

The President's Weekly Address September 1, 2012

Hi, everybody. On Friday, I visited Fort Bliss in Texas, where I met with some of our extraordinary men and women in uniform to mark the second anniversary of the end of major combat in Iraq.

It was a chance to thank our troops for the outstanding work they've done over the last decade. Fort Bliss is home to soldiers who took part in every major phase of the Iraq war: from the initial assault on Baghdad, to the years of fighting block by block, to the partnership with the Iraqi people that helped give them a chance to forge their own destiny.

And while the war itself remains a source of controversy here at home, one thing will never be in doubt: The members of our Armed Forces are patriots in every sense of the word. They met every mission and performed every task that was asked of them with precision, commitment, and skill. And now, with no Americans fighting in Iraq, it's my privilege, on behalf of a grateful nation, to once again congratulate these men and women on a job well done.

This anniversary is a chance to appreciate how far we've come. But it's also a reminder that there is still difficult work ahead of us in Afghanistan. Some of the soldiers I met at Fort Bliss had just come home from the battlefield, and others are getting ready to ship out.

We've broken the Taliban's momentum in Afghanistan and begun the transition to an Afghan lead. Next month, the last of the troops I ordered as part of the surge against the Taliban will come home, and by 2014, the transition to Afghan lead will be complete.

But as long as we have a single American in harm's way, we will continue to do everything in our power to keep them safe and help them succeed. That means giving them a clear mission and the equipment they need on the frontlines. But it also means taking care of our

veterans and their families. Because no one who fights for this country should have to fight for a job or a roof over their head when they come home.

I also told our soldiers at Bliss that part of honoring their service means strengthening the nation they fought so hard to protect. As we turn the page on a decade of war, it's time to do some nation-building here at home.

My grandfather's generation came back from World War II and helped form the backbone of the greatest middle class in history. They helped this country come back stronger than before. Today's veterans have the skills, the discipline, and the leadership skills to do the exact same thing, and it's our job to give them that chance.

It's time to build a nation that lives up to the ideals that so many Americans have fought for: a nation where they can realize the dream they sacrificed to protect. We need to rebuild our roads and runways and ports. We need to lay broadband lines across this country and put our veterans back to work as cops and firefighters in communities that need them. And we need to come together to make America a place where hard work is rewarded and anyone willing to put in the effort can make it if they try.

That's how we can honor our troops. That's the welcome home they've earned.

Thanks, and have a great weekend.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 5:55 p.m. on August 30 in the Blue Room at the White House for broadcast on September 1. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 31, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on September 1.