

Inside This Issue

- *Chapter/State News*
- *Notes from the Captain*
- *POW/MIA News*
- *On The Hill*
- *Veterans' Affairs News*
- *VVA Press Releases*

Meetings

The Chapter 120 membership meeting will be held on Thursday, January 5, 2012 at 7:00pm in the Machinists Union Hall, 357 Main St., East Hartford.

The Board of Directors will meet on Thursday, January 26 at 7:00pm. Call the Chapter office for any changes in schedule. Chapter members are welcomed to attend.

Notice

If you have moved or changed your address, PLEASE notify us immediately. Call the Chapter office at (860) 568-9212, mail us at the address on the back of this newsletter or e-mail the Newsletter editor at JRCVVA120@aol.com.

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Iraq War Over

But not for those who fought there

The war in Iraq ended officially on Thursday, Dec. 15 with a flag-lowering ceremony in which Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said a free, democratic Iraq was worth the sacrifice in American lives.

Nearly 4,500 U.S. service members were killed in more than eight years of war and over 32,000 wounded.

But there are many more service members coming home who will need help with the invisible wounds of war – among them, the lingering symptoms of Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) and the lasting effects of PTSD. For these veterans, their war is far from over – to continue for years to come... and for some, a lifetime.

The VA is overwhelmed in open disability claims with a backlog that has doubled in the past year, despite the VA Secretary's announcement in 2010 that he would "break the back" of the backlog. With even more service members returning from Iraq within the next month or so, the backlog of claims will only get worse.

The war will certainly continue for this new generation of veterans when seeking benefits they earned after multiple tours in both Iraq and Afghanistan. But this time, their war will be against their own government, and the agency that is supposed to "care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan".

The VA says they are here to help these veterans, to assist in every way possible. For those who are already involved in the fight to obtain VA benefits, we know better. Around every corner in the VA claims process, there's an obstacle that a veteran must hurdle – a regulation that prevents a veteran from a timely decision on that VA claim. It's a war – no doubt about it.



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Birthday Wishes

For our Chapter members born in January, we wish you a Happy Birthday and many more to come!

James G. Ashwell
 Stephen Brown, MD
 Andrew P. Crafa
 Arthur N. Desrosiers
 Stanley T. Duro
 Henry E. Jackson
 Samuel L. Lavoie
 William M. Quirk
 Jim Tackett
 Elizabeth W. Vozzo

Chapter/State News

Chapter holds 25th Annual Dinner Dance

The Chapter's 25th annual Christmas Dinner Dance, held on Saturday December 3, proved to be another successful fundraising event as well as a fun time for all who attended. For the second consecutive year, members rose for a toast to all members and to remember our honorable service to our country as well as the new generation of servicemen and women.

Chapter Donates Coats, Toys to Needy Veteran Families

Chapter 120 donated \$1,000 to make Christmas a bit merrier for children of needy veteran families. Families are selected by the Hartford Vet Center and information given to Chapter 120 in order to buy coats and at least one toy for each of the children. Students at East Hartford Mayberry School gift wrapped the gifts before delivering them to the children.

Member of the Year



Charlie Hallgren, Chapter 120 Life member for over 4 years, was awarded Member of the Year during the Chapter's 25th annual Dinner Dance. Charlie has been very active in Chapter 120 activities. He encouraged Chapter members to participate in the Wounded Warrior Project at Riverside Park in Hartford in August 2011.

When the Chapter lost full representation at the State Council when some of our delegates moved out of state, Charlie volunteered to fill in for the duration. He has always stepped up to help when the Chapter needed him.

Appreciation Award



Frank Zizzamia, Chapter 120 Life member for over 3 years, was presented with the Chapter Appreciation Award during the Chapter's 25th annual Dinner Dance.

Frank is currently a State Council delegate, actively representing our Chapter to assure our interests in the state are preserved.

Frank has been very active in all Chapter activities and is always there when the Chapter needs help.

Life Membership Awarded

Mike Infantino was awarded a VVA Life membership for his continuous devotion to veterans. Mike made a major contribution for Chapter 120 by catering the lunch for 60 members of the Legion of Valor on 21 April. The Legion of Valor held their 121st annual reunion at Mystic CT, from 18 to 22 May.

Congratulations to you all!

Lt. Gov. Wyman, Commissioner Schwartz Announce Ten New Inductees into Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame



Lt. Governor Nancy Wyman and Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Linda Schwartz today announced the ten men and women who were inducted into the Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame Class of 2011.

The Hall of Fame recognizes distinguished veterans who have made significant contributions to their communities after leaving military service.

Wyman and Schwartz were joined by leaders of the state's veterans' community at the induction ceremony on Friday, Dec. 2, in the Atrium of the Legislative Office Building in Hartford. Each inductee or family representative received a commemorative medallion recognizing their induction.

The 2011 Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame inductees are:

Madelon Baranoski: US Army Nurse Corps - Vietnam

Baranoski, of Meriden, served as the Chairman of the Pediatric Nurse Practitioner Program and now serves as Assoc. Professor of Medicine at Yale Law School. Her research has been very instrumental in promoting understanding of the physiological reactions of stress on disease and behavior.

Samuel Beamon Sr.: US Marine Corps, Vietnam 1st Marine Air Wing

Beamon, of Waterbury, is Past Commandant of the Dept. of CT Marine Corps League. He had a long and honored service with the Waterbury Police Dept., where he obtained the rank of Lieutenant. He is especially proud of his work with the Young Marines Program in Waterbury.

Rev. Dr. G. Kenneth Carpenter: US Navy, Vietnam

Carpenter, of Mystic, has been Pastor at Union Baptist Church in Mystic since 1982. He is Founder and former President of the Mystic Area Shelter and Hospitality (MASH) which provides services for families with children who are at risk of homelessness.

Ronald Catania: US Air Force, Vietnam

Catania, of Rocky Hill, serves with numerous charitable organizations and is a champion of the return-to-work program for veterans. A vice-president of Sage Allen and Bob's Stores, Catania serves on the Board of Directors of the CT Police Chiefs Assoc. After the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, he volunteered to take shoes and clothing to New York City for EMS, Fire and Police personnel.

John Chiarella: US Army, Korea/Vietnam

Chiarella, of Waterbury, is past Chairman of the Waterbury Veterans Memorial Committee. For more than 10 years he has developed and provided patriotic programs for Waterbury schools, such as the Forever Wave program that teaches students respect and proper etiquette for the American Flag.

Harold Farrington: US Army, Vietnam

Farrington, of Old Saybrook, has assisted numerous state veterans as a vocational rehabilitation and veteran's benefits counselor. He has been a voice for the men and women of Connecticut who have served in the military and has provided three decades of selfless services to improve the lives of all veterans in Connecticut.

Phillip Kraft: US Army, Vietnam

Kraft, of Darien, is the creator of the National Veterans Service Fund and served with Admiral Zumwalt on the Agent Orange Commission. For the past 10 years, he has been an instructor of veteran's benefits for the UAW annual conference. He has watched over the 1,500 veterans buried in the Spring Grove Cemetery in Darien and has worked with the community to greatly improve the quality of the grounds there.

Ronald Perry: US Marine Corps, Vietnam

Perry, of Meriden, is an active and avid supporter of veteran's causes and is best known for his planning and execution of Marine Corps birthday celebrations in Connecticut. He is a retired Sr. Account Executive of the Wellcare Management Group.

Richard Rampone: US Marine Corps, Vietnam

Rampone, of Kensington, is the State Commandant of the Marine Corps. League Dept. and is a contributor to countless local and state patriotic and military organizations. Rampone was a Patrolman for the Berlin Police Department.

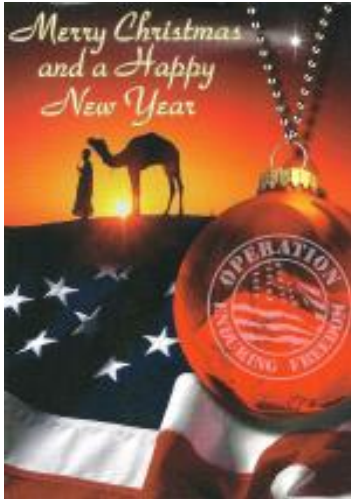
Burke Ross: US Marine Corps, WWII

Ross, of Shelton, was a draftsman for 33 years at the Bullard Company working on machine design. He served for several years as Adjutant for the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH) and is a leader in obtaining permission and issuing the stamp in honor of the MOPH. Ross is considered by many as the elder statesman of veteran's issues in Connecticut.



Notes from the Captain

U.S. Army Captain Frank DuVerger, son of Chapter 120 Life member John Siemer and Ria, continues serving in Afghanistan under Task Force Sword with the 18th Engineer Battalion.



As many of us remember, spending holidays away from family during our tour in Vietnam long ago, we understand how lonely it can be half way around the world in a war zone. Capt. DuVerger sends this greeting from Afghanistan/OEF.

Captain DuVerger is scheduled for R&R in March 2012, when he plans to visit family and friends before returning to Afghanistan to complete his tour of duty.

- Authorize early retirement and voluntary separation incentives to reduce the need for involuntary separations during the coming force reductions
- Bar denial of reenlistment based on a medical condition that a medical board has evaluated and deemed as not disqualifying for continued duty
- Establish the Chief of the National Guard Bureau as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
- Provide \$45M in assistance for civilian schools in which military dependents are enrolled
- Enhance the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program for wounded warriors and their families
- Safeguard reemployment rights for Guard members ordered to full-time duty under state orders
- Authorize a death gratuity and related benefits for Reserves who die during an authorized stay at their residence during or between successive days of inactive duty training
- Require GAO to review effectiveness of programs aimed at promoting military spouse employment
- Require GAO to review effects of extending space-available travel eligibility to certain survivors and gray area reserve retirees
- Require a DoD report on the cost of expanding the Homeowner Assistance Program to help more servicemembers who are “upside-down” on their mortgages

POW/MIA News

House Resolution 111 gains more cosponsors

House Resolution H.RES.111 would establish a Select Committee on POW and MIA Affairs. The bill has been stalled in the House Committee on Rules since 28 February 2011. There are 147 cosponsors of this bill. Rep. Himes (CT-4) is the only holdout from Connecticut. Rep. John Larson signed on as a cosponsor after numerous letters, faxes and calls from our own POW/MIA advocate, Mary Beaulieu. Thanks Mary!

On The Hill



Defense Bill Passed

Early this week, House and Senate leaders worked out an agreement on the FY2012 Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 1540). By Thursday (12/15/11), both the House and Senate had passed the compromise version, and signed by the President on 17 December.

Among other provisions, the legislation will:

- Authorize a 1.6% military pay raise
- Limit the percentage increase in TRICARE Prime enrollment fee in any year to the percentage growth in military retired pay
- Enhance authority to call up the Reserves for certain missions

Unfortunately, the final legislation did not retain the Senate-passed provision to eliminate deduction of VA survivor benefits from military Survivor Benefit Plan annuities.

Committee Reviews Plan to Ensure VOW to Hire Heroes Act Will Get Veterans Back to Work

The Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity began oversight on 15 December to ensure that the new VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 is being implemented with the intent of the law intact and that the Departments of Labor (DoL) and Veterans Affairs (VA) are collaborating to execute the law.

“I can’t stress enough that the proper implementation of this law is extremely critical, and as such I want to put both agencies on notice that this will be this Subcommittee’s top priority in the next session of Congress,” stated Rep. Marlin Stutzman, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity. “We need to identify any obstacles now so that our veterans can take full advantage of this jobs law.”

The major provision of the VOW to Hire Heroes Act is the temporary extension of Montgomery GI Bill benefits to eligible veterans to receive up to one year of training at a community college or technical school for in-demand occupations. Eligible veterans would have to be between the age of 35 and 60, be unemployed, and not have eligibility for other VA education programs.

During the hearing, VA officials cited challenges, including the aggressive timeline, set by Congress due to the high

unemployment rates experienced by veterans, to implement the programs in the law. Members of the Subcommittee were also concerned about how DoL and VA will reach out to ensure unemployed veterans are aware of the new programs, and how veterans can receive updates from VA on the law's implementation process.

"We need to make sure that our veterans are not cheated out of this wonderful benefit because of bureaucratic delays or hurdles," Stutzman said. "We need to get this right. We will work with the Departments to make sure they have the tools they need to make this law a reality, but we will not tolerate excuses or delays. Our returning veterans deserve better."

"Earlier this year, I set a goal to cut veterans unemployment rates in half," stated Rep. Jeff Miller, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs and co-author of the law. "If this law is implemented properly, the VOW to Hire Heroes Act will help us attain that goal."

Today's hearing is the first in a series of oversight hearings the Subcommittee will hold on the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011.

Membership Renewals

Is your membership renewal about to become due? Please renew today so you can continue to receive the Chapter newsletter, as well as the VVA Veteran! And as you renew, please consider joining the other 147 members who have chosen Life membership.

Veterans Affairs News

Homelessness down among U.S. veterans



Secretary Eric Shinseki and HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan cheered the trend and called it evidence that the Obama administration is on course to end veteran homelessness by 2014.

The homeless statistics are based on a survey taken each January, known as a "Point-in-Time" count. The January 2011 survey found 67,495 homeless veterans, down from 76,329 a year earlier.

Homelessness among U.S. veterans dropped 12 percent between 2010 and 2011, according to a report released Monday by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Speaking on a conference call with reporters, VA

The shift was more pronounced among "unsheltered" homeless veterans, officials said, with data reflecting a 17 percent drop in the number of veterans sleeping on streets or in other public places, as opposed to staying in shelters or other transitional housing.

"It's nothing less than extraordinary," said Donovan, who credited the drop in part with a change in the government's focus from "rescuing" veterans who were sleeping on streets to trying to prevent those at risk from falling into homelessness in the first place.

The VA also announced it will make \$100 million in grants available in fiscal 2012 to community agencies across the country aiming to prevent veterans and their families from falling into homelessness or to return those who do lose their homes to stable housing quickly. Last year, the VA dedicated \$60 million to similar programs.

"We have an image of an individual in the height of winter ... sleeping on a steam grate," Shinseki said in a conference call with reporters. "The problems that lead to homelessness begin long before veterans and their families are on the street."

Fewer veterans with PTSD using anti-anxiety drugs



Use of a class of anti-anxiety drugs fell during the past decade among veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder, a large U.S. study shows.

The trend is encouraging, researchers say, because current guidelines recommend against using the drugs, benzodiazepines, to treat symptoms associated with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

"One of our concerns is that it's very, very difficult to get patients off benzodiazepines," said Dr. Matthew Friedman, executive director of the National Center for PTSD and a professor of psychiatry at Dartmouth, who co-authored the study.

Benzodiazepines include the medications alprazolam (Xanax), diazepam (Valium) and clonazepam (Klonopin). They are used to manage conditions such as anxiety and insomnia, which are often linked to PTSD. Long-term use of the drugs can lead to high tolerance and addiction.

The study, which looked at data from more than 498,000 patients in the Veterans Affairs health care system between 1999 and 2009, found decreases in the frequency, duration and doses of benzodiazepines given to veterans with PTSD.

Treating veterans with PTSD will become even more important in coming years, the team notes, due to recent and ongoing U.S. military conflicts. The number of veterans with PTSD treated in the Veterans Affairs health care system rose nearly 200 percent between 1999 and 2009.

The percentage of PTSD patients given benzodiazepines fell from about 37 percent in 1999 to about 31 percent in 2009. Of patients taking the drugs, the proportion of long-term (more than 90 days) users dropped from about 69 percent in 2000 to about 64 percent in 2009. Daily doses fell 14 percent on average, according to findings published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*.

Veterans with PTSD have an increased risk for harm because they often also suffer from substance abuse disorders, the researchers note. Estimates place the co-occurrence of alcohol abuse and PTSD around 25 percent, or higher, nationally.

Emerging evidence also suggests benzodiazepines may interfere with prolonged exposure therapy, which has been one of the most effective treatments for PTSD, Friedman said.

Guidelines issued by the departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs earlier this year recommend against using the drugs to treat veterans with PTSD. Instead, experts generally recommend psychotherapy to treat core symptoms such as hypervigilance, avoidance and flashbacks. The guidelines also recommend using antidepressant medications to treat PTSD symptoms.

“We believe a lot of benzodiazepines are being prescribed for problems with sleep, which is also a symptom of depression,” Friedman told Reuters Health. “If we treat the depression, perhaps the insomnia will also go away.”

The study found that new PTSD patients -- those who were diagnosed and began treatment at a Veterans Affairs medical center -- in 2009 were prescribed benzodiazepines at the lowest rate, about 21 percent. Newly diagnosed patients are often the first to benefit from updated treatment guidelines.

Trading One Risk for Another?

But the possibility that benzodiazepines are simply being swapped out for other risky drugs concerns some experts.

Substituting more modern medications such as zolpidem (Ambien) or quetiapine (an antipsychotic) is not the answer, said Dr. Alexander Neumeister, a professor of psychiatry and radiology at New York University.

“Unfortunately, when you look into databases like the VA’s, it is pretty evident that there is a lot of off-label use of medications like quetiapine to treat sleep issues,” Neumeister told Reuters Health, referring to the ability of doctors to prescribe drugs approved for conditions other than PTSD.

“Even if you avoid the abuse problem, you’re nevertheless treating a patient with a medication that really should not be used for that indication. Not at all.”

The study authors also recognized that possibility.

“We are trying to characterize these diagnoses to get a better handle on who’s prescribing what, who’s getting what, and for what reasons,” said Friedman. “Based on that information, we can develop our educational approaches to inform clinicians who may not be as familiar with clinical practice guidelines.”

VVA Urges All Veterans Exposed to Agent Orange Be Screened for Prostate Cancer



“Veterans exposed to Agent Orange are at least twice as likely to develop prostate cancer; their recurrence rates are higher; and recurring cancers are more aggressive,” noted Dr. Thomas Berger, Executive Director of VVA’s Veterans Health Council, before the Congressional Men’s Health

Caucus Prostate Cancer Task Force. Berger urged his fellow Vietnam veterans to get screened, noting “it’s worth the fight.”

Said Berger, “Some three million veterans served in Southeast Asia, and no one knows for sure how many of these veterans were exposed to Agent Orange.” In 1996 the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences concluded there is “limited evidence of a positive association between prostate cancer and exposure to herbicides used in Vietnam, including Agent Orange.” As a result of IOM’s findings, Jesse Brown, then-Secretary of the Veterans Administration (VA), issued the final rule, recognizing prostate cancer as a service-connected, presumptive disease associated with exposure to Agent Orange and other phenoxy herbicides during military service, allowing such exposed veterans to become eligible for VA disability compensation and health care.

In 2008, University of California-Davis Cancer Center physicians released results of research showing Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange have greatly increased risks of prostate cancer and even greater risks of getting the most aggressive form of the disease as compared to those who were not exposed. The research was also the first to use a large population of men in their 60s and the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test. More than 13,000 Vietnam veterans enrolled in the VA Northern California Health Care System were stratified into two groups, exposed or not exposed to Agent Orange between 1962 and 1971. Based on medical evaluations conducted between 1998 and 2006, the study revealed that:

- Twice as many Agent Orange-exposed men were identified with prostate cancer than non-exposed;
- Agent Orange-exposed men were diagnosed two-and-a-half years younger than non-exposed; and
- Agent Orange-exposed men were nearly four times more likely to present with metastatic disease than non-exposed.

Further buttressing this link in 2009, a study of 1,495 veterans in five cities who underwent radical prostatectomy to remove their cancerous prostates showed 206 exposed to Agent Orange had a near 50 percent increased risk of their cancer recurring, despite the cancer seeming nonaggressive at the time of surgery. And the cancer came back with a vengeance. The time it took the prostate-specific antigen, or PSA, level to double – an indicator of aggressiveness – was eight months versus more than 18 months in non-exposed veterans.

Air Force Disrespect for the Dead Draws VVA's Ire



"It's a matter of respect, of honoring service and sacrifice," said John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America. "And the members of VVA are quite frankly saddened, if not outraged, at reports that the Air Force, our Air Force, has disrespectfully and unceremoniously

dumped the incinerated remains of at least 274 American troops in a landfill in Virginia, far more according to news reports than the military had acknowledged previously."

"What is unconscionable," Rowan noted, "is that, according to a report in today's Washington Post, the landfill dumping 'was concealed from families who had authorized the military to dispose of the remains in a dignified and respectful manner.' To us, this does not mean dumped in a landfill. Whoever came up with that idea ought to think about a second career."

With the tens of billions of dollars spent on the global war on terror, Rowan said, "Is it too much to ask that protocols be followed for the proper disposal of body parts? How much could that cost?"

Connection Available through E-Mail

The Chapter 120 newsletter, *The Connection*, is available to members who wish to receive this monthly publication via email versus US Postal Service. As the cost of a first-class postage stamp will increase to \$0.45 in January, the Chapter could realize an annual savings of \$4.95 for each member who wishes to receive the newsletter via e-mail attachment. We currently have 56 members receiving the newsletter by email, saving the Chapter over \$275 annually in postage. To those members, we thank you for making the decision to help the Chapter reduce its postal expenses.

The newsletter is available in Adobe format and is sent approximately one week earlier to members wishing an electronic copy than those who receive the "snail-mail" copy. This time difference is based on the lead-time for printing and mailing the newsletter via USPS.

You must have an Adobe Reader installed in your computer to open and read this attachment (most new computers have the Adobe reader already installed). Adobe also provides free readers, downloaded from their website at: <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/>

If you decide that you would wish to receive the newsletter via e-mail attachment IN-LIEU of the "snail-mail" copy, please e-mail the newsletter editor at jrcvva120@aol.com. If at any time, you decide that you would like to change from electronic copy back to the "snail-mail" copy, send an e-mail to let me know.

Helping Hands for Our Fellow Veterans



Won't You Please Give a Helping Hand to a Brother or Sister Veteran?

Several veterans have contacted Chapter 120 asking for help in paying the most basic of needs for themselves and their families. These veterans are those who do not qualify for regular federal, state or local assistance – they fall into that financial category where they make too much to qualify for assistance, but not enough to afford basic needs for their families, like food, fuel for heat, or clothing for their children.

Chapter 120 has decided to ask you – our members – to lend a helping hand to your fellow veterans and their families. Won't you please consider donating for this worthy cause? Even a small amount of \$5 can make a difference – or more if you can afford to help a fellow veteran and his or her family.

Please send your generous gift, made out to Connecticut Chapter 120, to:

Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.
Connecticut Chapter 120
Attention: Helping Hands for Veterans
357 Main Street
East Hartford, CT 06118

Chapter 120 has established a separate line item in the budget to collect donations to assist these fellow veterans and their families in need. *And don't forget, your donations are tax deductible.*

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.

WE, the veterans who served during the Vietnam War, who embraced through sacrifice and service to country the most fundamental and cherished bonds of our democracy, reaffirm that commitment to spirit and ideals, accepting it as the solemn responsibility of our survival, to bear the burden of what has been, so that tragedy once endured can never be forgotten.

AND so do we resolve that the true measure of our worth as citizens, as veterans, and as patriots be found in our willingness to draw from and abide by these strengths and convictions born of heritage and experience.

TO HOLD that a sacred and binding contract exists between governors and governed, with the latter recognizing an obligation of compulsory foreign or domestic service equitably shared by all, and the former morally obligated to implement foreign and domestic policies that are clear, consistent, and reflective of the will of the people.

TO HOLD further, that the contract extends to post obligatory service with the Nation, bound whenever and wherever appropriate to the prompt delivery of compensation to individuals or survivors in direct proportion to sacrifice and service rendered.

TO HONOR with dignity the sacred memory of the war dead, and so in dignity, insure that the lasting legacy of the fallen is responsibility toward, not exploitation of, their sacrifice.

TO STAND for cooperation, dialogue, and friendship among the nations of the world community, with full respect and support of those principles central to our national life.

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