

Rep. Tom Tangretti

**Remarks – Veterans Day Assembly
Greensburg Central Catholic High School**

Friday, Nov. 10, 2006

Thank you students, teachers, administrators, other distinguished guests, and of course, veterans.

It is an honor to be here with you today to declare our love of this country and our thanks to all who defend her on this Veterans Day.

To the veterans who are with us today, who keep America safe and proud, I say thank you on behalf of every Pennsylvanian.

Today we honor the valor of your sacrifice and the legacy of your heroism, which is the freedom we so cherish.

The roots of Veterans Day can be traced to World War One, when on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918, an armistice was signed and a great victory was won.

*Brother
Knecht*
*HONORABLE
Jackets*

But it was not -- as the world had hoped at the time -- the "war to end all wars."

Since that time, evil has repeatedly reemerged in new lands with new tyrants rallying under different banners, though the cry for destruction and despair is always the same.

And though the forces of darkness have emerged to spread fear in peaceful lands for more than 200 years, they have been overwhelmed by the light of liberty carried by American fighting forces on the field of battle.

America remains today, as it was when she was founded: a bright beacon of hope for every human being whose soul longs for freedom.

America is a land built on the promise of a second chance for every person, a land where the trials and tears of yesterday are wiped away without penalty, where hope is reborn in the hearts of the hopeless the very instant someone sets foot on these shores.

The reason redemption is possible in America is because we are the freest nation ever to exist on the face of the earth.

But while America freely makes her gifts available to all, it is not without great cost.

The price of freedom is one that has been paid by every man and woman who has put on a uniform and patrolled occupied territory, or strapped into a cockpit and braved enemy fire, or quietly prayed on the somber journey from the ship to the beach.

It is a price that has been paid in the jungles of Southeast Asia and on the high seas of the Pacific; in the deserts of the Middle East, the fields of France and Italy, and in countless other places American forces have answered freedom's call.

It is a price that is written in every line upon a weary soldier's face, counted in every mother's tear and etched upon the broken heart of every speechless father whose son or daughter never came home.

But it is a price that must be paid by some, so that all of us may be free.

That is an important truth that it is the responsibility of my generation to teach to younger generations.

You may have heard the term “The Greatest Generation”...it is used to describe the men and women who fought and won World War Two, then went on in the 1950s and 60s to build an America that became the strongest, fairest and noblest nation on earth.

These men and women are called the Greatest Generation because they confronted great evil with great courage, and because they liberated millions without claiming one ounce of foreign soil except that which was suitable to bury their fallen friends.

Those great heroes didn't do what they did for glory or fame or medals, but because they had a sense of decency, a sense of purpose and an understanding that freedom is not free.

That is the same spirit that dwells inside every veteran, the spirit that defines the very essence of America, and that drives those serving today to stand for freedom, no matter the cost.

The freedom we have today is not the gift of academics, poets or politicians; it is the gift of soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines.

It is they who fight for inches of divided soil, who drop behind enemy lines outnumbered and outgunned, who take to the air and the seas not knowing if the present mission will be their last.

The free air we breathe, they have purchased.

The rights we espouse, they have protected.

The liberty we cherish, they have granted.

It is the duty of every person who takes up arms on behalf of this nation to answer the call whenever they are called, and our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines do so willingly.

They do so despite their own personal politics, and they do so despite our politics.

That is why it is our responsibility and our duty to support them.

I don't have to remind anyone here that the current fight that hundreds of thousands of our troops are engaged in is not popular everywhere...just as wars we have fought in the past have ^{been} supported by some and opposed by others.

But no matter what each of us believes about the war, or the reasons behind it, we owe the troops that are fighting that war the full measure of our support.

And when they return home, we will owe those brave men and women -- who will become our latest veterans -- the full measure of our support, and our gratitude.

Our troops do not ask for your beliefs before they take up their post, ready to sacrifice everything to defend those beliefs.

That is why your support and gratitude for that sacrifice should not be dependent on those beliefs, either.

Our troops' service to this nation is personal, not political.

Your support for them, and all our veterans, should mirror that.

That is why I say: to every veteran who has answered the call of duty, who has stood in harm's

way to protect the American Way of life, I offer the thanks of an indebted American citizen and a grateful Pennsylvanian.

May our veterans live every day they have left with pride, dignity and honor, and may those of us who enjoy the gifts of freedom, liberty, democracy and justice that our veterans have won for us provide them with that pride, dignity and honor.

They have earned it.

May the rest of us never forget it.

Thank you, God bless all of our veterans and all of these students – who will protect and spread freedom and the American ideal to future generations – and God bless America.

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