

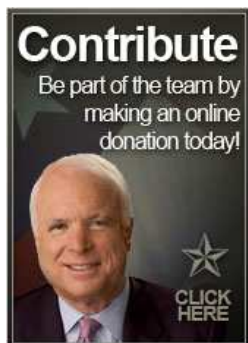


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McCain Addresses The National Guard Association Of The United States

August 27, 2007

U.S. Senator John McCain (R-AZ) today addressed the National Guard Association of the United States conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The remarks, as prepared for delivery, are as follows.

"Good morning, and thank you for the honor of being here with you for this 129th General Conference. I am proud to address such a distinguished group of patriots.

"I am here, in part, to say thank you for your service and your sacrifice on behalf of our beloved country. Every American who understands the true value of freedom, and the price that must be paid to preserve it, owes an eternal debt of gratitude to each you and to all of the brave and honorable "citizen-soldiers" you are privileged to lead. The men and women of the National Guard are a national treasure.

"I was blessed to have been born into a family who made their living at sea in defense of our security and ideals. My grandfather was a naval aviator; my father a submariner. Their respect for me was one of the great ambitions of my life. And so it was nearly pre-ordained that I would find a place in my family's profession, and that occupation would one day take me to war.

"Such was not the case for many of you. Your ambitions might not have led you to war; the honors you sought were not kept hidden on battlefields. Many of you were citizen-soldiers. You answered the call when it came; took up arms and served for your country's sake; and fought because you believed America's security was as much your responsibility as it was the professional soldier's. And when you came home, you built a better a country than the one you inherited.

"I do not mean to dismiss the virtues of the professional soldier. I consider my inclusion in their ranks to be one of the great honors of my life. The Navy was and still remains the world I know best and love most.

"The world has changed dramatically since September 11, 2001. Today, the National Guard's role resembles, in many respects, the role it performed in World War II, when Guard units fought in every theater and every major campaign.

"Units such as Company A of the 116th Infantry Regimentâ€”the famed "Bedford Boys" of the Virginia National Guardâ€”that spearheaded the allied assault on Omaha Beach, June 6, 1944. Prior to 9/11, a lot of us didn't always fully appreciate the power and potential of the Guard, and what it might one day be called upon to do. But my friends, we understand it now. Times have changedâ€”we all understand that now.

"Today, thousands of National Guard soldiers and airmen once again fight alongside their active component comrades on every battlefield in the war against militant Islam. From the mountains of Afghanistan to the back alleys of Iraq, Guard and Reserve personnel are engaged in every aspect of this conflict.

"Today's National Guard soldiers and airmen, together with the Reserve forces, are the citizen-soldiers of the next Great Generation. You are the role models of freedom, who bravely set aside self-interest, and forgo the comforts of home, the economic security of your jobs and enterprises, and the company of your families to undertake the hard work of freedom--to do your part in preserving our precious gift of liberty, protecting our cherished values, and securing the life and property of fellow human beings, often by risking your own.

"The men and women of the National Guard represent the very best of what it means to be an American and what our country is truly all aboutâ€”free people of every race, creed, color, and ethnic background, who regard it as their sacred duty not simply to indulge in the rights and privileges of citizenship, but to answer its obligations.

"No matter the danger to our security or safety--at home or abroad--whether from the violent foes of freedom or the turbulent forces of nature, wherever and whenever America has called, the National Guard has answered. You have always been ready. You have always been there.

"For everyone in the military todayâ€”whether you are Guard, Active, or Reserveâ€”these are difficult times. We are a nation at war, and we have asked of our men and women of the armed forces an almost unprecedented level of commitment and sacrifice. Extended deployments and back-to-back combat tours have become the standard rather than the exception.

"In the face of these demands, the distinction between the Guard and Active forcesâ€”a distinction that once was so clearâ€”is now virtually undetectable. In 2005, Army National Guard brigades made up more than 50% of the combat units in Iraq. Not since WWII have we asked so much of the Guard, not only overseas but at home where the Guard must continue to fulfill its critical duties securing the homeland from attack, and responding to emergencies that threaten lives and property almost every day.

"Fortunately for America, today the men and women of the National Guard, are cut from the same patriotic cloth as their predecessors who answered the call at Concord and Bunker Hill, Gettysburg and Cold Harbor, the Argonne Forrest, and the beaches of Normandy.

"They are men like Master Sergeant Keary Miller of the 123rd Special Tactics Squadron of the Kentucky Air Guardâ€”who, in March 2002, boarded a CH-47 in an attempt to rescue two stranded American servicemen from a mountainous area of Afghanistan swarming with al Qaeda and Taliban forces. The helicopter took heavy fire and crashed, injuring several on board.

Ultimately, seven American lives were lost, but many more were saved, thanks to the courage of Master Sergeant Keary Miller.

"With total disregard for his own safety, Master Sergeant Miller helped establish a defensive perimeter, then tended the wounded, protected them from enemy fire, and established MEDEVAC collection points. But that was not enough for this "Fighting Kentuckian." This was a gunfight for survival, and Master Sergeant Miller ensured the success of his team by gathering up ammunition and distributing it among those still able to fight--making sure everyone's weapon was replenished and no one was left defenseless. Master Sergeant Miller was credited with saving the lives of ten gravely wounded Americans.

"These were the actions of an American patriot, a citizen-soldier and true hero who epitomized the creed of the Air Force para-rescueman "That Others May Live," and one who followed the motto of all Bluegrass State warriors--to "Fight Like Kentuckians!"

"The world in which many of us served in the past was a dangerous one, but more stable than the world today. It was a world where we confronted a massive, organized threat to our security. Our enemy was evil, but not irrational. And for all the suffering endured by captive nations; for all the fear of global nuclear war; it was a world made fairly predictable by a stable balance of power until our steadfastness and patience yielded an historic victory for our security and ideals. That world is gone, and please don't mistake my reminiscence as an indication that I miss it. If I'm nostalgic for it at all, it is only an old man's nostalgia for the time where he misspent his youth. That world, after all, had much cruelty and terror, some of which it was our fate to witness personally.

"Today, we glimpse the prospect of another, better world, in which all people might someday share in the blessings and responsibilities of freedom. But we also face a threat and a long war to defeat it that is as difficult and in many respects more destabilizing than any challenge we have ever faced. We confront an enemy that so despises us and modernity itself that they would use any means, unleash any terror, cause the most unimaginable suffering to harm us, and to destroy the world we have tried throughout our history to build.

"As we meet, in Iraq and Afghanistan, American soldiers, Marines, sailors and airmen are fighting bravely and tenaciously in battles that are as dangerous, difficult and consequential as the great battles of our armed forces' storied past. As we all know, the war in Iraq has not gone well, and the American people have grown sick and tired of it. I understand that, of course. I, too, have been made sick at heart by the many mistakes made by civilian and military commanders and the terrible price we have paid for them. But we cannot react to these mistakes by embracing a course of action that will be an even greater mistake, a mistake of colossal historical proportions, which will -- and I am as sure of this as I am of anything -- seriously endanger the country I have served all my adult life.

"In the coming month we will face a fork in the road. We can pursue our opportunity for victory in Iraq, strengthen our hand in the larger war against Islamic extremists, and make our nation more secure. Or we can fold our tents, embolden our enemies, throw a region into instability, and increase the risks faced on our home soil. Which way requires greater leadership? I plan to lead the fight in September on the floor of the United States Senate to support our troops and in support of victory and against a plan for defeat.

"We have new commanders in Iraq, and they are following a counterinsurgency strategy that I have advocated from the beginning of this war, which makes the most effective use of our strength and doesn't strengthen the tactics of our enemy. This new battle plan is succeeding where our previous tactics failed. Although the outcome remains uncertain, we must give General Petraeus and the Americans he has the honor to command adequate time to salvage from the wreckage of our past mistakes a measure of stability for Iraq and the Middle East, and a more secure future for the American people. To concede defeat now would strengthen al Qaeda, empower Iran and other hostile powers in the Middle East, unleash a full scale civil war in Iraq that could quite possibly provoke genocide there, and destabilize the entire region as neighboring powers come to the aid of their favored factions. The consequences would threaten us for years, and I am certain would eventually draw us into a wider and more difficult war that would impose even greater sacrifices on us.

"Our defeat in Iraq would be catastrophic, not just for Iraq, but for us, and I cannot be complicit in it. I will do whatever I can, whether I am effective or not, to help avert it. That is all I can offer my country. It is not much compared to the sacrifices made by Americans who have volunteered to shoulder a rifle and fight this war for us. I know that and am humbled by it. But though my duty is neither dangerous nor onerous, it compels me nonetheless to say to my fellow Americans, as long as we have a chance to succeed we must try to succeed.

"I have many responsibilities to the American people, and I try to take them all seriously. But I have one responsibility that outweighs all the others -- and that is to use whatever meager talents I possess, and every resource God has granted me to protect the security of this great and good nation from all enemies foreign and domestic. And that I intend to do, even if I must stand athwart popular opinion. I will attempt to convince as many of my countrymen as I can that we must show even greater patience, though our patience is nearly exhausted so we can defeat our enemies. That is how I construe my responsibility to my country. That is how I construed it yesterday. It is how I construe it today. It is how I will construe it tomorrow. I do not know how I could choose any other course.

"The new security environment in which we live will continue to pose great challenges, and require that we use all elements of national power to defeat radicalism. The National Guard will play a vital role in this multi-dimensional effort, precisely because its citizen-soldiers and airmen bring such a wide range of skills and capacities to the force.

"As we go forward, America must make a new and lasting commitment to our National Guard--a commitment that will ensure the force is properly manned, trained, led, and equipped to undertake the growing scope of missions we ask of you both at home and abroad.

"Such commitment must begin with our political leadership recognizing the sheer magnitude of what we ask Guard units to accomplish with a force comprised primarily of part-time soldiers and airmen.

"Such commitment means providing sufficient end-strengths in the Active, Guard and Reserve components consistent with the workload imposed on our military. We must do a better job of following the guidelines regarding the frequency and duration of deployments. Failure to do so abuses the trust of those who serve, and is a national disgrace.

"It means ensuring that the Guard has the proper equipment with which to train and deploy. We must never, never, ask our young men and women to go into harm's way without the equipment and training they need to do their job effectively and safely--whether the enemy they face is a military force, terrorist cell, pandemic disease, earthquake, fire, or flood.

"It means that our nation's leaders must set wiser priorities in the allocation of national resources. The Congress must stop funding "bridges to nowhere" and thousands of other pork barrel projects while we shortchange our service members and fail to provide what they need to defend our nation.

"It means getting rid of Defense Department policies, practices, and customs that fail to promote a seamless total force based on cooperation, jointness, and the mutual respect that all components have earned with their blood and bravery. It means establishing a new compact with our Guard and Reserve component personnel to ensure they have the pay they deserve, the career opportunities they merit, and the level of service that befits their time, capability, and need. It means making certain that our Guard and Reserve members, and their families, receive the proper health care they deserve and have been promised. It means guaranteeing that all injured service members are treated with equal care and dignity.

"And, my friends, it means a national leadership that respects and treats our governors and Adjutant Generals as partners in national and homeland security policymaking, rather than as impediments and intruders. As far as I'm concerned part of that essential effort must be granting the Chief of the National Guard Bureau the fourth star that the position merits, and updating the charter of the Bureau to align it with the scope and importance of its mission today.

"Achieving these imperatives will require breaking old paradigms, shedding outdated thinking, and understanding the new capabilities that are so vital in the modern security environment. It will require less partisanship and greater political will. Above all, it demands strong leadership at all levels of government and the military.

"From great challenges, emerge great opportunities. Ours is a time of unprecedented challenge. With it comes the opportunity to make our country safer, the world better, and the future brighter. We can do this. We can seize this opportunity for our good and the good of our children, but only if we exercise the resolve that America has always demonstrated in momentous times when our security and the prospects of the world's future hung in the balance.

"I would like to close as I beganâ€”by saying thank you. To the National Guardsmen who today will walk combat patrols in Iraq and Afghanistan; to those who will fly missions in support of our deployed forces; to those engaged back home in humanitarian efforts to relieve suffering; and to all of you who know what it means to stand the long night watches--thank you. You understand both the valueâ€”and the price--of freedom. You are the best among us.

"In whatever capacity Providence grants that I serve my country I pledge to you my undying fidelity to the cause to which you devote your livesâ€”the safety and security of Americaâ€”and a National Guard that will always be ready, and always be there.

"Thank you."

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