

I thought you might be interested in my remarks commemorating Veterans Day that I gave at the Marysville Elks Lodge Veterans Annual Dinner. As I said in the speech, “We simply could not have become an independent nation and the world’s only superpower without our veterans from years gone by, and we simply cannot maintain our freedom and status as the leader of the free world without our active duty troops today. To all of our veterans here tonight: Thank you again, and may you have an overwhelming sense of pride and satisfaction knowing that your service has helped keep the United States of America strong and free...”

Thank you very much; it’s great to be with you. Good evening. It’s great tonight that we recognize and honor the millions of Americans who have served our nation in uniform. From the start of the American Revolution at Lexington and Concord, to the invasion of Normandy, to the ongoing mission in Afghanistan, our freedoms have been won and preserved through the remarkable courage and sacrifice of the valiant men and women of our Armed Forces.

It is a true honor to represent the 73,000 veterans here in California’s Second Congressional District. At this time I would like to recognize those individuals in attendance this evening, beginning with: the brave veterans of World War II... The Korean War... the Vietnam War... the Gulf War... the missions in Bosnia and Kosovo..., and last but not least, veterans of the War on Terror and our active duty troops.

From the bottom of my heart, my family, and every American: Thank you for your service. The American Soldier, sailor, airman, and Marine have earned the greatest respect and immense gratitude of our nation. You are part of a proud tradition of American patriots who have defended our nation and our way of life because of your great love for this country. Your sacrifices cannot be adequately repaid... the time away from your spouses and children, the physical wounds, the emotional scars, the more lucrative employment opportunities you may have denied. But what we must all do is to ensure that you receive the highest quality benefits and health care to honor your sacrifices which have made the United States the greatest nation in the history of the world.

I’d like to share one example of the tremendous sacrifice that our troops are making. I have had the pleasure of talking to Air Force Sergeant Chris Frost, a Chico State Alumnus, on several occasions. Sergeant Frost was severely wounded in Iraq in 2008 resulting in the amputation of his leg. He received treatment at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in our nation’s capital and later joined me at President Obama’s inauguration. He also completed a 10-mile bike ride at the steps of the U.S. Capitol building. That was quite an accomplishment and an inspiration to us all. Unfortunately, Sergeant Frost and his wife recently had to make the difficult decision to amputate his other leg after a long series of painful treatments and surgeries. This was a major setback for sure, but I have no doubt that Sergeant Frost will continue to enjoy life and excel in the challenges before him. Let us always take the time to pray for the Sergeant Frosts’ and all the other veterans who have given up so much to protect our liberty and our way of life.

I know so many of you have done outstanding work for the veterans in this community. Thank

you for your tireless work and important contributions. Here in the North State, we support our troops and work hard to strengthen care for our veterans. I have been honored to work with our veterans community to build the first veterans cemetery in Northern California, begin construction of a new veterans' home in Redding, and expand services for veterans here in Yuba City/Marysville and in other parts of our region. Last October, the VA partnered with the Feather River Tribal Health Service in Yuba City, which is providing care to local veterans on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I understand that a new Yuba City/Marysville Community Based Outpatient Clinic is scheduled to open early next year. I'm grateful that we have made great progress for our veterans, and I will continue to work with our local veterans' communities to bring about additional improvements in veteran care.

Likewise, one of my highest priorities as your representative is ensuring that our active duty troops have the resources they need to succeed in their missions, and the care they deserve when they return to the U.S. shores. Congress should fund our troops without adding arbitrary withdrawal deadlines that do nothing more than tie the hands of our commanders and offer encouragement to the enemy by telling them when U.S. forces will be leaving. I will continue to urge President Obama and Congress to reject unwise deadlines and to pass clean troop funding legislation instead. Further, I have supported an expanded GI educational benefit for our veterans serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, expanded TRICARE coverage for military retirees and reservists, and increased efforts to prevent and treat PTSD and severe brain injuries. It is absolutely critical that Congress provides active-duty troops with top-notch medical care to ensure their recovery, and meaningful incentives to encourage them to continue their service.

I'd like to spend a few minutes talking about the missions our troops are currently engaged in. They are taking the fight to al Qaeda jihadists in Afghanistan, Iraq, and parts of Africa where terrorists are seeking to establish sanctuaries. Nine years after the September 11 terrorist attacks our nation is more secure because of the steady work of our troops and intelligence community. However, we should be under no illusion that the threat from al Qaeda and like-minded terrorists is over. A terrorist gunman claimed the lives of twelve Americans at Foot Hood in 2009, and over thirty other planned terrorist attacks have been foiled since 9/11. The near-miss by the Christmas Day bomber above the skies of Detroit just last year and the attempted car bomb attack in Times Square this May were among the startling reminders that the enemy is ruthless, determined, and actively pursuing to kill Americans again. Our nation must be more determined to defeat them.

That is why our mission in Afghanistan is critical to our security. The Taliban that is seeking to regain power today is the same group that allowed al Qaeda to plot and train for the September 11 terrorist attacks on our soil. We must show the resolve and determination to prevent these terrorist-sympathizers from regaining power. Recent reports on the ground suggest that our troops are dealing serious blows to the Taliban in their key strongholds. Allied forces are also playing a vital role in training Afghan troops and gradually enhancing stability in that country. I believe President Obama made the right decision in committing more troops to this mission last year and I think he should stand firm in that decision. Moving forward, it is my sincere hope that he will avoid artificial withdrawal timelines and instead follow the advice of General Petraeus when determining when to bring our troops home. General Petraeus has a proven track record of excellent leadership and decision-making in turning around the situation in Iraq, and I have

confidence in his leadership as our top general in Afghanistan.

Finally, Congress must ensure that our nation's military remains the most advanced and most capable in the world. The Defense Department is not unlike any other federal agency – there are areas of waste, fraud, and abuse that must be identified and stopped. However, it would be deeply irresponsible for the President and Congress to slash defense spending on critical weapons programs and equipment. I have opposed cuts to the state-of-the-art F-22 fighter plane, the Global Hawk spy plane that's stationed at Beale, and our nation's missile defense capabilities, among other proposed reductions. These and other programs are vital to our national defense and preparing for potential challenges down the road. They are also crucial to demonstrating to our current and future adversaries that the United States is committed to maintaining our military superiority. We have the best men and women serving in the world. We must continue to ensure that they remain the best trained and the best equipped.

There's another threat that is receiving a lot of attention in Congress and at the Pentagon. Many of you have probably read news stories about adversaries abroad trying to penetrate and corrupt computers used by our government and military. These cyber attacks have the potential to greatly damage our financial systems, electric grids, transportation systems, and more. Beyond threatening our homeland, cyber attacks could greatly limit the potency of our military.

After all, just about every weapon and communications device is operated through a computer. If the enemy can corrupt these computers, our military capabilities would be greatly weakened. In response, the Defense Department has established a new joint Cyber Command and each branch of the service has assigned some of their brightest people to master the cyber world. Their goal is to strengthen our nation's cyber capabilities and to ensure that the United States achieves dominance in the cyber domain just as we have in the air, on the land, and at sea. I will continue to work in Congress in support of our nation's efforts to guard both our homeland and our military from cyber threats.

So whether we look at our mission in Afghanistan, the rise of potential adversaries, or emerging threats in cyberspace, it is very clear that our national security and the preservation of our cherished liberties will continue to depend greatly on those who proudly wear the American uniform. We simply could not have become an independent nation and the world's only superpower without our veterans from years gone by, and we simply cannot maintain our freedom and status as the leader of the free world without our active duty troops today. To all of our veterans here tonight: Thank you again, and may you have an overwhelming sense of pride and satisfaction knowing that your service has helped keep the United States of America strong and free. It will never be forgotten. May God bless you and your families, and may God bless our great nation. Thank you very much.