

I'M HAPPY TO BE HERE TODAY, AND VERY PLEASED TO PARTICIPATE IN A SPECIAL EVENT DURING A SPECIAL WEEK.

THE NATIONAL SALUTE TO HOSPITALIZED VETERANS IS,  
INDEED, A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS AMERICA'S COLLECTIVE SENSE OF RESPECT AND APPRECIATION FOR THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE SERVED IN OUR ARMED FORCES.

AND IT DOES OCCUR AT A SPECIAL TIME. IT'S NO ACCIDENT THAT THIS OBSERVANCE IS HELD DURING THE WEEK WE CELEBRATE VALENTINE'S DAY.

AS WE ALL KNOW -- ESPECIALLY THOSE OF US WHO'VE BEEN EMBARRASSED BY FORGETTING THE DATE ...

... FEBRUARY 14th IS A TRADITIONAL DAY FOR  
SENDING BEST WISHES AND EXPRESSIONS OF AFFECTION TO LOVED ONES AND CLOSE FRIENDS.

*America is #1  
Thanks to our Veterans*

-2-

**HISTORY TELLS US THE DAY IS NAMED FOR ST. VALENTINE, A CHRISTIAN BISHOP MARTYRED NEAR ROME ON THIS DATE IN THE THIRD CENTURY. BUT THE PRACTICE OF ATTACHING AFFECTIONATE SENTIMENTS TO THE DATE IS EXPLAINED ONLY IN VAGUE LEGEND.**

**THE MOST COMMON LEGEND HOLDS THAT IT'S BECAUSE THIS IS THE DAY ON WHICH BIRDS RETURN FROM WINTER MIGRATION TO MATE, REST, AND WELCOME SPRING.**

**WHATEVER THE FACTS ARE, FEBRUARY 14 HAS BECOME A DAY OF SPECIAL MEANING -- A DAY FOR THOUGHTFULNESS BETWEEN FRIENDS AND SINCERE CARING.**

**BEGINNING IN 1974, A NEW ELEMENT WAS ADDED TO THIS TRADITION WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THIS SALUTE PROGRAM.**

-3-

FEBRUARY 14 -- AND THE WEEK DURING WHICH IT  
OCCURS -- BECAME AN OPPORTUNITY FOR EXPRESSION OF  
CARING FOR A SPECIAL GROUP OF AMERICANS.

THESE ARE THE SOLDIERS, THE SAILORS AND MARINES;  
THE MEMBERS OF THE AIR FORCE AND COAST GUARD -- WHO  
HAVE SERVED OUR COUNTRY PROUDLY AND COURAGEOUSLY  
AROUND THE WORLD.

THEY NO LONGER WEAR THE UNIFORM. BUT THEY LEFT  
THEIR MARK ON HISTORY AT PLACES LIKE THE ARGONNE;  
OMAHA BEACH AND GUADALCANAL; THE CHOSEN (Cho Sir)  
RESERVOIR AND PORK CHOP HILL; KHE SANH (Kee Sawn) ,  
THE IA DRANG (ya drang) VALLEY, AND A HUNDRED RICE  
PADDIES AND JUNGLES IN VIETNAM.

-4-

BUT HISTORY LEFT ITS MARK ON THEM, TOO. MANY WERE WOUNDED OR INJURED DURING THEIR SERVICE. ALL BORE THE HARDSHIP OF BEING AWAY FROM HOMES, JOBS AND FAMILIES.

AND TODAY, SOME STILL BEAR THE SCARS OF THEIR SERVICE. MORE THAN SIXTY THOUSAND PATIENTS WILL SPEND TONIGHT IN A VA MEDICAL CENTER.

THESE ARE MEN AND WOMEN WHO DESERVE THE PERSONAL APPRECIATION OF THEIR FELLOW CITIZENS. MEN AND WOMEN WHO SHOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN.

AS A BENEFACTOR OF THEIR SERVICE, IT IS EVERY AMERICAN'S RESPONSIBILITY TO SHOW OUR VETERANS THAT THEY ARE NOT FORGOTTEN.

-5-

IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO EXPRESS TO THEM OUR  
HEARTFELT THANKS AND APPRECIATION; OUR RESPONSIBILITY  
TO LET THEM KNOW SOMEONE CARES. THAT'S WHAT THE  
NATIONAL SALUTE IS ALL ABOUT.

THE FACT THAT VALENTINE'S DAY IS HEAVILY  
COMMERCIALIZED RAISES NATURAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE  
SINCERITY OF THE EXCHANGE OF CARDS AND GIFTS.

BUT WITHIN VA THERE IS NO QUESTIONING THE  
SINCERITY OF THOSE VOLUNTEERS, OFFICIALS,  
CELEBRITIES, AND ORDINARY CITIZENS -- YOUNG AND OLD  
-- WHO VISIT VA HOSPITALS BY THE THOUSANDS FOR  
PURPOSES SUCH AS THIS.

THE NATIONAL SALUTE TO HOSPITALIZED VETERANS TAPS  
THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WHO HAVE  
ALWAYS CARE ABOUT THEIR VETERANS.

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go to page  
8*

-6-

ADVICE COLUMNIST ANN LANDERS HAS ASKED HER MILLIONS OF READERS TO VISIT HOSPITALIZED VETERANS OR SEND A CARD. LAST YEAR ONE AND A HALF MILLION PEOPLE FOLLOWED HER ADVICE.

IT'S BEEN SAID THAT WHEN THE NIGHT IS DARKEST, WE CAN BEST SEE THE STARS. WELL, TIMES DO SEEM A BIT DARK FOR SOME OF OUR HOSPITALIZED VETERANS, AND -- THIS WEEK -- THE STARS ARE OUT FOR THEM.

~~DURING THE WEEK OF THE SALUTE, MOVIE STAR KEVIN DOBSON -- WHO APPEARS IN THE TELEVISION SERIES "KNOT'S LANDING" AND OTHER MOVIES -- IS AMONG MANY ENTERTAINMENT PERSONALITIES VISITING HOSPITALIZED VETERANS.~~

-7-

AS CHAIRMAN OF THIS YEAR'S SALUTE, MR. DOBSON HAS  
URGED ALL AMERICANS TO VISIT HOSPITALIZED VETERANS  
THIS WEEK.

SO MANY OF YOU PRESENT HERE HAVE BEEN -- AND WILL  
BE -- THOSE STARS -- STARS THAT PROVIDE LIGHT AND  
SHINING MOMENTS, WHEN TIMES SEEM DARKEST FOR SOME OF  
OUR PATIENTS.

THAT DIMENSION OF KINDNESS -- THE HUMAN TOUCH,  
WHICH IS THE ESSENCE OF VOLUNTARISM -- IS OF  
TREMENDOUS IMPORTANCE IN OUR VA SYSTEM.

AFTER ALL, VOLUNTARISM IS A STRONG PART OF OUR  
NATIONAL CHARACTER. PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND  
BACKGROUNDS WILLINGLY GIVE THEIR TIME AND ENERGY TO  
VOLUNTEER WORK. TODAY, THERE ARE MORE THAN 87  
THOUSAND REGULARLY SCHEDULED VOLUNTEERS WORKING IN VA  
MEDICAL CENTERS.

-8-

OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS WE HAVE SEEN A SURGE OF  
ACTIVITY AND A REKINDLING OF THIS AMERICAN  
TRADITION. THESE WONDERFUL MEN AND WOMEN GAVE 13  
MILLION HOURS OF THEIR TIME LAST YEAR TO WORK WITH  
HOSPITALIZED VETERANS.

SO THE VOLUNTEERS ARE KEY PEOPLE IN THIS SALUTE;  
THEY'RE THE ONES MAKING IT WORK. THEY HAVE OUR  
HEARTFELT THANKS FOR WHAT THEY'RE DOING AND FOR WHAT  
THEY CONTINUE TO DO.

X IN CLOSING, I WOULD LIKE TO PASS ON SOME VERY  
PROFOUND AND TOUCHING THOUGHTS ABOUT THIS SALUTE TO  
HOSPITALIZED VETERANS, WHICH RECENTLY WERE SENT OUT

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-9-

... ON THAT SIMPLE BUT DISTINCTIVE STATIONARY  
THAT BEARS THE INSCRIPTION: "THE WHITE HOUSE,  
WASHINGTON."

HERE IS THE NATIONAL SALUTE MESSAGE FROM THE  
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, TO OUR HOSPITALIZED  
VETERANS:

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"RECENT EVENTS HAVE FILLED OUR HEARTS WITH  
RENEWED HOPE AND OPTIMISM THAT DEMOCRACY AND FREEDOM  
WILL EVENTUALLY SPREAD TO ALL PARTS OF THE GLOBE.

"THE UNITED STATES SERVES AS A SYMBOL OF LIBERTY  
AND INDEPENDENCE FOR THOSE NATIONS BEGINNING THEIR  
EXPERIMENT IN DEMOCRACY, AND THIS IS DUE IN GREAT  
MEASURE TO CITIZENS SUCH AS YOU WHO HAVE SACRIFICED  
TO ENSURE THAT OUR GREAT NATION WOULD REMAIN STRONG  
AND FREE.

-10-

"YOU HAVE AMERICA'S HEARTFELT THANKS FOR YOUR  
DEDICATED SERVICE. WE WILL NEVER FORGET YOUR  
DEVOTION AND ALL YOU HAVE DONE TO PRESERVE AND  
PROTECT AMERICA."

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SPEAKING FOR EVERYONE PRESENT AT THIS SALUTE  
CEREMONY, LET ME SAY, WE ECHO THE PRESIDENT'S  
FEELINGS.

SPEAKING FOR MYSELF, LET ME SAY IT IS CERTAINLY A  
GREAT PRIVILEGE TO BE IN THE COMPANY OF SO MANY  
PEOPLE WHO CARE SO MUCH ABOUT OUR HOSPITALIZED  
VETERANS. THAT IS A TRADITION THAT WE ARE PROUD OF  
AND A TRADITION THAT WE INTEND TO KEEP.

THANK YOU AND GOD BLESS YOU, AND GOD BLESS OUR  
VETERANS.