

**The
American
Legion**



For God and country

Suggested Speech

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Veterans Day 2017

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Fifty years ago, gratitude was in short supply among many segments of the American public.

Heroes returned from Vietnam and were discouraged from wearing their uniforms in public places due to the disrespectful actions of some protestors and others who disagreed with policies that were set by our elected officials.

Too often the protestors failed to realize that it was not the campus agitator who ensured our First Amendment rights. It was the military veteran.

Diane Carlson Evans recently described what it was like to be a U.S. Army nurse in Vietnam.

“You didn’t worry about the little things like dying,” she told The American Legion Magazine. “We had so many casualties to take care of. We were never bored. Our patients came first.”

A lot of things came first to our veterans. Country first. Mission first. Comrades first.

James McCloughan is in the Michigan High School Coaches Association hall of Fame and in the Olivet College Athletic Hall of Fame. But before he became a teacher and coach, he served in Vietnam.

“This medal is about love,” he said this year, as President Trump presented him with the nation’s highest award, the Medal of Honor.

Mr. McCloughan, who was a combat medic, spoke of “a love so deep in the soul of 89 men,” – men, who fought on a hill alongside him.

He said, quote -“I shall do my best to represent those men as the caretaker of this symbol of courage and action beyond the call of duty,”--unquote.

That’s what veterans do. They put others first.

Today is Veterans Day. It is a day that we put Veterans first.

And putting Veterans first also means support and care for their families. It is why President Lincoln famously included widows and orphans when he promised to “care for him who shall have borne the battle.”

It is why American Legion National Commander Denise H. Rohan has encouraged posts around the country – and even overseas – to open their doors and invite veterans and families from their communities to enjoy Veterans Day Dinner and learn more about our own American Legion Families.

You don't have to live in a military town to know veterans. Veterans are everywhere – sometimes proudly wearing a service cap or military t-shirt. Other times quietly blending in the background.

By virtue of your attendance here, you likely have an appreciation for veterans. The people here are veterans, friends of veterans, family of veterans, co-workers of veterans and neighbors of veterans. It is up to us to ensure that every veteran feels that his or her service to this country is appreciated by their fellow Americans. There are many tangible ways that we can acknowledge their sacrifice, but the easiest is to simply say “Thank you for what you have done for our country.”

As a nation, we should commit to serve our veterans as well as they have served us. Twenty veterans a day take their own lives. This is a tragedy for all Americans, since so many of these veterans have never recovered from invisible wounds that they incurred while defending us. If he is showing signs of unhappiness or depression, encourage him to seek help through the VA immediately. If she has had difficulty obtaining the benefits that she is entitled to, let her know that The American Legion has thousands of trained service officers nationwide that will help her navigate the bureaucracy free of charge.

Veterans Day is a time to honor not just those who have fought for us in battle, but, in fact, all of the outstanding men and women who served in our nation's Armed Forces since our founding more than 241 years ago.

Peacetime or wartime, all veterans have taken an oath indicating that they were willing to offer their lives to defend our Constitution and country. Often times it is the intimidating sight of an Army Ranger team, a Navy destroyer, an Air Force fighter jet, Marine Corps artillery or a Coast Guard cutter than deters an enemy from harming us. Most veterans will agree that the best wars are the ones that are never fought.

But when war is necessary, America's fighting men and women always come forward and put their country first.

Just five years after liberating two continents in the Second World War, they again answered the call in Korea, where 35,000 Americans made the ultimate sacrifice so others could be free.

Generations later, they served in places like the Persian Gulf, Beirut, Grenada, Panama, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Today, men and women in uniform are providing humanitarian aid and rescuing victims of natural disasters. Some serve in war zones and risk their lives on a daily basis. Some are Reservists and some are in the National Guard. And while each takes pride in their branch of service, when an enemy threatens or a mission surfaces – they join together as one family and meet the challenge.

That is what veterans do. Country first.

How else could you describe the motives of someone who undergoes rigorous training, submits themselves to demanding superiors and uproots their lives for minimal pay and long hours?

When we hear about our high national debt, we should not minimize it, but we need to remember a higher debt. The one that we owe to those who have given so much to us.

We need to remember that to them war is not a mere history lesson or subject of a book. For them, the battles continue even after the firing stops and their return home is complete.

We need to remember that veterans' benefits are a cost of war and a necessary part of fielding a strong national defense.

We need to remember the sacrifices made, the lives lost and the lost family time.

We need to remember that Veterans Day is also freedom's day.

Veterans put us first and today we put veterans first.

Thank you for being here, God Bless America and God Bless our veterans.

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