

Remarks at a Military Appreciation Parade in Arlington, Virginia January 6, 2009

Thank you very much. At ease.

Mr. Secretary, thank you for the kind introduction, and thank you for being an outstanding Secretary of Defense. For a while, we expected this event to be a joint retirement party. It didn't turn out that way, did it? *[Laughter]* I am pleased that President-elect Obama has asked you to stay on, and I am confident that you'll continue to be a strong leader as the Secretary of Defense.

And, Admiral Mullen, thank you for your strong advice, your clear thinking, and your years of service to our country.

I want to thank you for honoring Laura, who's been a fabulous First Lady. The military gave her the Distinguished Service Award; a lot of friends from Texas think she deserved the Purple Heart. *[Laughter]* I wish I'd have thought of the roses.

Mr. Vice President, I am proud to have served with you for 8 years. The military has had no stauncher defender in my administration than Vice President Dick Cheney.

I thank members of the Cabinet, members of the administration, and former members of the Cabinet, especially the former Secretary of Defense, who did an outstanding job, Secretary Don Rumsfeld.

I thank the current members of the Joint Chiefs and their families, as well as the former members of the Joint Chiefs and their families, for joining us today. I want to thank those who wear the uniform, distinguished guests.

As my time in office winds down, the days bring a series of lasts. I made my last overseas trip on Air Force One. I have delivered my final college commencement as President. And after much consideration, I pardoned my last Thanksgiving turkey. *[Laughter]* These have all been wonderful experiences. But nothing compares to the honor of standing before you today and

addressing America's Armed Forces as your Commander in Chief.

Over the past 8 years, I have seen the valor of the American military time and time again. I saw your valor on September the 11th, 2001, in servicemembers rushing into smoke-filled corridors to save their colleagues at the Pentagon and in planes patrolling the skies above New York City and Washington. I saw your valor in the days after the attack, when Americans crowded into recruiting centers across our country, raised their hands to serve, and pledged to defend our people and our freedom.

I saw your valor in the forces who deployed to Afghanistan. Within weeks of September the 11th, you closed down the terrorist training camps, and you drove the Taliban from power. I saw your valor in the fearless troops who stormed across the Iraqi desert and destroyed a regime that threatened America. I saw your valor in battle-tested warriors who signed up for a second or third or fourth tour and made the surge in Iraq one of the great successes in America's military history.

The valor of America's Armed Forces have made our Nation safer. Because you've taken the fight to the terrorists abroad, we have not had to face them here at home. And the world has seen something that almost no one thought possible: More than 7 years after September the 11th, there has not been another attack on American soil.

The decisions I made as your Commander in Chief have not always been popular. But the cause you have served has always been just and right. The missions you have carried out have always been necessary. And the work you have done has every bit—has been every bit as courageous and idealistic as that of any generation that came before you.

In the years since the war on terror began, America's Armed Forces have led the largest military liberation since World War II. Because of your actions, more than 50 million Afghans and Iraqis have seen the chains of despotism broken and are living in the liberty that the Creator intended. The new wave of freedom in the Middle East has made America more secure at home, because it is undermining the culture of tyranny that fosters radicalism.

There will become a day when your grandchildren will ask, "What did you do during your time in uniform?" And you'll be able to say, "We made the military stronger. We made the world freer. And we made America more secure."

You'll be able to tell them the story of the first decade in the 21st century, their early days of a generational struggle against terror and extremism. It is a story of a global coalition led by the United States that is dedicated to eliminating the forces of oppression and fear. It is the story of the Iraqi people proudly holding up ink-stained fingers to show that the threat of violence could not break their commitment to liberty. It is the story of young girls going to school in Afghanistan after years when educating a woman could be punished with beatings or imprisonment. It is the story about the character in men and women who volunteered to leave the comforts of home to defend freedom and keep our Nation safe.

On behalf of the American people, I thank you for making that sacrifice. I know you have not shouldered the burdens of military life alone. You've had the support of strong and loving families to sustain you. And this morning, I want all of you and your families to hear your Commander in Chief loud and clear: We appreciate you, we love you, and we honor your service.

We also honor our wounded warriors and those who never returned home from the field of battle. In their sacrifices, we see one of the extraordinary legacies of our Armed Forces: the willingness to give ev-

erything to secure safety at home and liberty abroad.

As the Admiral pointed out, we saw that selfless spirit in people like Petty Officer Michael Monsoor, a Navy SEAL who served in Iraq. In the fall of 2006, on a rooftop in Iraq, Mike threw himself onto a grenade in order to save the lives of his teammates. As Admiral Mullen mentioned, I had the honor of presenting Michael Monsoor's parents his posthumous Medal of Honor in the White House. On that day, I saw the deep sadness that is familiar to anyone who has lost a loved one in the line of duty. But I also saw the pride that comes with such noble sacrifice and the recognition that our freedom and our security only endure because of the acts of bravery like Michael Monsoor's.

That kind of courage, character, and devotion defines our Armed Forces. So this morning, I cannot accept your kind tribute unless I'm allowed to return the favor. To the men and women of the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and all those who serve in the Department of Defense: You have the respect of a grateful nation that you have kept safe. You have the admiration of millions around the world who would have never tasted freedom without you. You have the undying love and respect of a man who has been proud to call himself your Commander in Chief.

Two weeks from today, Laura and I will take our final trip back to Texas, or as you Texans understand, back to the promised land. We have the honor of doing it onboard a 747 piloted by the United States Air Force; Colonel Mark Tillman will be the lead pilot. This brings a fitting symmetry: The military brought me to Washington 8 years ago, and on January the 20th, the military is taking me home.

We will take with us many fond memories that we will cherish for the rest of our lives. We will always remember that you answered the call to serve when your Nation needed you most. We will always

remember that you did your duty with honor and dignity. And we will always remember the debt of gratitude that each of us who lives in freedom owes to each of you who has protected it.

May God bless you. And may God always bless the United States.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:21 a.m. at Fort Myer. In his remarks, he referred to

George and Sally Monsoor, parents of posthumous Medal of Honor recipient PO 2d Class Michael A. Monsoor, USN. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Adm. Michael G. Mullen, USN, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates.

Remarks on Signing Proclamations To Establish the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, and the Rose Atoll Marine National Monument

January 6, 2009

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thank you for coming, and happy New Year. Laura and I thank all of our distinguished guests, starting with members of my Cabinet: Secretary Kempthorne, Secretary Gutierrez, Administrator Johnson. Admiral, thank you for coming today; we're proud you're here. Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here; other members of the administration who have joined us. Members of the conservation community, we're glad you're here.

Governor, I am proud you're here. Thank you for coming. And Josie is with you. Representatives from American Samoa—by the way, Northern Mariana Islands Governor, just in case you don't know him. [Laughter] We know him, and we like him. And all the representatives from America Samoa, really appreciate you all coming. Apologize for the weather, but I don't apologize for the policy, because we're fixing to do some fabulous policy.

It's interesting that we're gathered a few steps from the office once occupied by a young Assistant Secretary of the Navy named Theodore Roosevelt. Not long after he left the position, he was back on these grounds as the 26th President of the United States. And exactly a hundred years

ago, he embarked on his final weeks as the President—something I can relate to. [Laughter]

President Roosevelt left office with many achievements, and the most enduring of all was his commitment to conservation. As he once said, "Of all the questions which can come before the Nation, short of the actual preservation of its existence in a great war, there is none which compares in importance with leaving this land even a better land for our descendants than it is for us."

That spirit has guided the conservation movement for a century. It's guided my administration. Since 2001, we have put commonsense policies in place, and I can say upon departure, our air is cleaner, our water is purer, and our lands are better protected.

To build on this progress, I'm pleased to make several announcements today. Under the Antiquities Act that Theodore Roosevelt signed in 1906, the President can set aside places of historic or scientific significance to be protected as national monuments. With the proclamations I will sign in a few moments, I am using that authority to designate three beautiful and biologically diverse areas of the Pacific Ocean as new marine national monuments.