

young, it is a great blessing to see how rapidly they're able to recover from some pretty devastating injuries.

There's one particular story I want to tell because this was the last visit that I had and I think it's representative of everything that I saw and heard today. I had a chance, just now, about 5 minutes ago, to visit with Allie Young—Allie is 19 years old—and I also had a chance to visit with Allie's best friend, Stephanie Davies, who's 21. Stephanie was actually downstairs with Allie as well as Allie's parents when I walked into the room.

And I don't think this story has been heard—at least I hadn't read it yet—but I wanted to share it with you. When the gunman initially came in and threw the canisters, he threw them only a few feet away from Allie and Stephanie, who were sitting there watching the film. Allie stood up, seeing that she might need to do something or at least warn the other people who were there. And she was immediately shot. And she was shot in the neck, and it punctured a vein, and immediately, she started spurting blood.

And apparently, as she dropped down on the floor, Stephanie—21 years old—had the presence of mind to drop down on the ground with her, pull her out of the aisle, place her fingers over where she—where Allie had been wounded, and applied pressure the entire time while the gunman was still shooting. Allie told Stephanie she needed to run. Stephanie refused to go; instead, actually, with her other hand, called 9-1-1 on her cell phone.

Once the SWAT team came in, they were still trying to clear the theater. Stephanie then, with the help of several others, carries Allie across two parking lots to where the ambu-

lance is waiting. And because of Stephanie's timely actions, I just had a conversation with Allie downstairs, and she is going to be fine.

I don't know how many people at any age would have the presence of mind that Stephanie did or the courage that Allie showed. And so, as tragic as the circumstances of what we've seen today are, as heartbreaking as it is for the families, it's worth us spending most of our time reflecting on young Americans like Allie and Stephanie, because they represent what's best in us and they assure us that out of this darkness a brighter day is going to come.

To the entire community of Aurora, the country is thinking of you. I know that there's going to be a vigil and an opportunity for everybody to come together. And I hope that all those who are in attendance understand that the entire country will be there in prayer and reflection today.

So thank you. God bless you. God bless all who helped to respond to this tragedy. And I hope that over the next several days, next several weeks, and next several months, we all reflect on how we can do something about some of the senseless violence that ends up marring this country, but also reflect on all the wonderful people who make this the greatest country on Earth.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:40 p.m. at the University of Colorado Hospital. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Steven Hogan and Chief of Police Daniel J. Oates of Aurora, CO; and James E. Holmes, accused gunman in the July 20 shootings at the Century 16 multiplex in Aurora, CO.

Remarks at the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Convention in Reno, Nevada *July 23, 2012*

Thank you! Hello, VFW. Thank you so much. Please, please, everybody, have a seat.

Commander DeNoyer, thank you for your introduction, and your service in Vietnam and on behalf of America's veterans. I want to thank your executive director, Bob Wallace; your next

commander, who I look forward to working with, John Hamilton. And to Gwen Rankin, Lianne Lemley, and the entire Ladies Auxiliary, thank you for your patriotic service to America.

I stand before you as our hearts still ache over the tragedy in Aurora, Colorado. Yesterday

I was in Aurora with families whose loss is hard to imagine; with the wounded, who are fighting to recover; with a community and a military base in the midst of their grief. And they told me of the loved ones they lost.

And here today it's fitting to recall those who wore our Nation's uniform: Staff Sergeant Jesse Childress, an Air Force reservist, 29 years old, a cyber specialist who loved sports, the kind of guy, said a friend, who'd help anybody; Petty Officer Third Class John Larimer, 27 years old, who, like his father and grandfather before him, joined the Navy, and who is remembered as an outstanding shipmate; Rebecca Wingo, 32 years old, a veteran of the Air Force, fluent in Chinese, who served as a translator, a mother whose life will be an inspiration to her two little girls; and Jonathan Blunk from Reno, just 26 years old, but a veteran of three Navy tours, whose family and friends will always know that in that theater he gave his own life to save another.

These young patriots were willing to serve in faraway lands, yet they were taken from us here at home. And yesterday I conveyed to their families a message on behalf of all Americans: We honor your loved ones. We salute their service. And as you summon the strength to carry on and keep bright their legacy, we stand with you as one united American family.

Veterans of Foreign Wars, in you I see the same shining values, the virtues that make America great. When our harbor was bombed and fascism was on the march, when the fighting raged in Korea and Vietnam, when our country was attacked on that clear September morning, when our forces were sent to Iraq, you answered your country's call. Because you know what Americans must always remember: Our Nation only endures because there are patriots who protect it.

In the crucible of battle, you were tested in ways the rest of us will never know. You carry in your hearts the memory of the comrades you lost. For you understand that we must honor our fallen heroes not just on Memorial Day, but all days. And when an American goes missing or is taken prisoner, we must do everything in our power to bring them home.

Even after you took off the uniform, you never stopped serving. You took care of each other, fighting for the benefits and care you had earned. And you've taken care of the generations that followed, including our newest veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. On behalf of all our men and women in uniform, and on behalf of the American people, I want to thank you, VFW. Thank you for your outstanding work.

Of course, some among you—our Vietnam veterans—didn't always receive that thanks, at least not on time. This past Memorial Day, I joined some of you at The Wall to begin the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam war. And it was another chance to say what should have been said all along: You did your duty, and you made us proud. And as this 50th anniversary continues, I'd ask all our Vietnam vets to stand or raise your hand as we say: Thank you, and welcome home.

Every generation among you served to keep us strong and free. And it falls to us, those that follow, to preserve what you won. Four years ago, I stood before you at a time of great challenge for our Nation. We were engaged in two wars. Al Qaida was entrenched in their safe havens in Pakistan. Many of our alliances were frayed. Our standing in the world had suffered. We were in the worst recession of our lifetimes. Around the world, some questioned whether the United States still had the capacity to lead.

So, 4 years ago, I made you a promise. I pledged to take the fight to our enemies and renew our leadership in the world. As President, that's what I've done. And as you reflect on recent years, as we look ahead to the challenges we face as a nation and the leadership that's required, you don't just have my words, you have my deeds. You have my track record. You have the promises I've made and the promises that I've kept.

I pledged to end the war in Iraq honorably, and that's what we've done. After I took office, we removed nearly 150,000 U.S. troops from Iraq. And some said that bringing our troops home last year was a mistake. They would have kept tens of thousands of our forces in Iraq in-

definitely, without a clear mission. Well, when you're Commander in Chief, you owe the troops a plan, you owe the country a plan, and that includes recognizing not just when to begin wars, but also how to end them.

So we brought our troops home responsibly. They left with their heads held high, knowing they gave Iraqis a chance to forge their own future. And today, there are no Americans fighting in Iraq, and we are proud of all the Americans who served there.

I pledged to make it a priority to take out the terrorists who had attacked us on 9/11. And as a candidate, I said that if we had Usama bin Laden in our sights, we would act to keep America safe, even if it meant going into Pakistan. Some of you remember, at the time, that comment drew quite a bit of criticism. But since I took office, we've worked with our allies and our partners to take out more top Al Qaida leaders than any time since 9/11. And thanks to the courage and the skill of our forces, Usama bin Laden will never threaten America again and Al Qaida is on the road to defeat.

I pledged to finish the job in Afghanistan. After years of drift, we had to break the momentum of the Taliban and build up the capacity and the capability of Afghans. And so, working with our commanders, we came up with a new strategy, and we ordered additional forces to get the job done. This is still a tough fight. But thanks to the incredible services and sacrifices of our troops, we pushed the Taliban back, we're training Afghan forces, we've begun the transition to Afghan lead.

Again, there are those who argued against a timeline for ending this war—or against talking about it publicly. But you know what, that's not a plan for America's security either. After 10 years of war, and given the progress we've made, I felt it was important that the American people—and our men and women in uniform—know our plan to end this war responsibly. And so, by the end of this summer, more than 30,000 of our troops will have come home. Next year, Afghans will take the lead for their own security. In 2014, the transition will be complete. And even as our troops come home, we'll have a strong partnership with the

Afghan people, and we will stay vigilant so Afghanistan is never again a source for attacks against America.

We're not just ending these wars, we're doing it in a way that achieves our objectives. Moreover, it's allowed us to broaden our vision and begin a new era of American leadership. We're leading from Europe to the Asia-Pacific, with alliances that have never been stronger. We're leading the fight against nuclear dangers. We've applied the strongest sanctions ever on Iran and North Korea, nations that cannot be allowed to threaten the world with nuclear weapons. We're leading on behalf of freedom: standing with people in the Middle East and North Africa as they demand their rights, protecting the Libyan people as they rid the world of Muammar Qadhafi.

Today, we're also working for a transition so the Syrian people can have a better future, free of the Asad regime. And given the regime's stockpiles of chemical weapons, we will continue to make it clear to Asad and those around him that the world is watching and that they will be held accountable by the international community and the United States should they make the tragic mistake of using those weapons. And we will continue to work with our friends and our allies and the Syrian opposition on behalf of the day when the Syrian people have a government that respects their basic rights to live in peace and freedom and dignity.

Because we're leading around the world, people have a new attitude toward America. There's more confidence in our leadership. We see it everywhere we go. We saw it as grateful Libyans waved American flags. We see it across the globe. When people are asked, "Which country do you admire the most?" one nation comes out on top: the United States of America.

So this is the progress that we've made. Thanks to the extraordinary service of our men and women in uniform, we're winding down a decade of war, we're destroying the terrorist network that attacked us, we're strengthening the alliances that extend our values. And today, every American can be proud that the United

States is safer and stronger and more respected in the world.

And all this allows us to fulfill another promise that I made to you 4 years ago: strengthening our military. After 10 years of operations, our soldiers will now have fewer and shorter deployments, which means more time on the home front to keep their families strong, more time to heal from the wounds of war, more time to improve readiness and prepare for future threats.

As President, I've continued to make historic investments to keep our Armed Forces strong. And guided by our new defense strategy, we will maintain our military superiority. It will be second to none as long as I am President and well into the future. We've got the best trained, best led, best equipped military in history. And as Commander in Chief, I am going to keep it that way.

And by the way, given all the rhetoric lately—it is political season—let's also set the record straight on the budget. Those big, across-the-board cuts, including defense, that Congress said would occur next year if they couldn't reach a deal to reduce the deficit? Let's understand, first of all, there's no reason that should happen, because people in Congress ought to be able to come together and agree on a plan, a balanced approach that reduces the deficit and keeps our military strong. It should be done.

And there are a number of Republicans in Congress who don't want you to know that most of them voted for these cuts. Now they're trying to wriggle out of what they agreed to. Instead of making tough choices to reduce the deficit, they'd rather protect tax cuts for some of the wealthiest Americans, even if it risks big cuts in our military. And I've got to tell you, VFW, I disagree. If the choice is between tax cuts that the wealthiest Americans don't need and funding our troops that they definitely need to keep our country strong, I will stand with our troops every single time.

So let's stop playing politics with our military. Let's get serious and reduce our deficit and keep our military strong. Let's take some of the money that we're saving because we're

not fighting in Iraq and because we're winding down in Afghanistan, use half that money to pay down our deficit; let's use half of it to do some nation-building here in the United States of America.

Let's keep taking care of our extraordinary military families. For the first time ever, we've made military families and veterans a top priority not just at DOD, not just at the VA, but across the Government. As Richard mentioned, this has been a mission for my wife Michelle and Vice President Joe Biden's wife, Dr. Jill Biden. Today, more people across America in every segment of society are joining forces to give our military families the respect and the support that they deserve.

And there's another way we can honor those who serve. It may no longer be a crime for con artists to pass themselves off as heroes, but one thing is certain: It is contemptible. So this week we will launch a new website, a living memorial, so the American people can see who's been awarded our Nation's highest honors. Because no American hero should ever have their valor stolen.

This leads me to another promise I made 4 years ago: upholding America's sacred trust with our veterans. I promised to strengthen the VA, and that promise has been kept. In my first year, we achieved the largest percentage increase in the VA budget in 30 years. And we're going to keep making historic investments in our veterans. When Richard came to the Oval Office, we talked about what those automatic budget cuts—sequestration—could mean for the VA. So my administration has made it clear: Your veterans' benefits are exempt from sequestration. They are exempt. And because advance appropriations is now the law of the land, veterans' health care is protected from the budget battles in Washington.

I promised you that I'd stand up for veterans' health care. As long as I'm President, I will not allow VA health care to be turned into a voucher system, subject to the whims of the insurance market. Some have argued for this plan. I could not disagree more. You don't need vouchers, you need the VA health care that you have earned and that you depend on.

So we've made dramatic investments to help care for our veterans. For our Vietnam veterans, we declared that more illnesses are now presumed connected to your exposure to agent orange. And as a result of our decision, Vietnam-era vets and your families received nearly \$4 billion in disability pay. You needed it, you fought for it, we heard you, and we got it done.

We've added mobile clinics for our rural veterans, more tailored care for our women veterans, unprecedented support for veterans with traumatic brain injury. All told, we've made VA health care available to nearly 800,000 veterans who didn't have it before. And we're now supporting caregivers and families with the skills and the stipends to help care for the veterans that they love.

Of course, more veterans in the system means more claims. So we've hired thousands of claims processors. We're investing in paperless systems. To their credit, the dedicated folks at the VA are now completing 1 million claims a year. But there's been a tidal wave of new claims, and when I hear about veterans waiting months or years for your benefits, it is unacceptable. And we are doing something about it.

We're taking all those folks who processed your agent orange claims—more than 1,200 experts—and giving them a new mission: Attack the backlog. We're prioritizing veterans with the most serious disabilities. And the VA and DOD will work harder towards a seamless transition so new veterans aren't just piled on to the backlog. And we will not rest, I will not be satisfied until we get this right. And today I'm also calling on all those who help our vets complete their claims—State VAs, physicians, and veteran groups like the VFW—to join us. You know how this can work better, so let's get it done together.

We're also focused on the urgent needs of our veterans with PTSD. We've poured tremendous resources into this fight: thousands of more counselors and more clinicians, more care and more treatment. And we've made it easier for veterans with PTSD to qualify for VA benefits. But after a decade of war, it's now an epidemic. We're losing more troops to sui-

cide—one every single day—than we are in combat. According to some estimates, about 18 veterans are taking their lives each day, more every year than all the troops killed in Iraq and Afghanistan combined. That's a tragedy. It's heartbreaking. It should not be happening in the United States of America.

So when I hear about servicemembers and veterans who had the courage to seek help but didn't get it, who died waiting, that's an outrage. And I've told Secretary Panetta, Chairman Dempsey, and Secretary Shinseki we've got to do better. This has to be all hands on deck.

So our message to everyone who's ever worn the uniform: If you're hurting, it's not a sign of weakness to seek help, it's a sign of strength. And when you do, we'll be there and do more to help, including more counselors and clinicians to help you heal. We need to end this tragedy, VFW. And we're going to work together to make it happen.

So too with our campaign to end homelessness among our veterans. We've now helped to bring tens of thousands of veterans off the streets and into permanent housing. This has to be a core mission, because every veteran who has fought for America ought to have a home in America.

And this brings me to the last promise I want to discuss with you. Four years ago, I said that I'd do everything I could to help our veterans realize the American Dream, to enlist you in building a stronger America. After all, our veterans have the skills that America needs. So today, our economy is growing and creating jobs, but it's still too hard for too many folks to find work, especially our younger veterans, our veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. And with a million more troops rejoining civilian life in the years ahead—and looking for work—we've got to step up our game, at every stage of their careers.

So today I'm announcing a major overhaul of our Transition Assistance Program. We're going to set up a kind of "reverse boot camp" for our departing servicemembers. Starting this year, they'll get more personalized assistance as they plan their careers. We'll provide

the training they need to find that job or pursue that education or start that business. And just as they've maintained their military readiness, we'll have new standards of "career readiness."

In addition, by making the post-9/11 GI bill a priority, we've helped more than 800,000 veterans and their families pursue their education. And I've issued an Executive order to help put a stop to schools that are ripping off our veterans.

I've directed the Federal Government to step up on jobs. Since I took office, we've hired more than 200,000 veterans into the Federal Government. We made it a priority. And we're keeping track, every agency, every department: What are you doing for our veterans?

I've challenged community health centers to hire thousands of veterans as physicians and nurses. And as we help local communities hire new police officers and firefighters and first-responders, we're giving a preference to veterans.

We're also fighting to get more vets hired in the private sector. With new tools like our online Veterans Jobs Bank, we're connecting veterans directly to jobs. We're helping thousands of veterans get certified for good-paying jobs in manufacturing. We succeeded in passing tax credits for businesses that hire our veterans and our wounded warriors. And this morning I signed into law the Veteran Skills to Jobs Act, making it easier for veterans to transfer their outstanding military skills into the licenses and credentials they need to get civilian jobs.

If you are a young man that is in charge of a platoon or millions of dollars of equipment and are taking responsibility or you're a medic out in the field who is saving lives every single day, when you come home, you need to be credentialed and certified quickly so you can get on the job. People should understand how skilled you are. And there shouldn't be bureaucrats or runarounds. We've got to put those folks to work.

Last summer, I also challenged the private sector to hire or train a hundred thousand veterans or their spouses. Michelle and Jill Biden

have been leading the effort through Joining Forces. And so far, thousands of patriotic businesses have hired or trained more than 90,000 veterans and spouses. And our message to companies is simple: If you want somebody who gets the job done, then hire a vet. Hire a vet. Hire a vet and they will make you proud just like they've made America proud.

And we're fighting for veterans who want to start their own businesses, including more training in entrepreneurship. It's one of the reasons we've cut taxes 18 times for small businesses, including veteran-owned businesses. And the effects ripple out, because vets are more likely to hire vets.

So today, we can point to progress. More veterans are finding jobs; the unemployment rate for veterans has come down. Yes, it's still too high, but it's coming down. And now we've got to sustain that momentum. It's one of the reasons I've proposed to Congress a veterans jobs corps to put our veterans back to work protecting and rebuilding America. And today I am again calling on Congress: Pass this veterans jobs corps and extend the tax credits for businesses that hire veterans so we can give these American heroes the jobs and opportunities that they deserve.

So, VFW, these are the promises that I made. These are the promises that I've kept. Where we still have more to do, we will not rest. That's my vow to you. I've got your back. I've got your six. Because we have a solemn obligation to all who serve, not just for the years you're in uniform, but for all the decades that follow, and because even though today's wars are ending, the hard work of taking care of our newest veterans has only just begun.

Just as you protected America, we're going to pass our country to the next generation stronger and safer and more respected in the world. So if anyone tries to tell you that our greatness has passed, that America is in decline, you tell them this: Just like the 20th century, the 21st century is going to be another great American century. For we are Americans, blessed with the greatest form of government ever devised by man, a democracy dedi-

cated to freedom and committed to the ideals that still light the world. We will never apologize for our way of life; we will never waver in its defense.

We are a nation that freed millions and turned adversaries into allies. We are the Americans who defended the peace and turned back aggression. We are Americans who welcome our global responsibilities and our global leadership. The United States has been, and will remain, the one indispensable nation in world affairs.

And you, you are the soldiers, the sailors, the airmen, the marines and the coastguardsmen who have kept us strong. We will honor your legacy. And we will ensure that the military you served and the America that we love remains the greatest force for freedom that the world has ever known.

Remarks at an Obama Victory Fund 2012 Fundraiser in Piedmont, California July 23, 2012

The President. Well, to Wayne and Quinn and all of you who are here, thank you. I have fond memories of being here. It was, I think, just as spectacular a day, it was just as beautiful. And I think Alice Waters was cooking. And part of the reason I remember that is because I've got a staff guy, Marvin Nicholson—some of you know Marvin—Marvin doesn't believe in eating vegetables. [Laughter] So he's still traumatized by—[laughter]. I'm just saying. I was mentioning the last time we were here, and Alice Waters was cooking, and yes—[laughter]—Marvin's general palate runs between hotdogs and hamburgers, so—and pizza. [Laughter] That's true. So—chicken tenders. [Laughter]

Anyway, we had a wonderful time then, and so many of you have been friends and supporters ever since. And so I'm grateful to all of you.

Because this is a more intimate setting, I'm not going to give a long speech. What this gives me an opportunity to do is really have a conversation with you, and I want to save as much time as possible for questions and answers and comments that all of you may have. But let me

God bless you, God bless all of our veterans, and God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:35 p.m. at VFW Convention Hall. In his remarks, he referred to Richard L. DeNoyer, commander-in-chief, Veterans of Foreign Wars; Gwendolyn Rankin, former national president, and Leanne Lemley, national president, Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars; Scott M. Larimer, father of PO3 John T. Larimer; Jaelyn and Jewel Wingo, daughters of Rebecca A. Wingo, who was killed in the July 20 shootings at the Century 16 multiplex in Aurora, CO; and Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, USA, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. He also referred to H.R. 4155, approved July 23, which was assigned Public Law No. 112-147; and Executive Order 13607, which is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

just summarize a little bit about what I'm seeing out there.

First of all, obviously, yesterday I spent time in Aurora, Colorado, after the terrible tragedy that they went through. And I spent time with the families, and the medical staff, the first-responders. And sometimes, when bad things happen, horrible things happen, I think it's easy for us to slip into despair. And yet if you had spent some time, like I did, with those people, who had faced down just unimaginable pain with strength and grace, it would make you extraordinarily optimistic about America.

And one of the messages that I tried to deliver—because if you're just paying attention to debates in Washington, sometimes, you feel as if the country is constantly arguing and everybody is down and out—when you travel the country and you meet people, Americans are strong, and they are resilient, and they are optimistic, and they are confident about their future and their kids' futures.

They recognize that there's dysfunction in Washington, and they'd like to see it changed. And they recognize that the economy is not