

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks at the Wounded Warrior Project Soldier Ride Opening Ceremony
April 20, 2012

The President. Thank you so much. Well, good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to the White House. Thank you, Ric, for that introduction. More importantly, thank you for your service and for everything you do for our veterans and our wounded warriors.

And we've also got here today Senator Tom Udall and Congresswoman Corrine Brown with us. Thank you all for coming.

This is the fourth time we've had the Soldier Ride here in the South Lawn. And this year, you've already covered some ground: 34 miles over the last few days and another 24-mile ride tomorrow. So our job is to give you a break, maybe even a little extra fuel, and get you back on the road.

The reason I ask this group to stop by every year is because this is one of the most inspiring events that we have here at the White House. As Commander in Chief, I can't take sides, but I know the Army is represented here.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. Navy's represented here.

Audience members. Navy!

The President. [Laughter] We've got some Air Force.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. We've got some Marines in the house.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. And we've got some Coast Guard.

Audience member. Hooah! [Laughter]

The President. And there's some folks here who don't wear a uniform, but who work just as hard and sacrifice just as much alongside you, and that's our outstanding military families in the house.

So this is a pretty diverse group, and I know you're all doing this ride for different reasons. Some of you may be athletes looking to get the competitive juices flowing again. Maybe some of you are trying to see how far you can push yourselves. Some of you are doing it for the camaraderie and the bond that comes when you work hard alongside people who know what you're going through. Maybe you're doing it to honor a loved one or a buddy. But all of you are here because you believe in living your lives to the fullest. You know that each of us has a responsibility to seize the opportunities we've been blessed with. You ride because you can, and you ride for those who can't. That's what this is all about.

And that's what inspired Chris Carney to hop on a bike and head across country on the first Soldier Ride 8 years ago to raise money and awareness for returning troops and wounded warriors. Chris came up with the idea working as a bartender in Long Island. And I have to say,

it's better than most of the ideas that come out of bars. *[Laughter]* At least that's been my experience. *[Laughter]*

Today there are Soldier Rides all across the country. They serve as a reminder that all of us can do our part to serve the men and women who serve us. And I'm glad to see you're all decked out in the stars and stripes, because I want anybody who sees this ride to go by to know that they're in the presence of heroes.

Some of these guys I've had a chance to meet before. I first met Hospital Corpsman 3d Class Max Rohn when he was in the hospital recovering from a grenade attack in Fallujah that cost him his leg. And Max, I think, will admit he was in pretty rough shape at the time. But the next time I saw him, at a dinner that we hosted here recently for Iraq war veterans, Max had gained 80 pounds—or 40 pounds and was training for the upcoming Wounded Warrior Games. I offered him two dinners after he finished the first one kind of quick, and he readily accepted. *[Laughter]* After he finished the first dessert kind of quick, I offered him another one. He accepted that one too. I am positive it is the most anybody has ever eaten in the White House. *[Laughter]* And now he's ready to ride.

We've also got Captain Leslie Smith here today. Leslie lost her leg and her eyesight after serving in Bosnia, and this is her first time back on a bike. She's going to be riding in tandem alongside Meghan Speicher-Harris, who works with the Wounded Warrior Project. And it's good to have them both here.

And then there are the Schei brothers: Erik and Deven. When Erik enlisted in the Army, Deven made a promise that if anything bad ever happened, he would finish what his brother started. And during his second tour in Iraq, Erik was shot in the head by a sniper. So Deven enlisted. And then 2 years ago, Deven was injured in Afghanistan. And now the two brothers ride a specially made tandem bike, with Deven leading the way. They're taking on this latest challenge just like they did every other one, together.

So these men and women, they're an inspiration. And it's also inspiring to meet the families behind them: the moms and dads and the brothers and sisters, the sons and daughters who are standing by their side through good times and bad. You're heroes too. And I know Michelle and I look forward to any time we get to spend with military families.

So I want to encourage everybody who sees these riders going by this weekend to go out and cheer and say thanks and salute and show your support. And as Commander in Chief, I promise to do everything I can to make sure that you guys get the care and the benefits that you deserve, that you've earned. All of you have served your country. That's why now it's time for the country to serve you. It's what you deserve, and here in America we take care of our own.

So to all the riders here today, we are proud of you. Your country is proud of you. And now I'm going to see how you guys do taking some laps around the South Lawn. But you got to do it on the horn. I don't want anybody cheating. *[Laughter]*

All right. On your marks, get set——

[At this point, the President sounded a horn.]

The President. Hey!

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:38 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki; and Chris Carney, founder, Wounded Warrior Project Soldier Ride.

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