domestic violence, sexual harassment and assault. America is home to 1.2 million women veterans and they deserve our support.
It is tragic that the men and women who allow us to be safe in our homes are often without homes themselves when they shed their uniforms.

23 percent of America’s homeless population are veterans.

89 percent of these homeless veterans were honorably discharged and 47 percent served during the Vietnam war.

America’s veterans have made great sacrifices for their country. Those costs have often included long separations from their families, missing the births of their children, freezing in sub-zero temperatures, exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam, losing limbs, and, far too often, losing their lives.

While America owes these heroes a debt that cannot be fully repaid, showing our appreciation is the least that we can do.
American Legion National Commander Jimmie Foster calls on members of The American Legion to be SAVED – that’s S-A-V-E-D: Serving America’s Veterans Every Day.

Whether it’s welcoming veterans home from deployment or volunteering at the local VA hospital, there is no shortage of opportunities to assist those who have given so much for their country.
In spite of the sacrifices that nearly all veterans have made and the horrors that some have experienced, the overwhelming majority are proud to have served. Nineteenth century British philosopher John Stuart Mill summed up the necessity of this special group of people when he wrote:

“War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things. The decayed state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth war is much worse. The person who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing which is more important than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself.”

Mill had it right. Fortunately, for all of us, America has been blessed throughout its history by many such men and women.
Thank you for being here, God Bless America and God Bless our veterans.

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