

November 2005 - A Veterans Day Message to Our Children

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by Congressman Jerry Moran

November 11, 2005

Thank you so much for the opportunity to be here today. In the presence of those who have sacrificed so much I am humbled. There is no group of people I hold in higher regard than veterans. Because of you veterans, we live in the strongest, freest, greatest country in the world. Throughout history, our country has been blessed to have men and women willing to answer the call to duty and accomplish great things for the benefit of their fellow man.

One year ago this week, Kansas experienced a great loss when two Kansans were killed in the War in Iraq. Sergeant First Class Clinton Wisdom and Sergeant Don Clary were the first Kansas Army National Guard soldiers to die in combat since the Vietnam War; both were members of the 2nd Battalion, 130th Field Artillery based in northeast Kansas. On November 8, 2004, these Kansas Guardsmen were providing protection to a convoy in Baghdad when a suicide bomber sped toward them. Without hesitation, these men placed their own vehicle between the bomber and the convoy. Both were killed in the explosion. Their actions saved many lives that day.

Shortly thereafter a soldier who served alongside Wisdom and Clary wrote a letter from Iraq to his three daughters back home. It was published in his hometown newspaper last year during the week of Veterans Day. The soldier wrote:

Hello girls, I have something very important to tell you about this war and the meaning of Veterans Day. Sometimes on Veterans Day, we lose connection to the real meaning of the day. Sweethearts, I've just returned from the memorial service that was held for two very special soldiers. These two men were taken from this world on Monday of this very week protecting our unit.

You might think that Army soldiers are tough and don't need to have time for this. It is exactly the opposite sweethearts. We too, need time to grieve over the loss of friends and family. A British soldier played the bagpipes as we assembled for the service. The memorial stand had a pair of empty desert combat boots with M-16 rifles pointed down beside the shoes. Their Kevlar helmets were placed on top of the upturned rifles. The unit that lost the men was called to attention and then role call was made. Each man responded to their individual names. Only silence responded to the names of the fallen heroes. The names were called out three times according to custom before the name is marked as 'not present'.

Shortly afterward, a wonderful trumpet played the mournful notes of "TAPS" while the entire unit saluted. Upon conclusion, each soldier in the entire unit then had a chance to march up to the temporary memorials and render one final salute to their dear friends. Some spent time on their knees in quiet remembrance of their friends. There were many tears among this 'band of brothers' today. Yes girls, soldiers cry too.

Sooner or later all of us will pass on from this life, but those who willingly give their lives for others certainly are true heroes. Jesus once taught the world that, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." That is one way to know that these two men were real-life heroes.

I am so looking forward to seeing you again and being together. I will give you extra hugs and kisses because I know that there are children who will not get them from their dad who was taken away on Monday.

Love you,

Papa

Like the soldier who wrote his daughters, it is our responsibility to ensure that our children and grandchildren appreciate the sacrifices made by those serving our country and never forget them. Each year, as the percentage of our population who has worn a uniform declines, fewer and fewer individuals and families have a personal connection with the military. Instilling in America's youth an awareness of the contributions of veterans past and present becomes even more important.

Even though many Americans will not serve, knowledge of those who have served is essential. The traits we learn from veterans - courage, honor, duty, sacrifice, patriotism, heroism - are characteristics that make us better citizens. Their everyday acts inspire us to reach beyond our limits. Their losses remind us to live a life worthy of their sacrifice. And through their service on our behalf, we remember the obligations we owe. These are important lessons only a veteran can teach us.

It is our task to share with our children that Veterans Day is more than a day off school or a department store sale. It's a day to honor the more than 250,000 veterans in Kansas and the 25 million nationwide, as well as their families, who stepped forward to defend our country. It's a day to pay tribute to those who have given so much.

There is concern today about a lack of heroes. If people have no heroes, it is because we are looking for heroes in the wrong places. We look at those who hit home runs, make touchdowns or shoot three-pointers. Those people are athletes, not heroes. Today's heroes are charging through the desert, fighting for the causes of freedom and peace. Today's heroes believe in freedom, and this belief is tested every day, as our men and women in uniform face the perils of war.

It is appropriate that we ask God to watch over our heroes and bring them home safely. I recently attended a funeral service of one of our nation's leaders. The hymn, "Mansions of the Lord," closed the memorial service.

To fallen soldiers let us sing

Where no rockets fly nor bullets wing

Our broken brothers let us bring

To the mansions of the Lord

No more bleeding, no more fight

No prayers pleading through the night

Just divine embrace, eternal light

In the mansions of the Lord

Where no mothers cry and no children weep

We will stand and guard though the angels sleep

Through the ages safely keep

The mansions of the Lord

We gather here today to honor those who have gone to their eternal home, those who now reside in the mansions of their Lord. Some served long ago, while some served just yesterday. I pray that our reasons for living are as good as theirs were for dying.

May we always remember.

May we always be proud.

May we always be prepared.

So we may always be free.

God bless our service men and women, our veterans and the country they so dearly love.