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Chair of the Bedford Selectmen

GOOD AFTERNOON EVERYONE, THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING AND WELCOME TO TODAY'S VETERANS DAY CEREMONIES. THANK YOU FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT TODAY'S COMMEMORATION.

LET ME START BY THANKING OUR OWN PATRIOTIC HOLIDAY COMMITTEE. THE WORK OF PAUL PURCHIA, JOE PIANTEDOSI AND MANY OTHER MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS IS CRUCIAL FOR EVENTS LIKE THIS TO BE SUCCESSFUL. WE RELY ON THEM IN OUR TOWN'S EFFORTS TO HONOR OUR MILITARY HISTORY AND TO SHOW THE HIGH VALUE WE PLACE ON SUPPORTING MILITARY FAMILIES AND FRIENDS. THEY NEVER LET US DOWN.

THE ORIGINAL VETERANS DAY - ARMISTICE DAY - WAS ESTABLISHED JUST MONTHS AFTER THE ACTUAL END OF WORLD WAR I, IN 1919. A GREAT VICTORY HAD BEEN WON BUT THE COST HAD BEEN HIGH. AMERICA WAS EAGER TO RETURN TO PEACEFUL RELATIONS WITH OTHER NATIONS AND SHOW ITS SINCERE GRATITUDE TO THOSE WHO HAD SERVED AND SACRIFICED IN THE WAR TO END ALL WARS. AFTER 19 YEARS - IN 1938, CONGRESS MADE ARMISTICE DAY A NATIONAL HOLIDAY DEDICATED TO THE CAUSE OF WORLD PEACE AND THE HONORING OF VETERANS OF WORLD WAR I.

BY 1954, AFTER ALL THE RESOURCES AND ADDITIONAL SACRIFICES OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE KOREAN CONFLICT, ARMISTICE DAY WAS RENAMED VETERANS DAY. A DAY TO HONOR THE SERVICE AND SACRIFICE OF ALL VETERANS NOT JUST THOSE FROM THE GREAT WAR. THE CURRENT-DAY VETERANS ADMINISTRATION DESCRIBES TODAY AS "A CELEBRATION TO HONOR AMERICA'S VETERANS FOR THEIR PATRIOTISM, LOVE OF COUNTRY, AND WILLINGNESS TO SERVE AND SACRIFICE FOR THE COMMON GOOD."

IT IS INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT TO CELEBRATE VETERANS DAY AND TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE IMPORTANCE OF VETERANS' SERVICE TO OUR COUNTRY.

FOR MANY YEARS, VETERANS - BOTH DRAFTED AND VOLUNTEER - HAVE FACED A DIFFICULT TIME RECEIVING THIS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT. AS FEWER VETERANS FROM THE WORLD WAR II ERA REMAIN, THE TIMES OF SERVICE FOR LIVING VETERANS COVER MORE CONTROVERSIAL PERIODS IN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CONTROVERSIAL MILITARY MISSIONS. AN INCREASING NUMBER OF VETERANS ARE PART OF THE ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCES ESTABLISHED AFTER THE END OF THE VIETNAM WAR. SOMETIMES IT SEEMS AS THOUGH THIS VOLUNTEERISM HINDERS THE RECOGNITION THEY DESERVE.

OUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS IN COMMAND AT HANSCOM HAVE TOLD US HOW POSITIVE IT IS TO HAVE THEIR PERSONNEL INCORPORATED INTO THE DAILY LIFE OF BEDFORD. IT IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC TO UNDERSTAND AND ACKNOWLEDGE THE VOLUNTEER MILITARY'S CONTRIBUTION TO OUR SAFETY AND SECURITY, HERE AND ELSEWHERE. BUT CELEBRATING MILITARY SERVICE IS A COMPLICATED THING IN AMERICA. LONG GONE ARE THE CLEAR VICTORIES OVER CLEAR ENEMIES. GONE ARE THE SIGNED SURRENDERS AND THE DATES THAT MARK THE END OF A CONFLICT. THE COMPLEXITY OF WORLD EVENTS, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND UNPREDICTABLE UPRISINGS OFTEN OVERWHELMS OUR SENSE OF WHO SERVES, WHAT THEY DO, AND WHY.

IN TODAY'S AMERICA, MEN AND WOMEN ENTERING THE MILITARY HAVE MADE A CHALLENGING CHOICE. IS IT A LONG-TERM CAREER OR NATIONAL SERVICE WITH PROFESSIONAL OR VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR THE FUTURE? PERHAPS IT WILL BE BOTH. WILL IT PUT THEM IN HARMS WAY FROM AN ENEMY; WILL THEY FACE DANGER IN SERVICE TO DISASTER VICTIMS OR IN RESCUE OPERATIONS? OR WILL THEY USE THEIR TALENTS AND SKILLS TO SIMPLY ASSURE THAT OUR NATIONAL DEFENSE IS THE BEST IT CAN BE NO MATTER THE CHALLENGE. IN ANY OF THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, THEY DESERVE OUR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND SUPPORT.

WE SEE THE TRAUMA THAT CAN RESULT AFTER ACTIVE COMBAT SERVICE FOR SOME VETERANS. WE SEE THE NEED FOR MEANINGFUL JOBS AND TRAINING, THE HOMELESSNESS THAT AFFLICTS SOME OF OUR VETERANS, AND THE SUBSTANCE ABUSE THAT CAN CRIPPLE SERVICEMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES. WE SEE A FEDERAL AGENCY DESPERATELY TRYING TO SERVE SO MANY IN NEED. UNDER ANY OF THESE CONDITIONS, THEY DESERVE OUR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND SUPPORT.

RESIDENTS OF BEDFORD HAVE SHOWN THEIR SUPPORT AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TOWN, HANSCOM AND THE VA HOSPITAL, FOR EXAMPLE, IS MUTUALLY SUPPORTIVE AND HAS ENDURED FOR MANY YEARS. WE EDUCATE MILITARY DEPENDENTS, WORK COOPERATIVELY TO PROVIDE SERVICES AND ACTIVELY SUPPORT HOUSING PROPOSALS FOR VETERANS IN NEED.

TODAY, WE ALSO OFFER OUR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF YOUR SACRIFICE, ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF YOUR SERVICE AND OUR HEARTFELT THANKS FOR YOUR DEFENSE OF OUR COUNTRY.

WE HOPE THAT OUR COMMEMORATION EFFORTS HONOR ALL VETERANS AND THEIR LOVED ONES WHETHER STILL WITH US OR IN MEMORIAM.

Mark Siegenthaler, Chairman, Bedford Selectmen