

"Its the Soldier"

Let me say how humbled I am to be here for this special observance. I join all of you in the dedication of this statue which will forever stand as a monument to the soldiers from SE Minnesota, who served and sacrificed their lives in service to their nation. The group of Americans which I hold in highest regard, is our veterans, exceeded only by those who contributed time and money to assure that the soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, merchant marines and the Coast Guard of SE Minnesota are remembered this day, and each day hereafter. It is important that we not only pay tribute to these men and women who answered the call, in service to their country, but to also expose our children and grandchildren to the sacrifices others have made.

To the Veterans of Minnesota and to each of their families, let me express our thanks. Because of your service and your families sacrifice, we live in the strongest, greatest nation in the history of the world. We live with the blessing of freedoms they fought, suffered and died for. We are the benefactors of their courage... their commitment to duty.. and their service to this country. Let us ever be grateful.

This dedication and recognition of our country's soldiers is particularly important because our nation is at war. Today, as we gather here to honor those who served in the past, a new generation of soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines and Coast Guard are halfway around the world. Our thoughts and prayers are with these men and women, as they fight to keep our world safe and free.

They fight....like the veterans of our past wars...for the cause of freedom and the promise of peace.

Our country has had many wars in its history. It is remarkable that from the revolutionary war to present day... that men and women of each generation have been willing to serve... that they would risk everything to ensure that their children, and grandchildren, have the opportunity to live in freedom.

When I need a reminder of what is important and what are the priorities of my life, all I need to do is take a walk to the Soldiers Field Veterans Memorial. That walk will take me past Vietnam, Korea, World War II and other wars. It is inspiring. Just like that walk past the memorial, being here with you reinforces what is important.

This area is filled with proud men and women who believe in freedom. As long as you remain role models for the next generation, there can be no doubt that America will always be free. I look forward with renewed faith and courage that Americas best days are yet to be. All of you and all of our veterans have changed the world with your convictions, beliefs and service.

I would like to close with the reading of the poem "It is the Soldier".....

It is the soldier, not the reporter, who has given us freedom of the press

It is the soldier, not the poet, who has given us freedom of speech

It is the soldier, not the campus organizer, who has given us the right to demonstrate

It is the soldier, not the lawyer, who has given us the right to a fair trial

It is the soldier, not the pastor, who has given us the right to worship

It is the soldier, not the politician, who has given us the right to vote

It is the soldier, who salutes the flag, serves under the flag, and whose coffin is draped by the flag, who gives the protester the right to burn the flag.....

As we gather here today to dedicate this soldier...may God bless you and the country you love.

May we always remember...

May we always be proud...

May we always be prepared...

So we may always be free.

Thank you.