

Information Operations Command Hawaii; PO1 Christopher O. Hutto, USCG, Sector Jacksonville Aids to Navigation Team; S. Sgt. Michael Noyce-Mering, USA, B Company, 1-163d Cavalry Regiment, Montana National Guard; SrA. Alicia Goetschel, USAF, 100th Security Forces Squadron; and Sgt. John Badon, USMC, Basic School for Martial Arts Center of Excellence.

Remarks at a Rededication Ceremony at the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum in New York City

November 11, 2008

Thank you all. Thank you for the warm welcome. Be seated. Charles and Rich, thanks a lot. I gratefully accept the Freedom Award. And I'm honored to be with you today as we rededicate a great monument to freedom, the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum. At this ceremony, we recognize nearly 55,000 Americans who served aboard the USS *Intrepid*, including some who are here today. And we commemorate Veterans Day by honoring all those who have worn the uniform of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps. Thank you for serving our great Nation.

I am proud to be traveling with the First Lady of the United States, Laura Bush, the most patient woman in America. [Laughter] Governor, thank you for joining us. Secretary Kempthorne, Senator Hillary Clinton, I'm proud to be with you. Thank you for being here. Congressman Pete King, Congressman Charlie Rangel, Congressman Anthony Weiner, thank you all for joining us today. Looking forward to that lame duck session, aren't we? [Laughter]

What an awesome guy General Jim Conway is, Commandant of the United States Marine Corps and member of the Joint Chiefs. Christine Quinn, thank you for your remarks. Bill White, the Vanna White of the *Intrepid*. He's a—[laughter]. Arnold Fisher and the Fisher family—what a fabulous contribution the Fishers have made to the United States of America, and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

John Rich—fellow Texan; John, tell them we're coming home, and we're coming home with our heads held high.

Members of the Intrepid Museum and Foundation board of trustees; wounded warriors—you know, oftentimes they ask me, "What are you going to miss about the Presidency?" And first reaction is, I say, "No traffic jams in New York." The truth of the matter is, I will miss being the Commander in Chief of such a fabulous group of men and women, those who wear the uniform of the United States military.

Veterans Day has a long and solemn history. The event that inspired it took place 90 years ago today in a small railway car in a French forest. November the 11th, 1918, the Allied Powers and Germany signed an armistice that ended one of the bloodiest wars the world had ever witnessed. By the time that day arrived, World War I had raged for more than 4 years, and more than 8 million soldiers had given their lives. But on the 11th hour of the 11th day of that 11th month, the guns fell silent and peace began to return to Europe.

To commemorate the war's end, President Woodrow Wilson declared that November the 11th should be remembered as Armistice Day, a holiday to honor the brave sacrifices of the American soldiers who defended democracy and freedom overseas. Today, we know it as Veterans Day, a day when we celebrate and thank and honor every man and woman who have served in our Armed Forces.

These noble Americans are our sons and daughters, they are our fathers and mothers, they are our family, and they are our friends. They leave home to do the work of patriots, and they lead lives of quiet dignity when they return. Today we send a clear message to all who have worn the uniform: Thank you for your courage, thank you for your sacrifice, and thank you for standing up when your Nation needed you most.

In the years since we began celebrating Veterans Day, America's Armed Forces have defended our freedom in many conflicts. And in those conflicts, they have often relied on the might of the USS *Intrepid*.

The great ship's keel was laid on December 1, 1941. Less than a week later, Pearl Harbor was attacked, and America entered World War II. In the years to come, as the United States Navy defended the freedom

in the Pacific, the men of the “Fighting I” would be in the thick of the battle. The *Intrepid* participated in the invasion of the Marshall Islands. She played a key role in the amphibious assault on Okinawa. She was part of one of the greatest sea battles in history, the Battles of Leyte Gulf.

In that massive engagement, American forces faced some of the most formidable elements of the Japanese Navy. The Japanese fleet included the *Yamamoto* [*Yamato*]^{*} and the *Musashi*; these were the heaviest and the largest battleships ever constructed. The Imperial Navy approached the coast of the Philippines from three different directions, and it was a fearsome challenge, but the men of this ship were ready. The *Intrepid*'s air group fought courageously and without rest. By the time the battle ended 3 days later, the United States Navy had sunk the *Musashi* to the ocean floor and lifted hopes for victory in the Pacific.

The war ended the following year, but the *Intrepid*'s mission did not end. As the United States raced into the new frontier of space, the *Intrepid* stood by to retrieve astronauts returning to Earth. During the cold war, she patrolled the Mediterranean and helped force the surrender of pro-Castro terrorists who had hijacked a freighter in the Caribbean, and did three tours off the waters of Vietnam. For our Nation's bicentennial celebration, the United States Congress paid a fitting tribute to this ship's extraordinary service when they selected the *Intrepid* to represent the United States Navy in Philadelphia.

After more than 30 years at sea, the *Intrepid* was permanently decommissioned. Despite her amazing history, she was destined to be scrapped. But thanks to the work of the *Intrepid* Museum Foundation, she found a home in New York City. Since 1982, she has been a museum that educates new generations of Americans about the high price that those who came before them paid for their freedom.

One of the veterans who has been honored here was a Navy pilot who flew Avenger torpedo planes during World War II. When he was invited onboard the *Intrepid* for the 50th

anniversary of D-Day, he was moved to see that the museum had arranged for a vintage Avenger, painted in the style of his unit, to be right here on the deck. It just so happens that it was flanked by two of the men who had flown in his squadron. The man the *Intrepid* honored that day is a great American. He's a dedicated servant to this country, and I can tell you from personal experience he's a fabulous father.

Even as a museum, the *Intrepid* still answered the call to service. I'm pretty certain most Americans don't understand what I'm about to tell you, but on September the 11th, when we came attacked just a few blocks from here, the *Intrepid* was used as an emergency command center. First-responders launched helicopters from the decks. It became clear that this ship, which helped defeat the great totalitarian threats of the 20th century, was front and center in the opening moments of a new struggle against the forces of hatred and fear.

The war on terror has required courage; it has required resolve equal to what previous generations of Americans brought to the fields of Europe and the deep waters of the Pacific. And I'm proud to report to my fellow citizens, our Armed Forces, the Armed Forces of this generation, have showed up for the fight. And America is more secure for it.

This morning, Laura and I flew up here with some brave men and women who are keeping us safe. I want to introduce them to you.

Staff Sergeant Michael Noyce-Merino was the first National Guardsman ever to be named the Army's Noncommissioned Officer of the Year. Senior Airman Alicia Goetschel was named one of the Air Force's Outstanding Airmen of the Year for her work in keeping dangerous extremists off the streets of Iraq. Chief Petty Officer Shenequa Cox won several awards recognizing her as one of the Navy's finest sailors. Petty Officer First Class Chris Hutto was honored as the Coast Guard's Enlisted Person of the Year. And United States Marine Sergeant John Badon's bravery earned him two Purple Hearts for his service in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Where are my new pals? God bless you.

^{*} White House correction.

They are representatives of the finest our Nation offers. And they have the support of strong and caring and loving families. And so on this Veterans Day, not only do we honor those who have worn the uniform, those who are wearing the uniform, we honor their families. And we thank them from the bottom of our hearts.

We have a moral obligation to support our families, and we have a moral obligation to support our veterans. It has been my privilege to work with Members of the United States Congress to nearly double the funding for those who have worn the uniform. It has been my privilege to work to implement the recommendations from the Dole-Shalala Commission, to make sure that we have a mental health care system and physical health care system worthy of the sacrifice of those who have worn the uniform.

It has been my privilege to work with the United States Congress to expand education benefits for both members of our military as well as our veterans. It has been my privilege to say loud and clear to our veterans: We love you, we respect you, and we thank you for serving the United States of America.

And I love what the Intrepid Relief Fund and the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund have done to support our veterans as well. They provided more than \$100 million to military families in need. The Intrepid's Fisher House program has provided temporary housing for families of service men and women receiving medical treatment.

At the center for the Intrepid's physical rehabilitation facility in San Antonio, Texas, America's wounded warriors receive some incredible medical care. I have seen what happens in this place of healing and hope firsthand. The Intrepid Center brings great compassion to those who have worn and are wearing the uniform. It also shows that the American people are incredibly generous in supporting the veterans. And I want to thank the Intrepid members, and those who support the Intrepid foundations, for your work on behalf of our country.

Throughout the decades, our service men and women have shown a spirit of selfless courage. I was impressed by the story of Alonzo Swann, who on October 29, 1944, here on the deck of the *Intrepid*, had to help

his fellow sailors deal with a kamikaze attack. He saw his best friend burning alive and caught in a gun mount. He rushed into the flames. He attempted to save his buddy, but before he could do so, an ammunition bin detonated; nine were killed, six injured, including Alonzo.

For his bravery, he was awarded the Bronze Star. It's a high honor, but a lot of folks didn't think it was a high enough honor. They felt he deserved the Navy Cross, and many believed that he had been denied the Navy Cross because of the color of his skin—he was an African American. For 50 years his advocates petitioned the Government, and for 50 years they were unsuccessful. But he kept the faith. November 3, 1993, under the Presidency of my predecessor, President Bill Clinton, right here on the deck of the *Intrepid*, Alonzo Swann finally received his Navy Cross. And I want people to listen to what he said. He said, "If you think you're right, fight your heart out." That ought to be the motto of the modern United States military. You think you're right, and you're fighting your heart out for the sake of peace and freedom, and we thank you for it.

Laura and I are honored to be here. We're honored to see this majestic place. I love the fact that parents can answer a child's question about "Why fight?" with this answer: These brave souls fought for freedom, they fought for liberty, and they fought to guarantee the rights given to us by our Creator. And that has been the history of our Armed Forces—brave folks, the mightiest defenders of those unalienable rights.

So on behalf of a grateful nation, I thank our veterans for your service, for your commitment. May God bless you, and may God continue to bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:27 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Charles de Gunzburg and Richard Santulli, cochairmen, and Arnold Fisher, chairman emeritus, Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum board of trustees; Gov. David A. Paterson of New York; Christine C. Quinn, speaker, New York City Council; Bill White, president, Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum; television personality Vanna White; and entertainer John Rich.

Remarks Honoring 2008 NCAA Championship Teams

November 12, 2008

Thank you all. Please be seated. Welcome to the White House, champions day here on the South Lawn. We appreciate you coming. We appreciate the fact that as champions you have set goals and you have worked hard to achieve those goals.

I appreciate very much the fact that you brought your coaches with you and people at your universities who support you. I'm proud to welcome the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, his wife Molly, and daughter Ella. He is here because he is a graduate of Northwestern University. Of course, you're probably here to cheer all the teams, right? Yes.

I want to welcome other members of the administration, school officials, families, and fans. First team I want to honor is the team for which we have called upon this weather: the University of Alaska Fairbanks rifle team. [Laughter] The Nanooks are with us today. You won your 10th national championship and your third in a row. I want to welcome coach Dan Jordan and the folks from Fairbanks—University of Alaska Fairbanks. I asked the captain, "Who did you beat to get here?" And he said, "Army." [Laughter] The folks at West Point need to practice. [Laughter] These guys make good competition to you. Congratulations. Welcome. And we are glad you're here.

A lot of teams from the State of Arizona have joined us. We put this weather on just for you. [Laughter]

The University of Arizona men's and women's swimming and diving teams are here. In March, the women defeated Auburn to win the national championship, and 1 week later, the men handily beat the University of Texas. We welcome you here. This is the first national championship for either team. And I got the feeling, having talked to some of the athletes, this will not be the last time you'll be at the White House, even though it will be my last time here at the White House. [Laughter] Coach Frank Busch—no relation—and the mighty Arizona men and women's team, congratulations, and we welcome you.

The Arizona State University men's and women's indoor track and field team have joined us today. There you are. The Sun Devil men and women both took home indoor track and field championships. This was the first indoor title for the men and a repeat for the women. You have a great leader and coach, Greg Kraft, and we're glad to welcome you back. Congratulations, and thanks.

Arizona State softball team are with us today. [Applause] Seems to be some support out there for women's softball. You're looking at a big women's softball supporter. You went 66–5, and 10–0 during the post-season to capture the Sun Devils' first NCAA softball national title. When Coach Clint Myers arrived 3 years ago, he promised that you would win a national title. That's a pretty bold promise, Coach Myers, and you've delivered. And you thanked him by dumping Gatorade all over him. [Laughter] I hope you sent them the cleaning bill.

The Florida State men's outdoor track and field team have joined us today, the mighty Seminoles. This is your third straight title. Coach Bob Braman told me that he—last year, he said, "We'll be back, Mr. President." I said, "I'll be here too." You're in the process of winning; you produced nine All-Americans. Congratulations on another great championship.

The Northwestern University women's lacrosse team; they finished 21–1. I must tell you, I was slightly disappointed when I came in the White House room there and looked at the feet of those women. I was looking for flip-flops. [Laughter] Coach Kathy—Kelly Hiller led you to the fourth straight national title over Penn, and here is what she said: "I'm not going to call ourselves a dynasty, but if you want to, I'm okay with it." [Laughter] Welcome back, a dynasty. Congratulations, ladies.

LSU women's outdoor track and field team, straight out of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. [Laughter] It came down to the wire, the very last event of the very last day was the 4x400, and you won. And now you are the national champs. We welcome Coach Dennis Shaver and the women from Louisiana State University.

I'm proud to welcome back Coach John Murphy's Brown University women's rowing