

A New Generation of Heroes

Dr Keating, Dr Hafner, Capt Benke, Capt Sarra, Col Arkins, distinguished guests, classmates, fellow veterans, families and friends, it is an honor to speak to you today.

First, let me begin by saying that these remarks are mine and mine alone. They do not represent the Department of Defense, the Massachusetts National Guard or Boston College.

This annual Veterans Day event is the result of on-going efforts of the Boston College Veterans' Alumni Network, Army ROTC, Campus Ministry and the University. It was built upon the legacy of the alumni who are veterans of the World War II, Korea, Vietnam Gulf War and Cold War eras. As a cold warrior myself, I would like to thank those whose vision and foresight resulted in this solemn ceremony to honor the sacrifices made by those who came before us.

Today I want to focus my remarks on a different group of warriors. I want to highlight for you today, those Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, Airmen and Coastguardsmen currently serving this great nation. They are white, black, Asian, and Hispanic. They are men and women. They are come from all over the Country and from all socio-economic backgrounds. They are remarkable in their diversity. What brings them together? They all – 100% of them – joined, reenlisted or stayed on duty, during a time of war. The majority of these individuals were heavily influenced by the events of 9/11. They not only assimilated 9/11's message, they ran to the sound of the guns to take up their Nation's arms. They joined knowing they were likely to be deployed in harm's way. With a full understanding that some things are more important than personal

safety, these young men and women stood up to be measured. They became a part of the other 1%; those who have served this great nation.

As we here today know, it takes a profound strength to wear this Nation's uniforms. To serve in the United States Armed Forces takes a commitment to service above self. It takes strength of character to sublimate your personal comfort, your rights and your safety to a concept such as national interest. The bonds that are forged through shared dangers and long tours of duty far from home transcend and supplant the ties of polite society. The experiences of unity of effort and shared purpose can never be un-learned.

This remarkable cohort of young people came of age during a unique time in our history and answered the call of their nation. Knowing they would be sent into harm's way, they volunteered to serve.

We are now in the process of wrapping up this decade of conflict. Operation Iraqi Freedom transitioned to New Dawn, which then ended last year. Operation Enduring Freedom is winding down after successful surge operations and as an economically weary Nation sets its sights closer to home. Hundreds and thousands of service members face the transition back to civilian life. This transition will be their biggest challenge. Faced with civilian employers who have little experience or direct knowledge of the depth and breadth of military responsibilities, Veterans return home to record levels of unemployment. I was in Afghanistan this time last year. During the deployment, our Command recognized that one-third of the 700 National Guard Soldiers and Airmen in the Task Force would return home without civilian employment. As recently as September, unemployment for post-9/11 Veterans was 9.7%, almost two

percent higher than the national average. The rate for post -9/11 Female Veterans was 19.9%. This is not a fitting welcome home.

A great many resources have been marshaled to focus on this problem. The Department of Defense, Veterans' Administration and the Service Departments are working together to assist Veterans in transition. This year, President Obama signed legislation providing tax breaks for companies that hire Veterans. Last year, JPMorgan Chase and a number of leading U.S. companies launched the 100,000 Jobs Mission with a goal of hiring 100,000 transitioning service members and military veterans by 2020.

Yet this is not enough. The Marine Corps states: Once a Marine, Always a Marine. The Army states: Once a Soldier, a Soldier for Life. These are not merely the mottos of fraternal organizations. They outline a covenant that exists through time that connects generations of warriors. From 1636 when the Massachusetts Militia was formed, to today, each generation has looked out for the next. It is up to us here today, to assist this new generation of Heroes in their transition to civilian life and in finding meaningful employment. We must be their advocates, their mentors and their role models.

As successful members of civilian society you have lived both worlds. You can help young service men and women translate their military experience into language that will resonate with hiring managers. You can help to increase their networks to link them to employers. You can reach out to let them know that they are not alone and that there is, and will always be, a support network for them.

You can encourage businesses to hire these Veterans, and remind them that Veterans make exceptional employees in any organization because in serving their country they have acquired invaluable skills, including:

- Decision-making skills primed by quick, clear thinking.
- Proven leadership skills, honed in the most challenging operational environments.
- The knowledge and experience needed to be sophisticated team-builders and natural team-players.
- A work ethic that demonstrates an unwavering commitment to excellence.

See the strength of our Veterans and look for ways help them. Just remember as we go forth today our Veterans are strong and resilient, creative and determined. “Once a Marine, Always a Marine.” “Once a Soldier, a Soldier for Life.” These are not mere words. They are a continuing call to action. We must heed this call to action and support today’s Veterans, and this generation will join the remarkable generations of men and women who wore this uniform and left an enduring mark on this nation.

Doctrine tells us to meet the enemy with the smallest possible force. In my world this is a point-man. The vanguard for the fire team, squad, platoon, company, He or She is the single point through which the might of a Nation is channeled to defeat our enemies. Somewhere in the world, right now, far from home, and in harm’s way, an American son or daughter is on point. He or she cannot worry about the future. He or she is laser focused on the current mission and counts on the Soldiers on the left and right to cover the flanks.

We must have their backs.

Thank you,