

Thank you for that introduction. I want to begin by saying I appreciate the opportunity to be here, and I am happy to be here. I want to thank Mrs. Embry for the invitation, and I want to express my appreciation for each of you that are here this morning. I know some of you didn't have a choice in that, but I'm glad you're here anyway. So welcome to students, faculty, and staff, many of whom are friends of mine, and members of our community. To my fellow veterans in the crowd, happy Veterans' Day, and thank you for your service.

On a personal note, my annual Veterans Day tradition is to sit in a deer stand and text guys I served with during my years in the Navy and wish them Happy Veterans Day. I will tell you that I got about halfway through that celebration this morning, and hopefully will get back out and finish that ritual this afternoon.

I am a 1989 graduate of Butler County High School, in fact earlier this month I was able to attend my 35-year class reunion. That reunion was a full-circle moment for me. It was the first-class reunion that I have attended, and it reminded me that when my 10-year reunion occurred, I was in the Adriatic Sea, off the coast of Kosovo, flying search & rescue missions and preparing to participate in what became the largest amphibious landing of US forces in Europe since World War 2. That was one of many times I recall thinking, "you're a long way from Morgantown, Ky." And I would guarantee that every veteran in this room and any veteran you might talk to would tell you that at one time or another, that same thought crossed their mind.

I want to begin by saying some things about veterans as a group. I know that you know that veterans generally are proud of their service. You can often recognize us by the ballcaps we wear. But the important thing to realize is the difference between personal pride and

pride in service. Veterans are usually not particularly proud of their personal service – they are not likely to brag about their own personal exploits or regale you with stories in which they are the hero – most believe that whatever they may have done, that the person next to them was asked to do just as much. They understand that some did less, and many did more - but what we take pride in is being part of something bigger than ourselves; part of a team devoted to sacrificial service to others. And that service is what we are gathered here today to remember and celebrate. But beyond what we do today, remember that sacrificial service leaves us as Americans indebted to our veterans to safeguard what they have preserved for us and handed down to us . President Ronald Reagan, said it this way:

*"Veterans know better than anyone else the price of freedom, for they've suffered the scars of war. We can offer them no better tribute than to protect what they have won for us."*

So, today, we celebrate Veterans Day – a day that America has set aside to honor the millions of men and women who have defended our country and preserved our peace and freedom. This tradition dates from early in the last century. Veterans Day was originally called Armistice Day, and was first celebrated in 1919, the year that our country commemorated the armistice that ended World War One. A war that was supposed to be the war that ended all wars. One hundred-five years have passed since then. And the First World War did not end all wars. Threats to freedom did not end, and neither did the heroic service and sacrifices of Americans in defense of our freedom. The men who fought on the fields of France have been joined by heroes from Guadalcanal and Omaha Beach, Mig Alley and the frozen Chosin, from Khe Sanh and the A Shau Valley, to Beirut. Our most recent veterans - those still serving and those who have in the near past come back from

Afghanistan and Iraq - carried on with the same dedication and valor as their brothers-in-arms that came before them. America's best continue to give of themselves for us, and for freedom-loving people everywhere. That is the point. Our veterans have given their best for all of us, and we must continue to do our best by them.

Veterans answered the call to serve. The call to serve is different for everyone. There are those who volunteered, there are those who were drafted, there are those who joined the military to avoid jail time, and there are those who joined as a means to pay for college. That really doesn't matter. When you are waiting for your turn to jump out of an airplane, or when you are in line humping through a jungle, or rice paddy, or across the desert, or when you are working on a 115-degree flight deck in the Persian Gulf, it makes no difference how you got there. You are part of a team, working together, for each other, and in service to the ideals and interests of the United States of America.

I believe that throughout our history most have served this country because we believe our country has been a force for good. Our military has fought to defend rights, freedoms, and ideas, not to seize territory nor enrich ourselves. Nevertheless, it is important to make a distinction between the politics and national interests that cause wars and the individuals who simply do their duty. There have been and will be times when Americans can disagree about if or how we should be involved in a military conflict, but we should never confuse opposition to the "why" we are fighting with justification for disrespect or antagonism for those who are doing our fighting. I am thankful that, for the most part, our country has seemed to figure that out. That was not always the case. I will tell you personally, I have felt uncomfortable and even embarrassed at times for how well veterans of my generation, the

Gulf War, Iraq, and Afghanistan have been honored and treated so well. Knowing that our brothers who served in Vietnam did not receive the gratitude from this nation that they deserved. So, let me ask you this, every time you see an old guy with a Vietnam veteran cap on, make a special effort to thank him for his service. He earned it. Just like his dad and uncles did in World War 2 and Korea. So, to the Vietnam veterans in the audience, thank you.

I don't intend to use all of the time that I have been graciously allotted this morning. I may not have learned much in my life, but I do know that no one ever got in trouble with their audience for making a speech shorter than expected. So, for the purpose of focusing our thinking during our time together, I want to leave you with three simple points as a way to think about Veterans Day. I'm going to suggest that observing veterans' day is about these 3 things: honoring our past, respecting our present, and protecting our future.

The first one is the obvious one, honoring our past. Veterans Day is about remembering those who have served throughout the history of our nation. It is the realization that we enjoy freedom and prosperity because of their sacrifices. Sacrifices that are unique among Americans but common among veterans. Veterans know about separation. Whether that word makes you think about being sent long distances from home and familiar surroundings, or if your mind goes to lengthy separations away from the places and people you love. Veterans know about both. Both take a toll, physically, emotionally, and psychologically. And as you think about being thousands of miles away from home and months apart from you loved ones, you may think, "I don't know if I could do that." Well, remember because of our veterans. You don't have to. Veterans have done that for you.

Remember that and be thankful for that. The greatest pleasure for any veteran is just knowing that folks enjoy the way of life that we have defended, and the highest tribute is to know that you appreciate it. Honor our past by honoring those who have sacrificed so much with the hope that you won't have to. Honor our past by personally thanking the veterans in your life. Not just one day a year. Let them know that you appreciate their service. Every veteran has his or her own story to tell. Ask them, listen to them, then thank them.

Second, I want to challenge you by telling you that Veterans Day is also about respecting our present. Each time our nation has called upon its citizens to serve, the best have come forward. That unbroken chain of heroes continues today. So, when you see one of our young men and women in uniform on the street or in a restaurant, how about a smiling "hello" or a "thank you." As a veteran, I'll tell you what I do. When I see active-duty personnel in uniform in a restaurant, I will go by and thank them for their service, and when I can work it out with their waiter, I try to pick up their check. Let me just add - I think that is a great idea. Especially if any of you see me out somewhere.

Respect our present by showing patriotism. Be proud to be an American. Respect our flag. Stand for the anthem. And, guys, remove your hat. Don't make me yell at you. Because I will, and my wife will be embarrassed, and I'll get in trouble, and it will be your fault.

And finally, Protecting our future. Be cognizant that there are those that are serving right now, safeguarding our freedom. As we move into this holiday season, realize that there are thousands of Americans who will not be home for Thanksgiving or Christmas this year. Let me give you some statistics: There are approximately 290,000 DOD personnel permanently stationed overseas, in addition to another 150,000 temporarily deployed personnel.

Combined with those who will be on duty stateside any given day, more than half a million Americans will not sleep in their bed tonight, so that you can safely sleep in yours. They are protecting our future. Don't take them for granted, don't forget about them. And when they get home and you see them, thank them for their service.

I will close with another quote from President Reagan. Listen, if anything I have said today has in any way inspired you to be grateful to our veterans then I will have accomplished my task. My point is just to remind us of the great debt we owe all our veterans. WE have talked about what gratitude looks like in some specific circumstances. But ultimately gratitude is more than what you can do in a particular situation. Gratitude ultimately is about what you remember and understand that someone else has done for you. Here's how President Reagan said it.

*If we remember that their dedicated service is in defense of our freedom and if we understand that they put their lives on the line so we might enjoy justice and liberty, then their sacrifices will not be in vain. This is our obligation. And this has been the spirit of Veterans Day from the beginning.*

Thank you.