

Good morning/afternoon everyone. It's my pleasure and privilege to be with you here this morning as we pay tribute to the veterans who have served -- and those who are currently serving -- this great nation.

Some of those heroes are here today at Name of Senior Center. We salute you, and we are eternally grateful for your valor and sacrifice.

As I'm sure most of you here today know, this tradition of honoring our veterans began in 1919 as Armistice Day to recognize those who died fighting in the First World War. Congress broadened the scope of this national holiday in 1954 to honor all veterans.

We take this opportunity to honor veterans who fought in our nation's wars. Combat veterans are naturally the first people we think of this day as we pay special homage to those who faced the horrors of combat. They have earned our nation's deepest admiration.

But a veteran is also that soldier, sailor, airman, marine and Coast Guardsman who served during peacetime, either on active duty or in the reserves. Our veterans represent those who were drafted and those who voluntarily signed up.

Also, this is a day to honor those veterans who did not return home from the battlefield . . . those who made the ultimate sacrifice and, therefore, are absent from celebrations such as this one.

And finally, on this day, we appreciate those men and women serving in today's military . . .

those who will be tomorrow's veterans. They have inherited the defense of the nation and stand guard in the shadow of their predecessors.

Tomorrow's veterans – today's soldiers – are not only recognized as trusted war fighters, but are also known as the champions of homeland defense. . .

For in today's world, our nation need not be at war for our military to be serving at great risk or hardship.

Tomorrow's veterans are also charged with tackling one of the grimmest realities ever to threaten America –terrorism.

Since even before Sept. 11, 2001, disaster response teams have constantly rehearsed and prepared for quick reaction should a terrorist attack hit American soil. This is a new – and ugly – type of warfare that many of you here today were never trained to defend against.

Our nation's veterans – today's and tomorrow's – answer a very serious, very critical call. They defend American lives and principles abroad, as well as right here at home.

Therefore, today we honor past, current and future veterans.

We lead busy lives and it is natural – because we're all human – to take for granted or overlook the service and sacrifice our veterans have given us. That is why holidays like this are so critically important.

We are a grateful nation, remembering veterans' sacrifices and service in both war and peace, in both far-off lands and right here on the American home front.

I firmly believe that America will endure as long as we continue to have valiant men and women in the armed services who are willing to fight for the ideals that we hold sacred.

Whenever our freedom is endangered, these heroes rise to the challenge. This nation remains a free nation only because our veterans fought to keep it that way.

President Calvin Coolidge once said: "A nation which forgets its defenders will itself be forgotten."

Our gathering today demonstrates that we have not forgotten, nor will we ever forget.

May God bless the United States and may He bless all of our American heroes... those of yesterday, today and tomorrow. They are the guardians of our liberty.

Before we close today, I would like to ask all the veterans in the audience to stand or raise their hand and be recognized. (PAUSE)

Each of you knows only too well that Freedom is Not Free. A grateful nation thanks you.

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