

117<sup>th</sup> VFW National Convention  
Presumptive Democratic Party Presidential Nominee  
Hillary Rodham Clinton Remarks

“Thank you so much Commander. Thank you, thank you so much. Thank you very much Commander for that very warm welcome.

Thank you to your Executive Director, Bob Wallace your Commander-in-Chief, and all the men and women of the V.F.W., of the auxiliary, for your commitment, your service, and your action on behalf of America’s veterans.

This is the 117th National Convention. That is a quite a legacy. And in that time, the V.F.W. has built a record to be proud of.

You have been a moving force behind hallmark achievements: like the creation of the V.A.; the passage of the G.I. Bill; the establishment of national monuments dedicated to those who fought in World War II, the Korean War, the war in Vietnam, women in military service, and veterans disabled for life.

These monuments are sacred places. I’ve been to many of them, also to our cemeteries around the world. People come to sit quietly, maybe lay a flower or a letter or other memento. To reflect on the courage and sacrifice of those who fought for our nation and our ideals. I don’t think it is an overstatement for me to say, those memorials might not exist if it weren’t for you.

So thank you, and thank you for standing up today and every day for veterans’ health, for veterans’ education, for the right of all veterans to dignity and security. And thank you for continuing to push our nation to live up to our obligations to those who serve.

I’ve been a direct beneficiary of your expertise and commitment – some of my top advisors are members of the V.F.W. I’m grateful to all the veterans and retired military leaders who have shared their knowledge and counsel with me – I especially want to thank the V.F.W. for the close consultation you provided as we work to put forth our plan to reform the VA. Today I especially want to acknowledge and appreciate Retired Marine General John Allen, former Deputy Commander of U.S. Central Command and Commander of the International Security Assistance Force overseeing NATO troops in Afghanistan. I had the great privilege of working with General Allen; therefore, I am deeply honored that he endorsed me this morning.

His confidence in me – and that of the other esteemed military leaders who support my campaign – means a great deal to me. But it also imposes a high responsibility on me as well.

So I thank you. I thank you for what you’ve done behind the scenes, as well as in public, to make sure that America keeps our promises, honors our history, and gives our veterans the

respect and the opportunities they've earned.

A lot of the issues you have fought for are at stake in this election. America is grappling with big questions:

How do we keep our country safe? How do we make the world safer? How do we make sure we give our troops what they need to see their missions through — and when they come home, that they have the support and access to services they need to lead healthy, productive, successful lives?

These challenges matter to me personally, not only as the proud daughter of a veteran. My father, Hugh Rodham, enlisted in the Navy shortly after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. He became a chief petty officer responsible for training thousands of young sailors before they shipped out to sea, mostly to the Pacific Theater. After my father died in 1993, I received letters and old photos from men who had served under him, talking about what a difference my dad made in their lives — these are letters that I treasure.

My dad once told me how sad he felt when he left Great Lakes Naval Base and accompanied his trainees to the West Coast to join their ships. He knew some of these bright, energetic young men wouldn't survive. Some of them probably thought it too. But still, they went to serve. Because they knew our country needed them.

That's the kind of courage and honor our men and women in uniform demonstrate every single day.

I thought a lot about my father's experiences later, when I became a Senator from New York serving on the Senate Armed Services Committee, and then as Secretary of State. I've worked hard over the years on many of the issues you care about and work on every day. I am not a newcomer to these issues.

And today, I want to tell you a few of my core beliefs, which will guide me if I have the great honor to be elected this fall.

Because Americans aren't just choosing a President — we're also choosing a Commander-in-Chief. The person who decides questions of war and peace, life and death. There's no more solemn or serious a responsibility than that.

So you deserve to know what we candidates believe about national security, and how we'd go about making life-or-death calls. Because they will affect our men and women in uniform, first and foremost. And they will affect our veterans.

Let's start here — I believe the United States of America is an exceptional nation, with

capabilities that no other country comes close to matching. And we have the world's greatest military – don't let anyone tell you otherwise. We also have an economy that is larger, more durable and more entrepreneurial than any other on the planet.

And we are guided by values that have long inspired people across the world – a commitment to freedom and equality, justice and diversity – that fundamental American idea that every single person deserves to be treated decently and with respect, no matter who they are.

I believe in standing with our allies because they are part of what makes us exceptional. No country in the world has relationships like we do.

Generations of American troops fought, and yes, died to secure those bonds, because they knew we were safer with more friends and partners and fewer adversaries and enemies. Our men and women in uniform carry that work forward today.

My running mate in this election is a wonderful man from Virginia named Tim Kaine. He's a U.S. Senator, he was governor of Virginia, mayor of Richmond, Virginia. If you're not familiar with him yet, I urge you to check him out. He's a great public servant and a terrific guy. His son is a Marine.

His son is actually deploying today to help defend our NATO allies in Europe. That's how committed he is – and many others are – to our alliances, and we should be, too. After all, America's word has to mean something.

I believe in being firm but wise with our rivals – finding common ground where we can, and standing our ground when we must.

That's the balance that made it possible for me to work with all kinds of nations: to work to increase pressure on North Korea; to work to stand up to the Chinese in the South China Sea; to work with Russia to conclude the new START treaty that reduces nuclear stockpiles, while standing up to them because of their threats to our friends in Eastern Europe. One thing for certain you will not ever hear me is praise for dictators and strongmen who have no love for America.

And yes, I believe with all my heart in democracy. And I believe in diplomacy. It's often the only way to avoid conflicts that can end up exacting a much greater cost.

I believe the most sacred responsibility of a Commander-in-Chief is deciding whether to send men and women into battle. I have visited our troops in theaters of war and tension. I know how serious this is. Force must only be used as a last resort, and only with a clear and well-thought-out strategy. Our troops deserve nothing less; America expects nothing less.

I believe our troops strive to comport themselves with honor. They deserve a Commander-in-Chief who will never order them to commit war crimes.

I believe in listening to our generals and admirals, because they have invaluable knowledge and experience, and they're doing one of the most important jobs there is: commanding America's sons and daughters. As Commander-in-Chief, I will always show them respect and hear them out.

You will never hear me say that I only listen to myself on national security. I believe in doing everything we can to meet threats at home and abroad. I know we live in a dangerous world. That's why we need real plans, real strategies, to deal with terrorism, including homegrown terrorism. I've worked with experienced people from across different fields, and indeed across the political spectrum, to come up with comprehensive strategies for these and other threats.

I will be ready to get to work on Day One – I take nothing more seriously than our security.

Most of all, I believe in American leadership. I believe that who we are as a people, the values that we hold dear, the history that we care about, matters a great deal. I'm not interested in talking provocatively; I'm not interested in insulting people, including our military; I'm interested in bringing our country together — I'm interested in healing the divisions.

We have to protect ourselves against terrorists.

To do that, we need to lead other countries in stopping ISIS, al Qaeda, and other radical jihadist groups. We shouldn't leave that to the rest of the world to figure out on their own — that won't keep us safe.

We need a strong global economy, because it's good for American jobs and exports. That means we should lead in setting and enforcing the rules. If we retreat on either security or the economy, behind some kind of imaginary wall, we will have lost our leadership, our purpose, our chance to prevail in the 21st Century.

Because if America doesn't lead, we leave a vacuum – and that will either cause chaos, or enable other countries to rush in to fill that void. Then they will be the ones making the decisions about American lives, jobs and safety. The choices, make no mistake about it, might not be to our benefit. That's not an outcome we can live with.

I have set forth plans and strategies for dealing with these threats. I know how challenging it will be to meet the difficulties that we face in the world today. But you see, I have confidence. I have optimism. I don't understand people who trash talk about America — who talk about us as being in decline, who act as though we are not yet the greatest country that has ever been created on the face of the earth for all of history.

If you want somebody who will scapegoat other people, peddle fear, and smear, I'm not your candidate. I'm interested in bringing everybody together, rolling up our sleeves, and getting to work to solve our problems.

That's why, in the Senate, I worked closely with Republicans. Now as some of you might know, I have been the recipient of numerous political attacks for a very long time. I've learned to live with that. I have, as Eleanor Roosevelt advised many years ago, 'If a woman wants to be in a public arena, you've better develop skin as thick as the hide of a rhinoceros.' So when I got to the Senate, I didn't say, 'Oh, I'm only going to talk to Democrats. I'm not going to work with Republicans.' How silly would that be?

I was elected to represent the great Empire State. And I wanted to do everything I could to produce results for the people who honored me by electing me to be their Senator. So I worked with Republicans to increase the benefit paid to family members of the fallen; to expand veterans' access to military health insurance; to make sure that all members of the Reserves and National Guard, and their families, had access to Tricare military health benefits even when they were not deployed.

I introduced the Heroes at Home Act to establish new services for military members and veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injuries.

I fought successfully in 2007 to amend the 2007 Defense Appropriation Act, to establish a training program for family caregivers helping their loved ones with TBI.

I did all of this because I had met so many wonderful people who were struggling, struggling because they lost a son, or a daughter, a mother, a father, a wife, or a husband. Struggling because their loved one came home and didn't have the care that he or she needed. They deserved more support from all of us, and I, fortunately, was in a position to advocate for them.

I joined forces with Senator John McCain to personally raise money for the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund, which helped build a state-of-the-art rehab facility in San Antonio to help our seriously wounded service members coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

And let me just say it was a pleasure to work with Senator McCain on that project and many others. I believe that he, and all American prisoners of war, are heroes and deserve the respect that that entails.

As President, I will build on the work I've done.

We're going to have a 21st Century Department of Veterans Affairs that delivers world-class care.

Like you, I was outraged by the V.A. scandals – people waiting months, even years for things like wheelchairs and basic medication – some even dying while languishing on a waitlist for an appointment. Heartbreaking and absolutely unacceptable. That’s why I have put forth a detailed plan about what I would do as President to revamp the V.A. — it will be one of my highest priorities. But I will tell you this: we are not going to privatize the V.A., we are going to reform it and make it work for every single veteran in America.

We will ensure access to timely, quality care; improve the coordination of care, which as you know is a huge problem still; improve care for women veterans, who are often under-served; tackle and at long last, end the epidemic of veteran suicides by expanding access to mental health care, erasing the stigma that still prevents too many from getting the help they need. I know this is a high priority for the V.F.W. and other veterans service organizations. And I will do everything in my power to support you in this critical work.

And we’re going to help more veterans looking for jobs with expanded tax credits for businesses that hire veterans, more support to veterans who want to start their own businesses, better certification and credentialing programs, so the work that veterans did on active duty will be understood and respected as they compete for the jobs in the civilian sector that they deserve to be considered for and hired to perform.

And I’m going to crack down on companies that prey on or discriminate against veterans. They should be ashamed of themselves, and we are going to hold them accountable.

We will also follow the lead of cities like New Orleans, Houston, Philadelphia, and Las Vegas, which have worked to end veteran homelessness. We have lessons to learn from them. Many more cities are making strong progress toward that same goal – we should support them, and end the tragedy of veteran homelessness once and for all.

And I will protect, preserve and defend the post-9/11 G.I. Bill. It has opened doors of opportunity to more than one million veterans and family members. Unfortunately, there are some Republicans in Congress chipping away at it. That’s not just wrong – it is short-sighted. This program helps us recruit and retain the all-volunteer force we need to protect our country. And it’s a way to invest in families and our shared future. We should protect and strengthen it, not let anyone erode it.

So yes, I have a plan to do all this and more. Including supporting military spouses as they seek to build careers. Including standing with women, standing with LGBT veterans to make sure they get the support they’ve earned.

You can go to my website, and I hope you will, [hillaryclinton.com](http://hillaryclinton.com), and read all the details. I hope you will, not only because I want you to know, but there’s a lot of expertise in this room. I

want your ideas too. I have this old-fashioned notion: you run for President, you should tell people what you want to do, as specifically as possible. So they can actually make up their minds. And then you should be held accountable as to whether or not you deliver results. So here's my bottom line.

This is something that I care deeply about. But I know a lot of veterans still feel invisible, powerless, like their country has forgotten them. That is just totally wrong. It's unacceptable, and we have to work together to make sure we end that.

We can disagree about the details. I'm sure we will from time to time. You see I actually believe as someone who's been in public life and public service, it's better if we have honest, candid conversations. That's the best way in a democracy for us to come up with the best solutions. But we should be guided by our values.

We can all agree that our troops deserve serious, strategic leadership. We can all agree we have to be serious and committed about the complexity of the challenges we face, here at home and around the world. Beneath whatever disagreements we might have as a country about how to get where we need to go, surely we can start listening to one another again. Respecting one another, our individual experiences that bring so much to the debate.

My father made sure I understood that the freedoms and rights we enjoy as Americans didn't come out of thin air. People sacrificed for them. Fought, bled and died for them. People like you, and the generations of soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen who have made our country strong, proud and free.

All of you, everyone who has served deserve our thanks, and more importantly, our respect. You deserve a country and a president and a commander-in-chief who honor your service. Not just with words but with deeds.

That's what the V.F.W. has stood for. To make sure that America lives up to that standard.

And as President, I will be working alongside you as I did as Senator to make sure that we produce results. I know this is the first time that one of our two major parties has ever nominated a woman.

And I know, that it takes a little getting used to, even for me. But here's what I want you to know. I will get up every single day in the White House, doing everything I possibly can to protect our country, to treat our men and women in uniform with the care, and concern and respect they deserve. To make good on our nation's promises to our veterans. That's how I was raised, that's what I have done, and I promise you that's what I will do. Thank you, V.F.W. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America. Thank you all very much."