

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024*

**Remarks Honoring United States Veterans and Their Families on the Eve of the 83d Anniversary of the Japanese Attack on Pearl Harbor**  
*December 6, 2024*

Thank you, thank you, thank you. Please sit down.

I want to get through this real quick. I'm anxious to see the show. [*Laughter*]

Secretary Del Toro, Secretary Kendall, Deputy Secretary Bradsher, I tell you, you—we've got a lot of important people here tonight—and most importantly, to our veterans and their families—and their family and caregivers and survivors. You know, it—I mean this sincerely—it's truly an honor to be here with all of you on the eve of such a solemn anniversary.

The attack on Pearl Harbor—as a kid growing up, I heard so much about it, and it changed literally the future of the world and our Nation and our own family. And like so many other brave women and men in our country, shortly after the attack, my mother, who is the number three of—had four—she had four brothers, and they all went down literally the next day, on Monday, and joined the United States military.

One of them, one of my uncles, was an aviator who was killed in the war, and another one was denied because he had a serious health problem. They wouldn't take him.

My uncle Ambrose Finnegan, he joined the U.S. Army Air Corps and a few dozen missions across the Pacific. And in 1944, during one of those missions, his plane crashed off the coast of Papua New Guinea.

General MacArthur, who commanded the U.S. Forces in the Southwest Pacific at the time, sent my family a condolence letter honoring my uncle's sacrifice. And the general wrote, "He died . . . serving in a crusade—a crusade from which a better world will all come." And I think a better world did come, but because of the sacrifice of so many.

Ladies and gentlemen, that's why we're here tonight: to remember the souls we lost 83 years ago, to honor the brave Americans of the "Greatest Generation" who stepped up to serve every single day that followed, and to recommit to building a better world from which—for which they fought and many of them died, as you know.

How many of you lost someone, one of your family, in World War II? I know you may—as my mother would say, God love you.

As so many of you know, earlier this year, I visited Normandy to honor the 80th anniversary of D-Day and urge people everywhere to make this same commitment that was made then. I walked along the beaches where the Americans and our Allies turned the tide of that war. I stood on top the cliff where three hundred—225 Rangers risked everything to breach the—to breach Hitler's Atlantic Wall. And I prayed at the crosses of men who gave everything to literally save the world. It wasn't hyperbole—to save the world. And I spoke with some of the last surviving veterans from that fateful June day.

But there's another moment in particular—another moment in particular—that stayed with me. When I was standing with other European leaders at the cemetery, I saw those veterans—a 99-year-old man who had met President Zelenskyy, because other world leaders were at that function as well. The veteran told President Zelenskyy, and this is what he said. He said—I remember hearing exactly what he said. He said, "You are the savior of the people," end of quote.

Then President Zelenskyy shook this veteran's hand and said: "No, no, no. You saved Europe. You saved Europe."

It was a reminder that every generation—every generation—must defeat democracy's mortal foes. Every generation must stand up to the forces of darkness and the forces of division. And every generation must honor the service men and women who dare all and risk all to ensure that freedom endures.

You know, that's our charge. I mean, that's literally our charge.

As a nation, we have many obligations. I got in trouble early on as a young Senator when I was 31 years old. I said we have many obligations, but we only have one truly sacred obligation. That's to prepare those we send into harm's way and care for them and their families when they return home and when they don't return home. It's an obligation not based on party or based on politics. It's an obligation, a promise that unites us all.

And, over the last 4 years, I've worked to make good on that promise every single day. We brought veterans homelessness and veterans unemployment down to historic lows. We invested record resources to reduce the scourge of veteran suicide—more people dying of suicide than any other cause in the military. We delivered more benefits to more veterans than ever before—in all of VA history. And we all—we all—we ensured all World War II veterans were eligible for VA health care. And we passed more than 35—35—bipartisan laws to support veterans and their families.

That includes the PACT Act, the most significant law our Nation—in our laws—Nation's history to help millions of veterans who were exposed to toxic burn pits during their military service. Not only did it for that generation, but for all subsequent generations, including all those in my generation exposed to Agent Orange and my son's generation exposed to toxic fumes coming from those burn pits. And it matters.

Let me close with this. You know, like our forebearers, during World War II, we stood at an inflection point. We still stand at an inflection point where decisions we make now and make in the next 4 or 5 years will determine the course of our future for literally decades to come. It's not hyperbole—for decades to come.

And, like our forebearers, we owe it to the next generation to set that course on a more free, more secure, and more just path; to do that hard work General MacArthur said those years ago "from which a better world for all will come."

I want to thank everyone in this room—and I mean it from the bottom of my heart—who dedicated their lives to this Nation and to all those who serve today to continue the work of protecting our Nation, of defending our democracy, of ensuring that government of, by, and for the people long endures.

I understand we have a veteran here—I don't see him; I wanted to say hello to him before he leaves—who is 101 years old. Where is he?

*[At this point, the President left the stage for a conversation with World War II veteran Llewellyn "Lew" Griffith and presented Mr. Griffith with a challenge coin. After greeting other audience members, he concluded his remarks as follows.]*

Okay. Sorry to hold it up.

Again, thank you all very, very much.

*[The President's remarks were followed by a special live performance of "The Eyes of the World: From D-Day to VE Day," a PBS program depicting the final 11 months of World War II.]*

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:48 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro; Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall; Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Tanya Bradsher; and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 9.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Pearl Harbor, 83d anniversary of Japanese attack, remarks honoring U.S. veterans and their families on eve.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Bradsher, Tanya; Carlos, Del Toro; Griffith, Llewellyn "Lew"; Kendall, Frank; Zelenskyy, Volodymyr.

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