

leader of the U.S. House of Representatives, then-Congressman Gerald Ford never sought the office of Vice President or President, but when in 1974 he faced the daunting task of assuming the highest office in the land, his steadfast dedication to the bedrock principles of hardwork, common sense, and duty—so emblematic of his upbringing and his remarkable career in Congress—prepared him to occupy the White House and served him well over the course of his brief but historic tenure.

With an unwavering moral compass, a certain grasp of purpose, and an always-steady resolve, President Ford guided us out of conflict abroad and quelled our concerns here at home and in doing so brought honor to the Oval Office and reassurance to Americans. It is fitting that in football as well as in his public life, Gerald Ford was ever the keystone, the center that held those around him together, who exemplified the essential underpinning that made progress possible.

On a personal note, last summer I had the esteemed privilege of cosponsoring—along with Senators WARNER, STEVENS, and LEVIN—an amendment offered by Senator JOHN WARNER to the 2007 Defense authorization bill that would name our Nation's newest carrier the “USS *Gerald R. Ford*.” In fact, the Navy's entire class of future carriers would be known as the Ford class—in honor of the President we praise.

Later this month, that accolade—which the Senate passed unanimously—is expected to come to fruition. Such a bestowal by Navy Secretary Winter would be an appropriate tribute to then-Lieutenant Ford, who, as a sailor in December 1944, encountered a typhoon while aboard the carrier USS *Monterey* and demonstrated the virtues that would emerge as the hallmark of his unflagging service and sacrifice to our Nation, such as calm and courage amid turmoil, presence of mind to act decisively despite confusion and chaos, and an unflinching will of spirit to help others, even at great personal peril.

It has been recounted in the Bob Drury and Tom Clavin book “Halsey's Typhoon: The True Story of A Fighting Admiral, an Epic Storm, and an Untold Rescue” that Lieutenant Ford rescued wounded comrades, beat back raging fires, and helped salvage a ship that was ordered to be abandoned. Gerald Ford was integral to the effort driven by the simple belief of the skipper, Captain Ingersoll, that “we can fix this.” As part of Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet, they did not give up the USS *Monterey* in what reportedly was “one of the worst natural disasters in U.S. military history,” a disaster where much of the fleet was decimated and more men were purportedly killed than in the Battle of Midway.

Mr. President, this story in many ways embodies the essence of this great son of Michigan. The story of the USS

Monterey is telling in that—like President Ford—it has for years taken a humble and unassuming place in the American narrative—and yet over time has rightfully grown in stature and acclaim. We also see a disposition and valor in a young sailor that would be brought to bear later in life as a statesman. Lieutenant Ford's reaction to conflagration and crisis was to take action and help tamp it down. Gerald Ford helped bring under control the flames that imperiled the USS *Monterey*. He would do similarly as President when charged to guide the ship of state—which he did with a fearless, unflappable demeanor. And which he did, to paraphrase President Lincoln, “with firmness in the right as God [gave him] to see the right.” And through his eloquence of action, Gerald Ford moved us all to “strive on to finish the work we [were] in” . . . and helped “to bind up the nation's wounds.” And for that we are eternally grateful.

Our thoughts and prayers continue to be with First Lady Betty Ford, their children, and the entire Ford family. May God bless and keep President Gerald R. Ford and may God bless the United States of America he so ably led.

HONORING HOLIDAY WREATHS AT ARLINGTON CEMETERY

Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize and honor the patriotic and exemplary contribution of Morrill Worcester, owner of Worcester Wreath Company in Harrington, ME, who for the past 15 years has undertaken what has become an extraordinary tradition—to donate, transport, and oversee the placement of Maine balsam fir holiday wreaths on the graves of the exceptional service men and women buried and forever extolled at Arlington National Cemetery.

It is truly inspiring to see how the actions of one man can transform into such an honorable and moving tribute to America's fallen heroes. Unquestionably, I am immensely grateful to have been part of Morrill Worcester's dream, which began in December of 1992 when he called my office to ask if he could place his excess wreaths on the graves of soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery. I never could have imagined that what occurred on that day would evolve remarkably into a nationwide gesture of unfailing gratitude for our troops.

During the season of thankfulness and giving, Morrill Worcester's tremendous generosity exemplifies not only the very best of the holiday spirit but also the inherent good will and can-do belief which is the abiding hallmark of Mainers. And what better way to celebrate the joy engendered by that time of year than to pay rightful homage to the countless courageous veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice to ensure and protect the many freedoms we cherish everyday. It is on oc-

casions such as this that I could not be more proud to be both a Mainer and an American.

This past December Mr. Worcester was joined by 800 volunteers, including Maine Civil Air Patrol Units, local VFW and American Legion Posts, military units, congressional staffers, schoolchildren, Scout troops, and an array of American veterans for the trek down U.S. Route 1 from Harrington to Washington, DC, with 5,000 Maine balsam fir holiday wreaths.

In fact, it was on Thursday, December 14, 2006 when the tractor-trailer with the logo “Wreaths across America” was parked at the top of the 11th section of the cemetery, with more than 500 volunteers gathered and ready to grace those monuments to heroism with red ribbons, making an already beautiful testament to bravery and valor even more stunning and glorious. The Maine wreaths were also laid on the grave of Edmund Muskie, former U.S. Senator from Maine and Secretary of State, and near the sites of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the USS *Maine* Memorial.

The many white tombstones that one day prior had stood barren now had come to life because of one man and hundreds of dedicated volunteers who, with full hearts and sharing hands, simply took the time to thank those who sacrificed themselves on our behalf—men and women whose undaunted service recalls the timeless words of President John Adams: “If we do not lay out ourselves in the service of mankind whom should we serve?”

With many of America's finest in harm's way, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is more imperative than ever that we remember always that freedom is not free—and there are those who gave the full measure of devotion to protect us and defend our liberty.

A NEW CHANCE FOR GUN LEGISLATION

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, on April 20, 1999, two students walked into Columbine High School and carried out a shooting rampage, killing 12 fellow students and a teacher, as well as wounding 24 others, before committing suicide. A week later, we paused in the Senate to observe a moment of silence in tribute to those who died and to express our sympathy for their loved ones. Since this tragic event, many of us, on many occasions, have urged our colleagues to debate and pass sensible gun legislation.

Between 1999 and 2004, over 117,000 people have been killed by guns, criminals continue to gain easy access to guns and law enforcement officers do not have the tools they need to investigate gun-related crimes. The 109th Congress nonetheless has failed to act and has missed numerous opportunities to enhance the safety of our communities across the Nation. Congress has not reauthorized the 1994 assault weapons ban. Congress has not closed the

gun show loophole. Congress has failed to make the necessary improvements to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System that could significantly decrease the likelihood of convicted criminals gaining access to guns. And, the President has failed to provide the necessary leadership. Instead we have seen a continual rise in the levels of gun related crime. This increase in crime levels has not been restricted to America's largest cities, but has also permeated America's small and mid-sized cities. As Paul Helmke, president of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence and former mayor of Fort Wayne, IN, describes it:

For almost six years, many have systematically made it easier for criminals to have access to firearms by weakening enforcement of laws that cut illegal gun trafficking, supporting policies that encourage more firearms on the streets of American cities, putting AK-47s and other military-style semiautomatic weapons back onto our streets and even placing huge restraints on the ability of governments and individuals to hold the gun pushers accountable through the civil court system.

The 110th Congress has a fresh opportunity to act on a bipartisan basis to pass legislation that will make our streets safer for all Americans. I urge my colleagues to work to enact sensible gun safety legislation for the benefit of our families, communities and police officers.

CREATION OF A U.S. AFRICA COMMAND

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, as the Defense Department continues its planning for the creation of an Africa Command, it is important to realize that the creation of a new regional combatant command focused exclusively on Africa will have a profound impact on our country's presence, policies, and engagement in what is becoming one of the most critical regions of the world. New bases, new personnel, new missions, new efforts, and new relationships will be created, and our potential to have a positive impact throughout the continent will be enhanced greatly.

We have to be strategic and forward-thinking as we create this new organization, though. Because we are making such a profound change to our posture on the continent, we need to ensure that the new organization will contribute to, not define, the U.S. Government's overall strategy and objectives for the continent. We also need to make sure that the U.S. military's activities and involvement on the continent do not overshadow, skew, or otherwise hinder our Government's other key objectives.

It is clear that challenges in Africa are diverse and complex. We have a number of security-related concerns there, ranging from terrorist organizations and safe havens to large-scale corruption, regional conflicts, and the disruption of global energy markets. Continuing to establishing firm and productive military-to-military rela-

tions with a number of African nations is also critical.

But we have learned that the way to address the underlying causes of the security challenges throughout the continent is not generally through military power. In fact, the best way to address the full range of security-related concerns in Africa is to focus on the underlying conditions that plague governments and societies throughout the continent. Security threats and instability stem from corruption, absence of human rights, poverty, disease, lagging economies, and joblessness. Weak governments are incapable of addressing the dynamics that often contribute to lawlessness or violence, and are often left without any capacity to help defeat trans-national threats.

Our focus as a government, therefore, must be on strengthening African governance capacities and legitimacy, as well as the commitment to the rule of law, sound democratic mechanisms, and human rights. We must continue to help alleviate the humanitarian suffering that exists throughout the continent, and we must work hard to assist African countries develop sound democratic institutions that are credible and capable, and that have the technical capacity to provide for their people and to govern fairly. Only then will we start to see real returns—real, long-term returns—for our national security.

This isn't to suggest that continued military involvement throughout the continent isn't essential. It is. But only if it is a component of a broader strategy to address these underlying causes of instability. U.S. military activities throughout Africa must help support a larger framework that seeks to strengthen African governments and balance the need for good governance and security capacity. Our security assistance to African nations, and more broadly, the work of the U.S. military throughout Africa, must not interfere with, create an imbalance in, or skew the necessary political, economic, and social work that must be done if we are going to see any long-term improvement in areas of critical concern.

Accordingly, establishing a new combatant command for Africa presents an opportunity to strengthen our national security focus in Africa, but it also presents an opportunity to create a military command with the primary mission of supporting diplomatic, development, humanitarian assistance, and regional initiatives led by the Department of State, USAID, and other agencies. This command, if designed right, will be able to serve as a contributor to broader U.S. Government efforts throughout the continent, and will help provide an additional platform for regional thinking, strategizing, and activity that will advance the strategic interests of our country throughout Africa.

To be effective, of course, this command will take careful planning. It will also take a considerable amount of

planning on the part of the Department of State, USAID, and other departments and agencies that will have to adjust to this new organization. It will take intensive coordination and adjustments throughout the civilian inter-agency and it will be crucial that State, USAID, and other departments and agencies are playing a full role in the creation of this command.

The mission of this command will need to be relatively broad. Africa Command should establish strong security-oriented relationships with our partner nations throughout Africa. These relationships should be coordinated with our embassies and with Washington, but should only be part of our broader efforts with any given country. The command's efforts should be balanced and should take into consideration the scale and scope of diplomatic, development, humanitarian, and human rights efforts in each country.

The command should also prepare to deal with international organizations—particularly the African Union and subregional organizations that often play leading roles in regional and continental peacekeeping efforts, conflict mitigation activities, and humanitarian response. Establishing a strong relationship with the AU and other organizations will be essential to unlocking the potential for Africans to address security challenges throughout their continent.

The command should also prepare to conduct missions that have often taken a backseat to higher profile or less military-focused efforts. Humanitarian assistance—often one of the best ways to win hearts and minds in the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster or conflict—will need to be at the top of the command's list of priorities. So too should efforts to help rebuild societies after conflict. This might take the form of logistical assistance for humanitarian or development personnel, or potentially a direct role for U.S. military personnel, when appropriate. Other critical components of the new command's mission should include anticorruption efforts, leadership training, strengthening civilian oversight of national militaries, preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS, demobilizing or reintegrating ex-combatants, and being on standby for rapid response to new conflicts or challenges.

The Department of Defense does a lot of this already. Many of these missions have been carried out by dedicated men and women in uniform who are stationed in places like Nigeria, Uganda, or at the Combined Joint Task Force—Horn of Africa. The challenge, though, is to establish a command that places these initiatives on its priority list, and to ensure that these efforts are resourced appropriately, are coordinated with the appropriate departments and agencies, and that they do not distort or disrupt other key initiatives throughout the continent.

With this new mission and these challenges in mind, I would like to