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Call to Duty Speech

(approximately 10 minutes in length)

It is a pleasure to be here today and have the opportunity to talk to you about your Army, our Soldiers, and something we refer to as the Call to Duty.

My purpose here today is to talk to you – the influencers – the people who play a big role in helping our young people make life decisions – about the value of serving the Nation. Whether it is as a Soldier, a member of the public services, or just as a good citizen, serving one's country is a noble calling and, I believe, among life's greatest work.

As most of you already know, the United States military is frequently listed at the top of opinion polls as the most respected institution in the country. And, it is for a reason. Today, hundreds of thousands of Soldiers of the United States Army, my service, are deployed, forward stationed overseas or securing the homeland. Our Army remains the preeminent land power in the world today, and will remain so, primarily because of the courageous men and women who proudly wear the uniform of the American Soldier.

And, as I'm sure you also know, today's All-Volunteer Force is experiencing some challenging times. The media and pundits frequently talk about a declining number of recruits and they continue to speculate that one day our country might have to return to the practices of a bygone era. These alarming reports seem to forget that our country has been challenged before, and we have always persevered.

In the winter of 1776, with thousands of Soldiers' enlistments about to expire, and the fate of our fledgling Nation uncertain, Thomas Paine wrote "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer Soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman."

One hundred and seventy years later, our Nation was again at war, but we met the challenge there, too. The men and women that fought and won the Second World War are often referred to as the greatest generation. Just as Pearl Harbor was the call to arms for that generation, the attacks of September 11th serve as the call to duty for today's generation.

And, just as America's Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Coastguardsmen helped win the Second World War, so too will today's generation, the grandsons and granddaughters of the Greatest Generation, help win the Global War on Terrorism.

In one of the most famous quotes from American history, President John F. Kennedy, in his inaugural address in 1961, challenged Americans to serve their country, saying "Since this country was founded, each generation of Americans has been summoned to give testimony to its national loyalty. The graves of young Americans who answered the call to service surround the globe. Now the trumpet summons us again...The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it -- and the glow from that fire can truly light the world. And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country."

Those few eloquent words galvanized a generation of Americans to serve, and President Kennedy's words remain as true today as they were forty-four years ago.

Today, our Soldiers serving in the All-Volunteer Force represent all that is right and good about our Nation.

In the words of our Secretary of the Army, “The Nation and free peoples around the world sleep better tonight because of the willingness of our Soldiers to sacrifice everything so that others might live in peace and freedom.” Soldiers like Sergeant First Class Paul Smith, the recipient of the first Medal of Honor awarded in the Global War on Terrorism. Sergeant First Class Smith fought above and beyond the call of duty, against overwhelming odds, and he died saving the lives of his fellow Soldiers. He was a role model to his Soldiers, a loving husband to his wife, and a dedicated father to his children. He epitomized the Army’s Warrior Ethos: I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat. I will never quit. And, I will never leave a fallen comrade.

Paul Smith also embodied the Army Values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage.

The Warrior Ethos and the Army Values are traits that all Americans should strive to uphold, for they form the foundation of a good citizen, one who is dedicated to the security of his country and the welfare of his fellow Americans.

Our Soldiers today answer the Call to Duty through the character of their service and sacrifice. And they are re-enlisting in record numbers because they believe their service is making a difference in the world. As is often the case, our Soldiers are the face of the America that the world sees. And in that role they have clearly come through as the emissaries of a kind and just people.

In these life experiences – whether it is helping a sick child receive medical care in Afghanistan, building a new school in Iraq, or rescuing the victims of the Asian Tsunami – our Soldiers know they are members of a team dedicated to something much greater than self. These life experiences strengthen their character and instill within them a personal commitment to improving the lives of all they touch. This is the essence of the Call to Duty.

As the Army Chief of Staff recently said, “These men and women are willing to give more than they take, to be part of something that is bigger than they are, and to be able to stand shoulder to shoulder with people they can trust, who have the same values, whose integrity they can trust, and understand

that they too are giving more than they are getting. We call it service for a reason.”

There is a common thread that runs through their motivation to serve. They answer the Call to Duty because they believe in the adage “freedom isn’t free” and that the freedoms that we so often take for granted are worth fighting for.

(INSERT PERSONAL STORY FROM THE SPEAKER ON WHY HE/SHE IS SERVING NOW AS A CASA, SOLDIER, DA CIVILIAN, MEMBER OF AUSA, ROA, USAWOA OR OTHER VETERAN SERVICE ORGANIZATION AND HOW HE/SHE HAS GROWN PERSONALLY AND/OR PROFESSIONALLY FROM THIS EXPERIENCE)

For the Nation to continue to be successful, our young people must be willing to serve. More importantly, they must consider various options – to include service to our country as a member of the Armed Forces. Whether as a Soldier, a firefighter or a police officer, the liberties we enjoy are predicated on the notion that some will step forward to do the dangerous work of a free society.

And in that vein, it is important to remember that the recruiting issue is not just a challenge for the Army, it is a challenge for our country. I ask for your help in telling our young people about the value of service, and especially the opportunities for personal growth through the life experiences that come with it.

I want to leave you with a couple of questions to ponder, and I ask that you share these questions with your children, your students, your players or other young Americans with whom you communicate on a regular basis. These are not simple questions, especially in a free society, and the answers you receive will probably reflect very diverse opinions.

What can I do as an American to help my country?

What would happen to our society – and all the freedoms and comforts we enjoy – if no one stepped forward to serve?

What obligations do I have as an American citizen to my country and to my fellow citizens?

In closing, I want to leave you with a quote from President Teddy Roosevelt, because I think it captures the essence of service – not only how service to one's country can better our society, but because service to one's country brings a personal satisfaction and life experiences that only those who have served can ever know.

President Roosevelt said: "It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better.

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”

On behalf of the over one million Soldiers of the United States Army, thank you for your continued support of our Soldiers and their families.

Thank you very much.

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