

Good afternoon everyone, and Happy Veteran's Day. I want to thank the organizers of this event for giving me this opportunity to participate, and the honor of addressing you as we commemorate such an important day for our Nation and for all Americans, including those of Japanese descent, that have served, or are serving, honorably and courageously in defense of America. I am very pleased to be here as we pay special tribute to those men and women of our ancestry who valiantly upheld those ideals on the battlefield, even though some in our own land once seemed intent betraying what America stood for. The courage of those we honor here today, both past and present, prove that America's ideals... while never perfectly achieved, and often the subject of intense disagreement or debate in our own land...are nonetheless strong, enduring, and always worth fighting for.

Veterans Day has its roots in an older tradition once called Armistice Day, which celebrated the end of World War I. In 1954, this observance was recast as Veterans Day to honor all those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces of our country.

In common usage, I most often hear Veterans Day referred to as a Holiday... technically accurate since it does result in both Government offices and even private organizations, schools, or companies offering Veterans Day as a day-off. While I am glad that it does indeed afford so many Americans a respite from their labors or studies, it can also become very tempting to only see this day as nothing more than a welcome Holiday. Yet observances such as Veterans Day or Memorial Day call for more of us than simply treatment as a day-off. I believe that Veterans Day comes with an implied obligation for all of our Citizens to find at least some small way to reflect on the service and sacrifice of those who wear the Nation's Cloth, Swear an Oath to support and defend the Constitution that created the very idea of America, and have too often shed their blood, cared for their wounded, and buried their dead... all to ensure that the ideals we have the

freedom to pursue, the lifestyle of liberty we enjoy, and the other manifold blessings of being an American, are defended and secured for future generations.

For those of Japanese ancestry who serve or have served in America's military, particularly when one reflects on the historic path that led to our forbears' contributions during the crucible of World War II, and followed thereafter by Japanese Americans who have faithfully served since that time over multiple generations both in peacetime and in war-- including Korea, Vietnam, up through and to the conflicts of present day--- Veterans Day should have an additional layer of meaning. Japanese Americans, immigrants or the children of immigrants though they were, once volunteered to defend America, and all that it claimed to stand for, when some in our land had given these same Americans ample reason to believe that what America professed to represent was hollow. Yet, instead of abandoning her, these courageous Americans instead chose to serve in the thousands... despite the fact that this required young men to leave their own families... their fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters... in terrible conditions within Internment camps scattered across some of the most isolated locations in our country.

I can remember learning about this period as a young man from my Mother and Father... my Father once served first Chaplain in the Regular Army after WWII and spent more than two decades in the service; doing tours in both Korea and Vietnam-- and I can recall being both angered and perplexed by what I learned had happened to these Americans. As I suspect was felt by many like me, I was anguished by the hypocrisy of those who had decided to oppress these Japanese Americans; and what was for me at the time, the rather bewildering choice that so many of my forbears made to nonetheless volunteer to serve the very same Government that had so badly mistreated them.

But, as the old saying goes, with age comes wisdom. Over the years, my feelings have slowly shifted to something else--- what previously was anger and confusion has softened into a kind of perpetual, underlying sorrow at what once happened. Yet, in spite that sadness, as I prepared for today's remarks, I found myself focusing on something that I have come realize is simultaneously both beautiful and remarkable---- how the young Nisei volunteers who flocked to the 100thBn/442 Regimental Combat Team and the Military Intelligence Service, the families they left behind, many of them remaining interned for the duration of the war, despite having every reason in the world not to, KEPT FAITH with a Country when its own Government had seemingly made KEEPING FAITH impossible. Said another way, these oppressed Americans, by standing with a Country that, at least in some ways, had failed to stand with them... created a rebirth and renewal of the very American ideals that others had conspired to wipe away. Since WWII, that renewal has been constantly refreshed by subsequent generations of Japanese Americans who continued to volunteer and serve within our Military in other, far-flung fields in defense of America. When seen through the light of this transformation from the perverse to the profound, Veterans Day becomes far more than just another holiday, and can be seen instead as a moment of courageous beauty and vibrant illumination, and a day of profound reverence.

All of you, one way or another, are connected to this story. Whether you are of Japanese heritage or not-- what I have tried to briefly describe for you today is a truly American story. Out of the cauldron of our own history... a history of immigrants of so many lands and cultures... we continue to strive for that more perfect Union, regardless of race, religion, creed, or origin, and to make manifest that phrase contained within our own Declaration of Independence--- the belief that our nation is based on unleashing and perpetuating humankind's endless striving for Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

I wish to close by quoting the first few lines from a song that came to mind as I prepared my remarks for today. Many of you I'm sure have seen the Ken Burns Documentary on World War II that is called simply "The War", and may recall that the documentary's musical theme is a song called American Anthem.

It seemed appropriate to use these few words today for two reasons- First, they are directly related to the journey that our World War II heroes once undertook, and which has since been endlessly nourished by other Japanese Americans who served in our Armed Forces ever since. Second, it is a reminder that America is more than just a place that exists between two oceans. America is an idea worth being a part of, and worth sacrificing for. America is something in our hearts more than it is in our hands. And ultimately, America... regardless of generation, whether in the cauldron of war or the quiet of peace, is ultimately what we choose to believe it is, and therefore strive to make.

All we've been given
By those who came before
The dream of a nation
Where freedom would endure
The work and prayers
Of centuries
Have brought us to this day

What shall be our legacy?
What will our children say?
Let them say of me
I was one who believed
In sharing the blessings
I received
Let me know in my heart
When my days are through

America, America
I gave my best to you