

**The  
American  
Legion**



*For God and Country*

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# VETERANS DAY SPEECH 2018

The American Legion  
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Earlier this year, a county sheriff in Wisconsin was doing a little spring cleaning. Like many in law enforcement, he was a veteran.

As he was organizing some of his keepsakes, he came across letters that he received back in 2003, while he was serving with the Wisconsin National Guard's 32<sup>nd</sup> Military Police Company in Iraq.

One letter, decorated with images of Santa Claus, reindeer and Christmas wreaths stood out. Like so many others, it was addressed generically to "Dear Soldiers" and thanked them for all that they do for our country. It wasn't directed specifically to any service member, but instead were sentiments that could be aimed at EVERY service member.

It was special enough to Sheriff James Johnson that he still had it 15 years later. But it wasn't until he looked at it again that he realized that he had previously overlooked a remarkable coincidence. The letter was signed by Chris Uselding, a fourth grade student at Cedar Grove-Belgium Elementary School.

Sheriff Johnson posted the letter on a bulletin board at the station. When one of his young deputies saw the letter, he was shocked.

That deputy, Chris Uselding, did not even remember writing the letter. When Sheriff Johnson hired Uselding a few years earlier, he did not connect the two names until he once again read the letter in 2018.

Thanking our veterans may seem like a small gesture to some but it can have a deeper meaning, as Sheriff Johnson believes.

"Finding the letter after all of these years and realizing the then fourth grader was now one of my deputies, seemed like a pretty neat coincidence, but our lives are full of coincidences," he wrote in The Wisconsin Legionnaire newspaper. "'We need to realize what a positive impact we can have on the lives of others. My coincidence also illustrates how small our world really is.'" – Unquote.

And while instances like these make the world seem small, it is America's veterans who make the world much safer.

From defeating Communism, Fascism and Imperialism, to liberating slaves, keeping the peace during the Cold War and battling terrorism today, veterans have accomplished remarkable things throughout our nation's history.

We gather at events like this to honor not just recent generations of veterans but every man and woman who has honorably served since the American Revolution. Even with that impressive history, Veterans Day 2018 is especially significant.

It was one hundred years ago – at 11 am on 11/11 that's November 11, 1918- when the armistice began which ended World War I. It was a conflict so bloody and horrific that many optimistically referred to it as the "War to end all wars." Sadly it wasn't.

It was that war, which led to the founding of our organization – The American Legion – and a commitment by this country to care for veterans who came home blinded by mustard gas, shell-shocked from trench warfare, or impoverished due to their military service. It is a commitment that continues today whether the wounds be inflicted by an IED in Afghanistan or injuries from a training accident in California.

It is a commitment that covers veterans of all races, religions, genders and economic classes. And while we currently have a strong economy, veterans still have a higher chance of homelessness than those who have not served in uniform.

Too often a veteran's highly skilled service isn't fully appreciated in the civilian sector where "certifications" and college degrees sometimes outweigh common sense.

The best way to eliminate veterans' homelessness is to reduce veteran's unemployment and provide treatment to those who may try self-medication as a means to deal with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

A simple but proven way to thank a veteran is to hire a veteran. It offers hope and opportunity to those who have not just earned a shot at the American dream, but have defended the freedom of others to do the same.

Employers should understand that it's smart business to hire veterans, and when members of the National Guard and Military Reserves deploy, it is America's business to ensure that their civilian careers do not suffer.

Our Armed Forces are full of examples of veterans who have overcome tremendous barriers to continue serving. One such hero is Navy Chief Personnel Specialist Raina Hockenberry. Shot five times while serving in Kabul, Afghanistan, she is fortunate to have survived. In 2018, just four years after the brutal attack by a cowardly terrorist, Raina won eight gold medals and set four records in rowing, powerlifting, cycling and swimming at the Warrior Games in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Hockenberry explained why she decided to remain in the Navy, even after she was wounded.

"I was severely injured to the point where a medical retirement made sense but I can't imagine not serving in the military," Raina told the Military Times. "It's all part of who we are, and my fellow brothers and sisters in the military, we all believe in what we do. And I could not imagine not standing with them." – Unquote.

Nor could we imagine them standing without you, Raina.

America is fortunate to have had millions of brave men and women stand for freedom since our country's founding. We owe it to them all to ensure that their service and sacrifice is always remembered.

We also remember their families who sacrifice time with their loved ones, perform a disproportionate share of household responsibilities and often have to make some difficult career and educational adjustments due to frequent address changes.

Military service is not like the private sector. Most civilian jobs do not require serious risk to life or limb to fulfill a dangerous mission or subject employees to criminal charges for disobeying their boss. Unlike their military counterparts, civilians can live *where* they want and choose other career options *whenever* they want.

But today is a day for civilians and, in fact, all Americans, to recognize those who have given us those freedoms – the veterans of the United States military.

As young Chris Uselding said a 15 years ago, “Thank you for all that you do for our country.”

God bless you and God Bless our nation’s veterans.

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