

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks at an Armed Forces Farewell Tribute in Honor of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark A. Milley at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Virginia

September 29, 2023

Thank you very much.

Death of Senator Dianne Feinstein

Before I begin, I want to say a brief word about Senator Dianne Feinstein, who passed away this morning. She was a historic figure, a trailblazer for women, and a great friend. Dianne made her mark in everything from national security to the environment to gun safety to protecting civil liberties.

The country is going to miss her dearly, and so will Jill and I. I'll have more to say about her later today.

Armed Forces Farewell Tribute in Honor of General Milley

Vice President Harris; our Second Gentleman; Secretary Austin; Members of Congress; leaders of the Department of Defense, both current and former; friends and officials from around the world, thank you for being here today to mark the change of responsibility and to celebrate the service of General Mark Milley.

A combat infantryman. A master parachutist. A Green Beret. A warrior who served a total of 5 years in war zones, from Panama to Haiti to Bosnia to Afghanistan to Iraq, with a chest full of medals to show for it. A leader who once ran across a bridge booby-trapped with mines to stop two battle tanks evacuating wounded troops from driving across it. A patriot, uncompromising in his duty, unflinching in the face of danger, and unwavering in the service to the country.

And Hollyanne, none of us can say as much—enough about you. You served right alongside him, every step of the way. And that's not hyperbole. You served alongside him, every step of the way.

You pulled double- and triple-duty to make sure you and Mark were always doing right by your family, supporting the military community while maintaining your own career as a nurse. It's incredible what you've achieved, Hollyanne. The work you've done to increase support for military spouse employment is going to keep improving the lives of military families for a long time.

And, Peter and Mary, thank you for sharing your dad with us. I know it wasn't easy: all those moves, all those schools, all those months when your dad was deployed and you couldn't be together. Thank you for all—all—you've given to our country.

And, Mark, I know one of the best parts of retirement for you, as has been already mentioned by our Secretary, is you're going to spend more time with your kids. That's going to be fun, man. I tell you what, I love my kids. I'm crazy about my grandkids.

Now, everyone who has spent time with Mark knows three things about him, several were already mentioned.

One, he's from Boston.

[At this point, the President briefly imitated a Boston accent.]

He parks his car in car garages.

He likes maps. And he loves the Constitution. But each of these three things points to something deeper about Mark's character.

His Boston heritage isn't just about pride of place. It's pride in what shaped him, the values that have guided his whole life. It's about the father and mother, both veterans of World War II, who set the example of nobility—of the nobility of serving your country.

It's about knowing that his dad was among those who landed at Iwo Jima. And that if those young men his father served alongside could raise the flag on Mount Suribachi, then there's nothing, nothing, nothing America cannot accomplish when we work together. It's about how his parents strived and sacrificed so their children would have every opportunity to chart their own future.

It's knowing that everyone who served under his command had their own story, in his view, just as important as his. And this—to this day, whenever Mark has attended events, I've watched him—we've attended many events together—I've watched him: He'll talk to every young person, every veteran, every Gold Star family who wants to speak to him, no matter how long it takes, so he can hear their story as well and show his respect.

The Boston pride is about knowing where you come from. The maps are about knowing where you are and where you're going. Mark wants to make sure he has the necessary facts to inform his decisions as a leader and his advice to others.

As Commander in Chief, I've relied on Mark's counsel because I know he always gives it to me straight no matter what. He always gives it to me straight. He's working with the best information possible, and he doesn't hold anything back.

During his tenure as Chairman, Mark has been a steady hand, guiding our military as we navigate what, I would argue, is one of the most complex security environments our world has faced in a long time.

He's been critical to strengthening America's existing alliances, from NATO to the Indo-Pacific to building the new strategic partnerships like AUKUS; and keeping our force at the cutting edge of the fields of cyber and space; ending America's longest war and continuing to take terrorists off the battlefield; standing with the brave people of Ukraine and making sure they have the equipment, the support they need, when they need it, to defend their freedom, and letting them know—letting them know—how much he respects them.

Mark, your partnership has been invaluable to me. And I give you my word to that. And I think it's been invaluable to Secretary Austin as well. I want to thank you for always seeing, always sharing the whole map with me—the whole map. Thanks, pal.

When it comes to the Constitution, that is and always has been Mark's North Star.

I'm so damn proud to serve with him. I—he's made it the central image on his challenge coin, those three little words that mean so much to every American, but especially to those who stand in the service of our Nation. The middle of his challenge coin says, "We the People." "We the People."

It's a reminder to all of us what makes us a strong nation, who we are as a democracy, and how the United States—for more than two centuries—has always managed to keep moving forward. Not fealty to any one person or to a political party, but to the idea of America—idea unlike any other in human history: the idea that we're all created equal.

That is what the Constitution safeguards. That's what we swear an oath to. And that is why generations of young women and men, Americans of every background and creed, have stepped

forward to be part of the greatest fighting force in the history of the world. And that's not hyperbole. You're the greatest fighting force in the history of the world. I've seen you in Afghanistan, Iraq, and—but I don't want to get started.

And our military is going to keep growing stronger—keep growing stronger—with General C.Q. Brown—Charles Q. Brown, Jr.—as our 24th [21st; White House correction] Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Congratulations, old buddy.

As Mark will tell you, I'll be meeting a lot with you. *[Laughter]*

I said when I nominated General Brown as a seasoned warrior with deep combat experience, an experienced commander of the joint force, a top-flight strategist, a leader known throughout the force for his unmatched judgement and unflappable demeanor.

Like General Milley, General Brown is a patriot through and through, sworn to uphold and defend the Constitution. He and his wife Sharene have dedicated themselves to keeping our military and their families healthy and vibrant. I thank you both and your sons Sean and Ross for everything you've given to our country over the years.

And I look forward to working even more closely with you, C.Q., as we take on all the challenges ahead to ensure that our force can continue to deter and defeat any potential threat to the American people.

As Secretary Austin noted, I am glad that General Brown was confirmed by the Senate, along with the new Commandant of the Marine Corps and Army Chief of Staff, but—I must be careful here how I say this—but it's thoroughly, totally unacceptable that more than 300 other highly qualified military officers are still in limbo. I've been here a long time; I've never seen anything like this. It's outrageous, and it must stop.

Their promotions, their careers, their families, their futures held hostage by the political agenda of one Senator and the silence of another 47 of them. It's a drag on our force. It impacts everything from readiness to morale to retention. And it's an insult—an insult—to the officers' years of dedicated service.

Our troops deserve so much better. And if the House fails to fulfill its most basic function, if it fails to fund Government by tomorrow, it will have failed all of our troops.

Our servicemembers will keep upholding their oaths, showing up for work, standing sentinel around the world, keeping our country secure, but they won't get paid. It's a disgrace. Thousands of Defense Department civilian and—civilian servants will be sent home. And the longer the shutdown lasts, the harder it will be to become—the harder it will become for military families to pay their bills.

We can't be playing politics while our troops stand in the breach. It's an absolute dereliction of duty. As leaders, we must never lose sight of the direct impacts of the decisions we make and the impact they have on the lives and families around the world.

General Milley, General Brown, Secretary Austin, and all the many great leaders across every branch of our military: You got to where you are by demonstrating extraordinary care and concern for the troops you command. It's a lived leadership of being in the field alongside your troops, sharing their hardships, holding each other together when times are hard, never forgetting the humanity beneath the uniform. It's an enormous credit to each of them personally and an enormous asset for our country.

Secretary Austin told the story of how he and General Milley got blown up together by an IED in Iraq. But the part of the story that stands out to me is the reason they were on Route Irish

that night to begin with. The reason they were there: They were going to see one of Milley's soldiers who had been wounded.

In fact, during that tour in Iraq, you'd often find then-Colonel Milley down at that hospital sitting with the wounded so they wouldn't be alone; rounding up his troops for an impromptu blood drive if the docs let him know they were running low on units; putting an arm around his team, gathering them together, seeing to their injuries—both physical and mental—when war extracts the greatest of tolls.

That's leadership. That's patriotism. That's strength. That's Mark Milley.

Mark, you know how strongly I feel about you. You've given remarkable service to our country. You've done honor for the uniform of our Nation. You've upheld your oath.

Thank you. Thank you, my friend. Thank you for being my friend.

May God bless you all, and may God protect our troops.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:19 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Douglas C. Emhoff, husband of Vice President Kamala D. Harris; Hollyanne Milley, wife of Gen. Milley; Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps Gen. Eric M. Smith, USMC; Army Chief of Staff Gen. Randy George, USA; and Sen. Thomas H. Tuberville.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley, USA, Armed Forces farewell tribute at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, VA.

Locations: Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, VA.

Names: Austin, Lloyd J., III; Biden, Jill T.; Brown, Charles Q. "C.Q.," Jr.; Brown, Sharene; Emhoff, Douglas C.; Feinstein, Dianne; George, Randy; Harris, Kamala D.; Milley, Hollyanne; Milley, Mark A.; Milley, Mary; Milley, Peter; Milley, Ross; Milley, Sean; Smith, Eric M.; Tuberville, Thomas H.

Subjects: Army Chief of Staff; AUKUS trilateral security partnership; California, U.S. Senator, death; Counterterrorism and homeland security; Cybersecurity, strengthening efforts; Deaths, Sen. Dianne Feinstein; Indo-Pacific, economic and security cooperation; Joint Chiefs of Staff; Military families; Military promotions, Senate confirmation process; Military spouses, employment and job training support; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Russia, conflict in Ukraine; Secretary of Defense; U.S. Marine Corps; U.S. servicemembers, service and dedication; Ukraine, Russian invasion and airstrikes; Vice President; Virginia, Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall; Virginia, President's visit.

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