

**RICHARD DENOYER, VFW COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
ACCEPTANCE SPEECH
SEPTEMBER 1, 2011**

THANK YOU, COMRADES ... THANK YOU FOR THIS GREAT HONOR AND TRUST. I WILL NOT LET THIS GREAT ORGANIZATION DOWN.

BEFORE I BEGIN, I MUST FIRST THANK MY GREAT DEPARTMENT OF MASSACHUSETTS ... DISTRICT 18 ... AND MY POST 1012 IN MEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS ... FOR YOUR FAITH AND SUPPORT. I ALSO EXTEND MY SINCERE THANKS TO PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF CLIFFORD OLSON FOR SWEARING ME IN TODAY.

TO PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF TOMMY TRADEWELL AND PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RICHARD EUBANK ... THANK YOU FOR YOUR GUIDANCE, LEADERSHIP AND FRIENDSHIP.

I WANT TO CONGRATULATE NEW SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF JOHN HAMILTON FROM FLORIDA ... AND WELCOME ABOARD NEW JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BILL THIEN FROM INDIANA.

I ALSO WANT TO CONGRATULATE NEW VFW LADIES AUXILIARY NATIONAL PRESIDENT GWEN RANKIN FROM CALIFORNIA. I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH YOU TO BETTER BOTH OUR ORGANIZATIONS.

I WANT TO THANK SOME GREAT FRIENDS FOR THEIR SUPPORT AND COUNSEL ... PAUL AND CATHIE CHEVALIER ... RONNIE AND CAROL CUFF ... YOLANDA PARRENTI ... NEW NATIONAL CHIEF OF STAFF WALLY GANSENBERG AND ANNETTE SCOPPA ... PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GEORGE LISICKI AND HIS WIFE, GLORIA. ... AND MARY MARTIN AND MY BROTHER-IN-LAW, LOU STIFANO.

TO MY CHILDREN ... RICK AND ANNETTE ... DAUGHTER-IN-LAW MARGARET ... SON-IN-LAW MARIO ... AND MY

GRANDCHILDREN ... JOHNNY, VICKIE, JOSH, JULIE, LIVIE AND RICHIE ... THANK YOU FOR SHARING THIS GREAT DAY WITH US. IT MEANS SO MUCH TO HAVE YOU HERE.

AND TO THE LOVE OF MY LIFE ... MY WIFE, THERESA ... THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT ... FOR YOUR LOVE ... AND FOR YOUR EQUALLY GREAT SERVICE TO THIS GREAT ORGANIZATION.

(PAUSE)

COMRADES, THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES WAS BORN 112 YEARS AGO DURING A TIME OF WAR.

WHEN OUR FOUNDERS RETURNED HOME, THERE WERE NO GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS TO CARE FOR THEIR DISABILITIES OR THEIR REHABILITATION ... NO VA ... NO GI BILL ... NO HOME LOANS ... AND VIRTUALLY NO QUALITY OF LIFE PROGRAMS FOR THOSE WHO STAYED IN UNIFORM.

NOW FAST-FORWARD TO 2011. WE ARE STILL A NATION AT WAR, BUT OUR DEPARTMENTS OF DEFENSE AND VETERANS AFFAIRS ARE THE ENVY OF THE WORLD FOR THE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES THEY PROVIDE TO THE PEOPLE WHO TAKE CARE OF THE MISSION.

BUT WHAT THE WORLD DOESN'T KNOW IS THAT IT TOOK A CONCERTED EFFORT BY YOUR VFW TO FORCE THE U.S. GOVERNMENT TO TAKE CARE OF THOSE SHE SENDS TO WAR.

AND WHAT THE WORLD ALSO DOESN'T KNOW IS THAT OUR FIGHT IS FAR FROM FINISHED ... ESPECIALLY DURING THESE CHALLENGING ECONOMIC TIMES ... WHERE SOME NOW EQUATE NATIONAL SACRIFICE TO THE SIZE OF HEALTHCARE PREMIUMS.

REGRETTABLY, EVEN THOUGH OUR ALL-VOLUNTEER MILITARY HAS SHOULDERED A MULTI-THEATER WAR ALL BY THEMSELVES FOR ALMOST 10 YEARS, EVEN AS WE MEET SOME IN CONGRESS HAVE PROPOSED PLANS THAT WOULD LEAVE AMERICA'S MILITARY AND HER VETERANS TO SHOULDER MORE

OF THE NATIONAL DEBT. INDEED THERE IS, IN FACT, A “10 FOR 10” PLAN CURRENTLY IN CONGRESS— THAT PLAN IF ENACTED, WOULD CUT 10 SPECIFIC BENEFITS TO PAY FOR THE 10 YEARS OF WAR OUR TROOPS HAVE BORNE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF FIGHTING.

INCONCEIVABLY, IN SPITE OF THEIR MAGNIFICENT SERVICE AND TREMENDOUS SACRIFICE TO THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES, SOME IN CONGRESS ARE SEEKING TO:

- INCREASE HEALTHCARE PREMIUMS FOR MILITARY RETIREES ON TRICARE
- INCREASE PHARMACEUTICAL FEES FOR TROOPS, FAMILIES AND RETIREES
- ELIMINATE PRESUMPTIVE SERVICE-CONNECTED CONDITIONS FOR DISABLED AND ILL VETERANS
- LOCK OUT OR INCREASE FEES FOR DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PRIORITY GROUPS 7 AND 8 VETERANS
- REDUCE COST-OF-LIVING ALLOWANCES
- FREEZE MILITARY PAY
- END GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES TO MILITARY COMMISSARIES

- [ELIMINATE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS STATESIDE](#)
- [ELIMINATE THE 20-YEAR MILITARY RETIREMENT PLAN](#)
- [ELIMINATE DOD TUITION REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAMS FOR SERVICE MEMBERS](#)

THE SHEER MAGNITUDE OF THESE CUTS AND THE POTENTIALLY DAMAGING AND FAR-REACHING CONSEQUENCES THEY WOULD IMPOSE UPON OUR MILITARY AND VETERANS ARE OF HISTORIC PROPORTIONS. WE FULLY UNDERSTAND THE DIFFICULT FISCAL DECISIONS OUR NATION MUST MAKE, BUT THE PROGRAMS AND BENEFITS VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES HAVE EARNED AND DESERVE HAVE ALREADY BEEN PAID FOR THROUGH THEIR HONORABLE SERVICE AND SACRIFICE.

IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS, THIS IS A BETRAYAL OF THE HIGHEST DEGREE. IT IS PURELY UNCONSCIONABLE AND WE CANNOT... AND WILL NOT, SIT IDLY BY WHILE THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE SERVED OUR GREAT NATION SO WELL ARE ASKED TO SACRIFICE EVEN MORE.

COMRADES, NO ONE WAS THERE FOR OUR FOUNDING FATHERS WHEN THEY RETURNED HOME FROM THEIR WARS AND IN THIS INSTANCE, WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO SEE TO IT THAT HISTORY DOES NOT ONCE AGAIN REPEAT ITSELF.

IT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT FOR THE VFW TO REMAIN STRONG NATIONALLY ... TO ENSURE THAT CONGRESS, DOD, THE VA, AND OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES CONTINUE TO HONOR OUR

NATION'S COMMITMENT TO THOSE WHO HAVE BORNE THE BATTLE.

I AM ASKING ALL OF YOU TO JOIN WITH ME IN THE WEEKS AND MONTHS AHEAD AS WE WORK TO COMPEL CONGRESS TO DO THE RIGHT THING – TO ENSURE PROPOSED FISCAL REFORMS DO NOT ADVERSELY AFFECT TROOPS, VETERANS OR THEIR FAMILIES.

THAT'S WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT FOR THE VFW TO REMAIN STRONG LOCALLY — AND WHY WE MUST SEE TO IT THAT THOSE WHO RETURN FROM WAR ARE PROPERLY WELCOMED HOME.

(PAUSE)

COMRADES, I WANT YOU TO IMAGINE YOUR COMMUNITY WITHOUT THE VFW.

(PAUSE)

- **UP IN SOUTH BERWICK, MAINE, POST 5744 HELPED TO BRING THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE BACK INTO THEIR LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL.**
- **OVER IN PORTALES, NEW MEXICO, POST 9515 SPONSORS MONTHLY “HAIL & FAREWELL” CEREMONIES ON CANNON AIR FORCE BASE.**
- **UP THE ROAD ABOUT 400 MILES IS A CITY CEMETERY IN LUBBOCK, TEXAS ... WHERE POST 2466 HAS BEEN WORKING FOR THREE YEARS TO IDENTIFY AND MARK ALMOST 175 VETERANS' GRAVESITES THAT HAD FALLEN INTO SERIOUS DISREPAIR.**

- **AND MARINE CORPORAL AND NEW LIFE MEMBER JUSTIN MCLOUD IS EXTREMELY HAPPY THAT THE VFW IS HERE. POST 2593 IN ARNOLD, MISSOURI, ALONG WITH A HALF DOZEN OTHER VFW POSTS, HELPED TO RAISE ALMOST \$60,000 FOR JUSTIN — WHO AT AGE 23 — IS A TRIPLE AMPUTEE FROM A LANDMINE EXPLOSION IN AFGHANISTAN LAST YEAR.**

THESE FOUR EXAMPLES ARE JUST A SNAPSHOT OF THE THOUSANDS OF GREAT COMMUNITY EVENTS AND SPONSORSHIPS OUR VFW POSTS CONDUCT EVERY YEAR.

UNFORTUNATELY, 136 POSTS CLOSED THEIR DOORS LAST YEAR. FORTY-THREE WERE ABLE TO MERGE WITH OTHERS, BUT THE NET LOSS STILL MEANS 93 CITIES AND TOWNS ARE NOW POORER BECAUSE THEY NO LONGER HAVE THE VFW TO BE THE BACKBONE OF THEIR COMMUNITY.

THAT WAS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL. NOW I WANT YOU TO IMAGINE OUR NATION WITHOUT THE VFW.

(PAUSE)

- **NO DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**
- **NO GI BILLS, DISABILITY COMPENSATION, HEALTHCARE PROGRAMS OR SURVIVOR BENEFITS.**
- **NO SOLDIERS AND SAILORS CIVIL RELIEF ACT.**
- **NO ENHANCED QUALITY OF LIFE PROGRAMS FOR OUR MILITARY SERVICES.**
- **JUST 30,000 REGISTERED LOBBYISTS PITCHING CONGRESS ON EVERYTHING EXCEPT VETERANS, SERVICE MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES.**

COMRADES, OUR GREAT ORGANIZATION HAS BEEN AT A CROSSROADS SINCE 1992, WHICH WAS OUR LAST MEMBERSHIP INCREASE.

- **SINCE THEN, WE HAVE GONE FROM ALMOST 10,900 POSTS TO BELOW 7,600 POSTS TODAY. THAT'S A 31 PERCENT DROP.**
- **WE ALSO DECREASED FROM ALMOST 2,170,000 MEMBERS TO BELOW 1,450,000 TODAY. THAT'S A FULL ONE-THIRD DROP.**

COMRADES, OUR RANKS ARE THINNING.

- **WE LOST OUR LAST CONNECTION TO WORLD WAR I WHEN MR. FRANK BUCKLES PASSED AWAY IN FEBRUARY.**
- **OUR WORLD WAR II GENERATION — ONCE 16 MILLION STRONG — IS NOW 2 MILLION.**
- **THE KOREAN WAR GENERATION HAS DROPPED FROM ALMOST 6 MILLION TO 2.5 MILLION.**
- **MY VIETNAM GENERATION HAS DROPPED FROM ALMOST 9 MILLION TO 7.5 MILLION.**

OF COURSE NOT ALL THESE VETERANS ARE ELIGIBLE FOR THE VFW, BUT MY POINT IS THE FUTURE OF THIS GREAT ORGANIZATION RESIDES IN RECRUITING, EMBRACING AND TRUSTING THE POST-VIETNAM GENERATION.

THERE ARE 30 LEADERSHIP POSITIONS AT THE NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS AND WASHINGTON OFFICE ... A NUMBER THAT INCLUDES THE ADJUTANT GENERAL, THE QUARTERMASTER GENERAL, THE WASHINGTON OFFICE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AND ALL THEIR PROGRAM DIRECTORS, DEPUTY DIRECTORS AND ASSISTANT DIRECTORS.

ONLY 16 OF THESE POSITIONS ARE FILLED BY VIETNAM VETERANS. THE OTHER 14 ARE ALL POST-VIETNAM, TO INCLUDE THREE IRAQ WAR VETS.

AS FAR AS NUMBERS ARE CONCERNED, THE VIETNAM GENERATION IS THE LARGEST, BUT OUR AVERAGE AGE IS NEARING 65. WE NEED NEW BLOOD BECAUSE THE FUTURE OF OUR GREAT ORGANIZATION LIES IN RECRUITING THE FUTURE GENERATION.

- **FOLKS LIKE TASHA DEBOIS, AN ARMY NATIONAL GUARD MP WHO SERVED IN IRAQ FROM 2009 TO 2010. SHE JUST TOOK COMMAND OF VFW POST 794 IN FITCHBURG, MASSACHUSETTS ... AT THE RIPE OLD AGE OF 20.**
- **OR MATTHEW STUART, THE NEW DEPARTMENT COMMANDER OF UTAH, WHO SERVED IN KOSOVO AND IRAQ.**
- **OR LIKE OIF VETERAN TIM BORLAND, WHO JUST BECAME THE DEPARTMENT COMMANDER OF ARIZONA.**
- **OR KEN WISEMAN, WHO DID COUNTER-NARCOTICS OPERATIONS OFF THE COAST OF COLUMBIA IN THE NAVY. KEN'S THE NEW JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER FOR HAWAII.**

THE FUTURE OF THE VFW LIES IN EMBRACING THE NEW GENERATION ... AND LUCKY FOR US, MOST OF THEM HAVE NOT YET CONSIDERED JOINING ANY ORGANIZATION.

IN A MILITARY TIMES SURVEY EARLIER THIS YEAR, IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN VETERANS WERE ASKED IF THEY WERE MEMBERS OF ANY NATIONAL VETERANS' ORGANIZATION.

- **13 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS SAID YES ... AND THAT THEY GOT A LOT OUT OF THEIR MEMBERSHIP.**
- **24 PERCENT ALSO SAID YES ... BUT THEY DIDN'T GET MUCH OUT OF IT.**

- **11 PERCENT SAID NO ... BECAUSE THE ORGANIZATIONS DIDN'T OFFER WHAT THEY WANTED.**
- **AND 52 PERCENT SAID THEY HAVEN'T CONSIDERED JOINING YET.**

COMRADES, WITHIN THAT FOUR-QUESTION SURVEY LIES THE FUTURE OF THE VFW, BECAUSE WE ARE 100 PERCENT DEPENDENT ON MEMBERSHIP WHO FEEL WELCOMED AND WHO BELIEVE THEY CAN CONTRIBUTE AND MOVE US INTO THE FUTURE.

THE 24 PERCENT WHO BELONG — BUT DON'T GET MUCH OUT OF THEIR MEMBERSHIP — ARE THE FOLKS WHO ARE ALMOST GUARANTEED TO DROP OUT THE BACKDOOR AT THE END OF THEIR ONE-YEAR MEMBERSHIP.

- **NATIONALLY, WE INCREASED OUR MEMBERSHIP BY MORE THAN 102,000 MEMBERS LAST YEAR, BUT OUR OVERALL NET LOSS OF 24,000 WAS BECAUSE OF 44,000 DEATHS AND 82,000 NON-RENEWALS.**
- **LET ME REPEAT THAT NUMBER ... 82,000 NON-RENEWALS OVER THE PAST YEAR. AN EVEN MORE SHOCKING NUMBER IS HOW MANY NON-RENEWALS WE HAVE HAD OVER THE PAST 5 YEARS ... 435,000.**

COMRADES, WE NEED TO DO EVERYTHING WITHIN OUR POWER TO GET THESE FOLKS TO RENEW THEIR MEMBERSHIPS ... TO BECOME LIFE MEMBERS ... TO TRANSFER POSTS IF NEED BE ... TO BECOME MEMBERS-AT-LARGE ... TO FEEL LIKE THEY BELONG AND CAN CONTRIBUTE.

FOR THE WHOPPING 52 PERCENT WHO HAVEN'T CONSIDERED JOINING ANY ORGANIZATION ... THEY ARE A RECRUITER'S DREAM ... AND THAT'S WHY EVERY VFW MEMBER MUST ALSO BE A MEMBERSHIP RECRUITER ... BUT YOU HAVE TO DO IT SMARTLY, AND NOT JUST SHOVE AN APPLICATION INTO SOMEONE'S HANDS.

(PAUSE)

I SERVED IN VIETNAM FROM 1966 TO '67 WITH THE 3RD MARINE DIVISION — BUT I DIDN'T JOIN UNTIL MY BROTHER-IN-LAW, LOU STIFANO, ASKED ME WHEN I CAME HOME ON CHRISTMAS LEAVE IN 1980.

LOU WAS GOING THROUGH THE CHAIRS AT THE TIME. I KNEW HIM ... I TRUSTED HIM ... AND BETTER YET ... HE DIDN'T JUST SHOVE AN APPLICATION INTO MY HANDS AND EXPECT ME TO JOIN BASED ON WHAT I THOUGHT THE VFW WAS ABOUT.

HE SHOWED ME WHAT THE VFW WAS ALL ABOUT ... AND IT IS WHY I HAVE CHOSEN TO COMMIT MYSELF TO THIS ORGANIZATION OVER THE EIGHT OTHERS I BELONG TO.

THE VFW IS THE MOST MILITARY OF ALL VETERANS' ORGANIZATIONS BECAUSE ELIGIBILITY IS BASED ENTIRELY ON HAVING SERVED IN HARM'S WAY. EVERY MEMBER SHARES THAT COMMON EXPERIENCE. EVERY LADIES AUXILIARY MEMBER HAS SHARED THE SAME ANXIETY THAT COMES FROM SENDING A LOVED ONE TO WAR.

THAT'S WHAT MAKES US SO RELEVANT TO TODAY'S IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN VETERANS. WE HAVE BEEN THERE AND DONE THAT ... AND WE CAME HOME AND GOT ON WITH OUR LIVES.

AFTER 10 YEARS OF WAR, THE NEW GENERATION HASN'T YET HAD MUCH OF AN OPPORTUNITY TO GET ON WITH THEIR LIVES, BUT THEY WILL ... AND THEY WILL INHERIT THE OBLIGATION TO "PAY IT FORWARD" JUST LIKE WE AND OUR FOREFATHERS HAVE BEEN DOING FOR 112 YEARS.

WHEN YOU TALK TO POTENTIAL MEMBERS, YOU HAVE TO EDUCATE THEM ABOUT WHO THE VFW IS ... WHAT WE DO ... AND WHO WE DO IT FOR. WE MUST ALSO HAMMER HOME OUR UNIQUENESS.

ONLY THE VFW CAN CLAIM WE'RE THE NATION'S LARGEST WAR VETERANS' ORGANIZATION ... AND ONLY THE VFW CAN SAY

WE'RE THE NATION'S OLDEST MAJOR VETERANS' ORGANIZATION. THOSE ARE BRAGGING RIGHTS THAT ONLY WE OWN.

YOU ALSO HAVE TO EXPLAIN WHY THE VFW REMAINS IMPORTANT — AND REMAINS RELEVANT — TO AMERICA'S VETERANS, SERVICE MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

OUR WASHINGTON OFFICE HELPS TO ENACT GREAT LEGISLATION LIKE THE FAMILY CAREGIVER BILL, TRAUMATIC INJURY INSURANCE, AND TO CREATE AND IMPROVE THE POST-9/11 GI BILL. THE WASHINGTON OFFICE ALSO OVERSEES A NATIONWIDE NETWORK OF SERVICE OFFICERS WHO LAST YEAR HELPED ALMOST 100,000 VETERANS TO RECOUP MORE THAN \$1.4 BILLION IN EARNED COMPENSATION AND PENSION.

THE NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS OVERSEES GREAT TROOP SUPPORT PROGRAMS ... LIKE UNMET NEEDS, WHICH HAS DISPENSED MORE THAN \$4 MILLION IN GRANTS TO HELP ALMOST 3,000 MILITARY FAMILIES THROUGH EMERGENCY FINANCIAL SITUATIONS;

- AND PROVIDED ALMOST 6 MILLION FREE PHONE CONNECTIONS TO DEPLOYED PERSONNEL AND THEIR FAMILIES ...**
- AND HOSTED 2 MILLION MILITARY FAMILIES TO FAREWELL, HOMECOMING AND OTHER TROOP SUPPORT EVENTS ...**
- PLUS DONATED MORE THAN \$100,000 TO HELP MILITARY FAMILIES IN NINE STATES WHO WERE VICTIMS OF THE SAVAGE TORNADOES THIS SPRING.**

COMRADES, ONE DAY OUR CURRENT WARS WILL END AND OUR TROOPS WILL RETURN HOME. AND JUST LIKE AMERICA HAS DONE TIME AND TIME AGAIN, WE WILL DOWNSIZE OUR MILITARY, CLOSE MORE INSTALLATIONS, AND TRY TO SHIFT MORE COSTS ONTO THE BACKS OF MILITARY RETIREES AND SERVICE-CONNECTED VETERANS.

IT WILL BE FAR MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE VFW TO PUSH A VETERANS' AGENDA WHEN THE NATION'S PRIORITIES WILL HAVE MOVED ON TO DOMESTIC ISSUES.

A STRONG MEMBERSHIP HELPS US TO KEEP THE VETERANS' AGENDA ON THE TABLE. A STRONG MEMBERSHIP GIVES THE VFW A SEAT AT THE TABLE, WHICH IS VITALLY IMPORTANT NOW, AND WILL BE EVEN MORE SO AFTER THE LAST SHOTS ARE FIRED.

COMRADES, THESE WONDERFUL VETERAN AND TROOP SUPPORT PROGRAMS ARE POSSIBLE ONLY BECAUSE OF A STRONG AND VIBRANT MEMBERSHIP AT EVERY VFW LEVEL.

I ASK FOR YOUR SUPPORT TO PUSH THAT SENSE OF OWNERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY DOWN TO EVERY MEMBER AND OUT TO POTENTIAL RECRUITS, BECAUSE WE ARE FAR MORE THAN JUST THE BUILDING DOWN THE STREET WITH A CANTEEN.

- THE VFW IS A STRONG SUPPORTER OF THE MILITARY, NATIONAL SECURITY, AND VETERANS' ISSUES.**
- THE VFW IS RESPONSIBLE FOR HELPING TO GET VIRTUALLY EVERY SIGNIFICANT PIECE OF MILITARY AND VETERANS' LEGISLATION SIGNED INTO LAW IN THE 20TH AND NOW 21ST CENTURY.**
- THIS IS WHO WE ARE ... AMERICA'S OLDEST AND LARGEST COMBAT VETERANS' ORGANIZATION.**

I ALSO WANT YOU TO RECRUIT MORE WOMEN TO JOIN OUR RANKS.

FIFTEEN PERCENT OF THE ARMED FORCES ARE WOMEN— YET ACCORDING TO OUR MEMBERSHIP DEPARTMENT—LESS THAN 1 PERCENT ARE VFW MEMBERS.

COMRADES, WE HAVE TO DO FAR BETTER THAN THAT ... AND IF YOU NEED SOME HELP, CONTACT VFW POST 12097 UP IN BUFFALO, WHICH HAD 34 WOMEN CHARTER MEMBERS ... OR THE 59 MEMBERS OF THE VFW WOMEN'S VETERANS COMMITTEE ... TO

INCLUDE MARLENE ROLL, WHO RECENTLY TESTIFIED BEFORE CONGRESS ABOUT THE RECENT GAO REPORT ON SEXUAL ASSAULTS AT VA FACILITIES.

ALONG WITH REACHING FELLOW VETERANS, WE ALSO NEED TO SPEND MORE TIME GETTING THE WORD OUT TO THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ... ABOUT WHO THE VFW IS ... AND WHAT THE VFW DOES.

PUBLICITY BRINGS RECOGNITION, AND RECOGNITION HELPS TO BOOST RECRUITING AND KEEP OUR ORGANIZATION STRONG. THERE IS STRENGTH IN MEMBERSHIP; THEREFORE, EVERY MEMBER HAS AN OBLIGATION TO CONVINCING PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS TO JOIN OUR GREAT ORGANIZATION.

(PAUSE)

BEFORE I CONCLUDE, I WANT TO RECOGNIZE AN UNKNOWN COMRADE WHO MAY BE IN THE AUDIENCE TODAY ... SOMEONE WHO MAY HAVE A SPARK IN HIS OR HER HEART TO ONE DAY BECOME COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THIS GREAT ORGANIZATION. MY ADVICE IS TO FOLLOW YOUR DREAM.

SERVING IN THE CHAIRS HAS BEEN ONE OF THE MOST REWARDING AND SATISFYING EXPERIENCES IN MY LIFE ... AND I AM CONVINCED IT WILL BE FOR YOU AS WELL.

IT HAS ENABLED ME TO SHAKE THE HANDS OF THOUSANDS OF VFW AND AUXILIARY MEMBERS AROUND THE WORLD ... TO TELL THEM "THANK YOU" FOR WHAT THEY DO DAILY FOR AMERICA'S VETERANS, SERVICE MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

IT HAS ENABLED ME TO RECONNECT WITH MY PAST, LIKE MR. MICHAEL CALDWELL FROM HOWARD, OHIO, WHO RECENTLY WROTE TO THANK ME FOR MY LEADERSHIP AS HIS DRILL INSTRUCTOR 41 YEARS AGO AT PARRIS ISLAND.

IT HAS ENABLED ME TO SHAKE THE HANDS OF THOUSANDS OF MILITARY MEMBERS ... TO TELL THEM "THANK YOU" FOR WHAT THEY DO DAILY ON BEHALF OF AMERICA.

IT HAS ENABLED ME TO WALK PEACEFULLY WHERE I ONCE WENT TO WAR ... TO SHAKE THE HANDS OF MILITARY AND CIVILIANS ASSIGNED TO THE JOINT POW/MIA ACCOUNTING COMMAND ... TO TELL THEM "THANK YOU" FOR WHAT THEY DO DAILY ON BEHALF OF THE FAMILIES OF AMERICA'S 83,000 MISSING IN ACTION.

AND IT HAS ALLOWED ME TO TELL MIA FAMILY MEMBERS THAT THE VFW WILL ALWAYS BE BY THEIR SIDE TO ENSURE OUR NATION NEVER FORGETS HER SACRED PLEDGE TO RETURN THEIR LOVED ONES HOME FROM THE BATTLEFIELD. THIS RESPONSIBILITY INCLUDES ENSURING THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT DOESN'T REDUCE POW/MIA FUNDING OR LESSEN THE IMPACT OR RESOLVE OF THE U.S.-RUSSIA COMMISSION.

SERVING THE VFW HAS PROVIDED ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE MY MOTTO OF "SERVICE WITH PRIDE," WHICH I STARTED IN THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS, CONTINUED AS A SERVICE OFFICER, AND AM NOW BLESSED TO SHARE WITH MY ENTIRE VFW FAMILY.

I THANK YOU ONCE AGAIN FOR YOUR SUPPORT AND CONFIDENCE.

MAY GOD BLESS YOU, OUR WONDERFUL ORGANIZATION AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.