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Veterans Day | November 11, 2014

On the 11th hour of the day, on the 11th day of the month, in the 11th month of each year, we pause as a nation to remember the nearly 24 million American men and women in uniform – past and present – and thank them for their service to our country. And what a debt of gratitude we owe our living veterans! Not too long after World War I – the war that was supposed “to end all wars” – the world went to war again, and a generation of Americans responded at home and abroad to preserve our American way of life. World War II vets are known as the Greatest Generation for their extraordinary service to our nation. And they were. Their sacrifices set the standard for the world. But, fortunately, America has had generation after generation of greatness.

When war broke out on the Korean peninsula, the first armed conflict of the Cold War, a generation of Americans responded, despite being war-weary from World War II. When troops were needed in Vietnam to stem the spread of communism, a new generation of Americans responded, even when their valiant service was often ridiculed at home. When Iraq invaded Kuwait, the next generation of Americans responded, making it clear once again that naked aggression would not stand in our world. And, when 9/11 happened, yet another generation of Americans responded – and are still responding today – to rid the world of terrorism. In fact, whenever Americans have been threatened by a foe or summoned by a friend, our American military men and women have responded. Our American veterans continue to make good on President Lincoln’s pledge made 151 years ago in this month of November in this state of Pennsylvania that “government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.” All of us Americans owe our rights as a people – our very way of life – to our veterans.

So, to our nation’s veterans, we say thank you. Thank you for your service to our country. Your commitment and your sacrifices are appreciated by all of us Americans, some of us who too often take you for granted. To the veterans assembled here today, we say thank you. To that Vietnam War veteran that I met a few weeks ago, we say thank you. To the veteran that I met who served as a medic on Guadalcanal and who had to make split-second decisions regarding whether a wounded service man could be saved or not, we say thank you. To the young veteran that I met who lost his eyesight and the use of his limbs from a sniper bullet in Iraq and who said he would do it all over again in defense of the nation he calls home, we say thank you. To all of the veterans who serve our country – in ways dramatic and subtle – we say, of course, thank you. Thank you all for the ways you strengthen our United States of America. To the families of America’s veterans – the unsung heroes of our nation – we again say thank you. Your sacrifices will not be forgotten. The family members of our service men and women deserve our gratitude today, too. Perhaps there should be a national holiday specifically for you. To our POWs and MIAs, the ultimate fate of which is known only to God himself, we say thank you. Your sacrifices

will never be forgotten. To the half a million men and women who since World War II have made the ultimate sacrifice of their lives in defense of our freedom, we say thank you. Their stories have been written to their conclusions, and they should be told forever. To all of these groups on this Veterans Day 2014, we say as simply and as sincerely as we can thank you. But, as President Kennedy said: “As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.” Let us all – military and civilian alike – take some personal responsibility for ensuring that “government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.” May our veterans’ acts of selflessness and duty and courage inspire our own acts of selflessness and duty and courage. May their heroism inspire our own heroism. And may the star-spangled banner wave this day and every day in the future!