

The President's Weekly Address *December 17, 2011*

This week marked a historic moment in the life of our country and our military. For nearly 9 years, our Nation has been at war in Iraq. More than 1.5 million Americans have served there with honor, skill, and bravery. Tens of thousands have been wounded. Military families have sacrificed greatly, none more so than the families of those nearly 4,500 Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice. All of them—our troops, veterans, and their families—will always have the thanks of a grateful nation.

On Thursday, the colors our Armed Forces fought under in Iraq were formally cased in a ceremony in Baghdad before beginning their journey back home. Our troops are now preparing to make their final march across the border and out of the country. Iraq's future will be in the hands of its own people. Our war there will be over. All of our troops will be out of Iraq. And this holiday season, all of us can finally say: Welcome home.

This is an extraordinary achievement, one made possible by the hard work and sacrifice of the men and women who had the courage to serve. And there's a lesson to learn from that, a lesson about our character as a nation.

See, there's a reason our military is the most respected institution in America. They don't see themselves or each other as Democrats first or Republicans first. They see themselves as Americans first.

For all of our differences, all of our disagreements, they remind us that we are all a part of something bigger, that we are one Nation and one people. And for all our challenges, they remind us that there is nothing we can't do when we stick together.

They're the finest our Nation has to offer. Many will remain in the military and go on to the next mission. Others will take off the uniform and become veterans. But their commit-

ment to service doesn't end when they take off the uniform. In fact, I'm confident the story of their service to America is just beginning.

After years of rebuilding Iraq, it is time to enlist our veterans and all our people in the work of rebuilding America.

Folks like my grandfather came back from World War II to form the backbone of the largest middle class in history. And today's generation of veterans—the 9/11 generation of veterans—is armed with the skills, discipline, and leadership to attack the defining challenge of our time: rebuilding an economy where hard work pays off, where responsibility is rewarded and anyone can make it if they try.

Now it is up to us to serve these brave men and women as well as they serve us. Every day, they meet their responsibilities to their families and their country. Now it's time to meet ours, especially those of us who you sent to serve in Washington. This cannot be a country where division and discord stand in the way of our progress. This is a moment where we must come together to ensure that every American has the chance to work for a decent living, own their own home, send their kids to college, and secure a decent retirement.

This is a moment for us to build a country that lives up to the ideals that so many of our bravest Americans have fought and even died for. That is our highest obligation as citizens. That is the welcome home that our troops deserve.

Thanks.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 4:25 p.m. on December 16 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast on December 17. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 16, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on December 17.