

Remarks at the Wounded Warrior Project Soldier Ride Opening Ceremony April 17, 2013

The President. Thank you, everybody. Thank you. Well, welcome to the White House. Thank you, Ric, for your introduction and for your leadership at the VA. And I want to thank all of you for coming out today.

This is actually good, a little overcast, to keep you guys not too hot. This is one of my favorite events of the year.

Audience member. I love you, Mr. President!

The President. I love you back. [Laughter]

We obviously meet at a time when our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Boston. Our hearts are with the families of the victims. And now we send our support and encouragement to people who never expected that they'd need it: the wounded civilians who are just beginning what will be, I'm sure for some of them, a long road to recovery.

It's a road that the remarkable warriors and athletes here know all too well. And as a consequence, they're going to serve for all of the families as well as all Americans a continued inspiration.

We do this every spring, and as all of you know, it started in a bar, where a lot of good ideas start. [Laughter]

Did you say "woo"?

Chris Carney and some of his buddies, who are here today, were talking about what they could do to support our wounded warriors, and Chris came up with the idea of biking coast-to-coast to raise money and awareness.

Now, even he has admitted in hindsight, "It may have been the beer muscles talking." But he followed through, and he started in Long Island, he ended in San Diego. Along the way, he inspired people all across the country. And since then, more than a thousand wounded warriors have joined soldier rides across America. This is the fourth time I've had the chance to welcome these rides here at the White House. And as always, we've got Army. We've got Navy. We've got Air Force. And we've got some marines in the house.

Together, with your outstanding families, you represent what's best in America. When we needed patriots to defend our freedom, you have answered the call. You've risked everything for our country and for each other. And you've made sacrifices most of us can barely imagine.

So thanks to your courage and your resolve, we've been able to end one war; we're beginning to wind down another. But for all of you, as is true for all of our wounded warriors, coming home doesn't mean that the fight is over. In some ways, it's just begun.

You think about folks like Sergeant Sean Karpf. I first met Sean last June at Walter Reed; he had just lost his left leg to an IED in Afghanistan, he knew that there was a long road ahead of him. But today Sean is here, he's ready to ride. He's trained to compete in swimming and track at the Wounded Warrior Games. He's lined up an internship in the physical therapy section at Walter Reed, where he's going to help fellow wounded warriors make the same journey that he did.

Then there's Staff Sergeant Erick Millette. During two tours in Iraq, Erick survived 17 IED attacks. They left him with the kinds of injuries that you can't always see: head trauma, brain injury, PTSD. Erick's military career was cut short, but he's taken on a new mission, and that's sharing his story with audiences across the country.

So he spread the message that it's okay to talk about these unseen wounds of war. It's okay to seek out help and to seek out support. Erick says that the Wounded Warrior Project literally saved his life, and now through his work, he's helping save even more lives. So, Erick, thank you so much. And obviously, to Sean and everybody who is participating, we could not be prouder of you.

I also want to thank folks like Captain Mary McGriff, First Lieutenant Jason Church for returning for another soldier ride as peer mentors for first-time riders. That's a big part of what the soldier rides are about: not just what

you can do for yourself, but what you can do as a team. As one rider put it: "It's just like in the military. You ride for the warrior next to you."

So 9 years ago, Chris Carney told a reporter that the most daunting part of that first ride was being alone. He said he had only played team sports in the past, that he wasn't used to a solo effort. But what Chris and others discovered is that when it comes to supporting our returning heroes, there's no such thing as going it alone. We do this as a team. We get each other's backs.

Those who have served under our proud flag never lose that sense of service to one another or to country, and we saw that on Monday. When that first explosion went off, National Guardsmen, servicemembers, veterans in the area all did what warriors do: They ran into harm's way to protect their fellow Americans. They applied tourniquets. They went to hospitals; they donated blood. Doctors used experience they acquired in part overseas to help save lives here at home.

That's the strong stuff that our warriors are made out of, and that's why we're so proud and so grateful to the men and women and veterans of our armed forces. And that's why, as Commander in Chief, I'll keep doing everything in my power to make sure we serve you as well as you've served us. And that means making sure you get the care and the benefits you need. It means making sure you don't have to fight for a job when you get home. It means recognizing our military families and giving them the support that they deserve. And right now it means saying a big thank you to all of our riders.

So I'm asking every American out there and everyone who is along the route to get out and

show their support, wave a flag. Cheer for these outstanding men and women.

Good luck over the next 3 days. Have fun out there. And know that you've got a country and a Commander in Chief who appreciates you, who's proud of you and who will always have your back.

So thank you. God bless you. God bless America. And let's get this thing going. You can see that they're ready to go.

[At this point, the President was given an air horn by a member of his staff.]

The President. And this is my favorite part, using this little horn here. Are you ready?

Audience member. Oh, yeah.

The President. You guys, everybody ready here?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. All right. So you guys all ready?

Audience member. Ready.

The President. You sure?

Audience member. Positive!

The President. All right I just want to make sure. All right. So I'm going to say "on your mark, get set," and then I'm going to blow the horn. All right? On your mark. Get set.

[The President blew the horn, and the ride began.]

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:54 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki; and Chris Carney, founder, Wounded Warrior Project Soldier Ride.

Remarks on Senate Action on Gun Control Legislation April 17, 2013

A few months ago, in response to too many tragedies, including the shootings of a United States Congresswoman, Gabby Giffords, who's here today, and the murder of 20 innocent schoolchildren and their teachers, this country took up the cause of pro-

tecting more of our people from gun violence.

Families that know unspeakable grief summoned the courage to petition their elected leaders, not just to honor the memory of their children, but to protect the lives of all of our