

MN National Guard Conference  
April 24, 2010

Thank you all for your invitation and your welcome. I appreciate the chance to give a little back to those who give so much to our country.

To paraphrase a distinguished soldier, a U.S. Military Academy Graduate, Class of 1903... old senators do not die, they just fade away.

Well, I am doing my best make my fade as slow as possible, because people like you put a lot into me that I still need to share.

As a Jewish kid growing up out East and even as an adult, my life is greatly shaped by the wisdom and encouragement I draw from the scriptures, especially the Torah, the first five books of the Bible.

As I think of the amazing lives of our Minnesota National Guard men and women, I recall the poignant scene of Moses on Mt. Nebo. You will

remember that he had an incredible challenge leading over a million Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land over a period of forty years. My wife tells me it took so long because the men refused to ask for directions.

But Moses, for reasons I won't go into, was not permitted to lead the people out of the desert. God's decision was that that should be Joshua's job – Moses' younger aide. But God did grant Moses the opportunity to climb Mt. Nebo so God could show him the Promised Land he would never set foot in. Just imagine a forty year struggle to get the people there, and falling just short. Sad. But an important lesson at the same time.

It has been said that no person is truly great unless they accomplish something important that outlives them. Reagan poetically talked about planting shade trees you would never sit under. But isn't that the real standard we should strive? In this internet-crazed, faster-faster-faster

culture, we almost worship instant gratification. We want a quick pay-off for our effort, forgetting there are no short cuts to anyplace really worth going.

So I think about the brave and talented young leaders who serve in the American military. And they lead the only truly indispensable function of our government: our national defense. This generation continues the unbroken string of outstanding and whole hearted service sacrifice that runs all the way back to the American Revolution and out into the future none of us will be around for.

Kind of takes your breath away, doesn't it?

And as I look back on my six years in the Senate, and down the decades of history yet to be, I am proud to have been involved in supporting our

National Guard with my advocacy, my vote, my voice and my constituent service work.

So I stand here at a minor Mt. Nebo moment and say “because of our great military families, the future looks promising from here.”

I want to talk about three topics tonight, two you might expect and one you probably don't.

The first, of course is service. We honor service because it benefits us, obviously. But we need to pay special attention to it for another reason.

The natural preference we all have is for safety, comfort and ease.

Service challenges the individual to seek the exact opposite.

The first few minutes after the I-35 W bridge collapse said more about Minnesota than a thousand speeches. The professional first responders did a great job to be sure. But what was truly amazing was the way hundreds of regular people saw a great need and ran *toward* the danger. They overcame their natural fear and desire for self preservation because people needed help.

What is so remarkable about our military members – academy applicants, guard and enlisted personnel – is that their run toward the danger is a careful, calm, consistent premeditated act. Fully aware of the price they pay in freedom, compensation and risk, they do it anyway.

That 1903 West Point graduate Douglas MacArthur addressed a military funeral saying “Don’t mourn that they died; celebrate that such men lived.” We need to celebrate the life of each military family and the miraculous service they provide.

The second topic I want to touch on is leadership.

In much of the academic world, leadership is a suspect category.

Professors have endless critiques of manipulative, self-serving and even corrupt leaders, until there doesn't seem to be any such thing as a good leader. What a price we pay for this anti-leader presumption.

I commend the Guard for its rigorous development of the practice of the topic of leadership and for highlighting the value of the genuine article.

Leaders give us vision, which rescues us from day to day complexities.

Leaders marshal resources, saying some tasks are more important than others.

Leaders foster unity, making us see how our similarities outnumber our differences.

Leaders punish failure and celebrate success, providing the negative and positive reinforcement that creates lasting progress.

I believe leadership was God's idea for making a flawed humanity and a challenging natural world work. So those who study it, teach it and practice it are doing something tremendously important.

Service, leadership... and the surprise third subject I want to talk about... is love.

What other word can we reach for that expresses the devotion our military families have for their country and their willingness to do anything to help her?

What other word captures the deep respect and camaraderie with which our military institutions operate?

Love is the emotion that somehow finds a way to go beyond the normal boundaries, to think the unthinkable and do the impossible.

Today I honor the love of country that has been instilled in these young people. When they are genuinely motivated by that love, no power or evil on earth is their match. In the great old sense of the word, nothing is more awesome to behold.

Service, leadership and love -- these are values they were introduced to at home that they express on the world-wide stage of history.

Even in the severely challenged world in which we live, as our military families project those values, we can be sure that America will not just endure, but prevail.

My late dad served with Patton in World II and came home to build the greatest nation on earth for you and me. And now we stand in awe and gratitude that the torch of freedom has been passed to these young leaders in America's active duty, Guard and Reserve. Nothing could give me more hope.

On behalf of an America yet to be that will be served, led and loved by members of the Minnesota National Guard, thank you, thank you, thank you.

May God bless continue to bless us all with leaders like this.