

As delivered

Admiral Thomas H. Collins  
Armed Services YMCA of Alaska  
Salute to the Armed Forces  
25 February 2005

Amenities:

Thank you very much, Senator [Stevens] for that kind introduction.

Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen, I'm delighted to be here with you. I am glad to see so many friends of the United States Armed Forces in tonight's audience.

Consulate General of Japan, Akihiro Aoki and his wife Yoshiko  
Senator Murkowski and her husband, Vern Martel  
Lieutenant Governor and Mrs. Leamon  
Members of the Alaska State Legislature  
The Honorable Mark Begich, Mayor of Anchorage, and his wife,  
Deborah Bonito  
My fellow Flag and General Officers  
Leadership of the Armed Services YMCA:  
Eldon Mulder, [Chairman, ASYMCA Salute to the Military]  
Steve Boyle and Linda Fast [Local Board Chairmen]  
Pete and Deb Mulcahy [ex-Director, Local Chapter]  
Our Master of Ceremonies tonight, Jim Robbins,  
Other distinguished guests,  
And most importantly, servicemen and women of the Army, Navy, Air Force,  
Marine Corps, and Coast Guard – active, reserve, and Guard ... welcome. It's an honor to be here with you.

Senator Stevens, I was very pleased when I received your invitation to this great event. I know I speak for all of us in uniform when I say we appreciate your tremendous support of our military throughout the years. Your leadership ensures our troops have the tools they need for continued success around the world. We thank you for your steadfast support and leadership.

Thank you also to everyone here tonight for coming out this evening to honor the servicemen and women of the United States military.

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Earlier this month, our 43<sup>rd</sup> President and Commander-in-Chief, as is tradition, went to the Capitol and delivered his annual State of the Union address. As you recall, he spoke on a number of topics, including the recent historic elections in Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and the Palestinian territories; the Social Security system; his 2006 budget – but, in my opinion, he saved the best for last. At the end of his speech, he talked about the men and women in uniform, serving our great country, both here and abroad. Speaking of them, he said, “They have given us an example of idealism and character that makes every American proud. The volunteers of our military are unrelenting in battle, unwavering in loyalty, unmatched in honor and decency, and every day they are making our nation more secure.”

“... that makes every American proud ...”

I can tell you, I’m proud to be in the military, as I’m sure every member in uniform here tonight is. I’d like you to know why we’re proud.

Pride is one of those words that can be a double-edged sword. On its negative side, it’s one of the seven deadly sins, and it denotes many traits that military leaders must carefully avoid -- arrogance, excessive self-esteem, haughtiness, lack of regard for others. But there is also a positive side to the word, and it is this positive sense that members of the military understand and experience.

When we say we are proud of the military and proud to serve our country in uniform, we are not boasting of our own worth. We are pointing to something larger than ourselves. We are exulting in the privilege of following in the footsteps of past heroes and of performing noble work in the company of current shipmates – whether they be soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, or Coastguardsmen. This exultation motivates us to serve -- so that our shipmates today and our successors tomorrow will draw the same strength that we have drawn from service to our country. The pride we speak of is not the pride that gives one a big head; it is the pride that gives one a strong heart.

While I couldn’t disagree more with them, you don’t have to look very hard to hear social commentators lamenting the selfishness and aimlessness of today’s young people – you hear that they are growing up spoiled, in a country without role models. These generalizations frequently end with some variation of the question, "Where have all the heroes gone?"

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Where have all the heroes gone? Many joined the military ... just as heroes have done since the American colonies declared their freedom from England.

The military has always been a place of heroes. And they are in our present as much as in our past ... they are all around us – right now, right here in this room. You need look no farther than the 11 servicemen and women we honor here tonight – they epitomize the character and professionalism that make heroes out of the ordinary men and women who join our ranks.

Military heroism is most evident on the front lines, whether in battle, in helping to rebuild a needy country, or during a rescue on a dark and stormy night. Our armed forces perform heroically across this wide range of missions – fighting the Global War on Terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan; bringing freedom to those for whom it was only a distant dream; flying rescue supplies and providing medical care to those whose lives were devastated by the tsunami – and these are only a few of the most recent headlines. The American public continues to be amazed by the professionalism and compassion of our armed forces ... and they should be.

But our heroism is evident in the way we serve not only in uniform, but out of uniform as well. The Citizen-Soldier is a credit to our country because we participate in so many ways to the strength of our Nation. Volunteerism runs rampant in our people and contributes greatly to our communities.

Paraphrasing our 35<sup>th</sup> President, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, “A nation reveals itself not only by the men and women it produces, but also by the men and women it honors, the men and women it remembers.”

By honoring these fine young service members tonight, the Armed Services YMCA of Alaska, our host this evening, helps reveal the values of our Nation and the values of this great state. But more important and more revealing than this wonderful banquet -- no matter how wonderful it is -- the Armed Services YMCA honors military members day-in and day-out, through its outstanding support of all Alaska's service members, not just tonight's honorees. With its many programs aimed at single members, parents, and children, the Armed Services YMCA of Alaska has something for everyone stationed in Alaska – those in uniform and equally as important, their family members. We would not be as strong and we would not be as successful if it were not for our families there to support us through

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deployments, transfers, and all the other upheaval a life in the military brings.

This evening's event is billed as a Salute to the Military – and it is, indeed, a fantastic celebration of the military. But it not only gives the Alaskan community a chance to say “thank you” to our Armed Forces, it also gives us in the Armed Forces a chance to say “thank you” to all of you – the YMCA, our supporters in national, state, and local politics, business leaders, and the wonderful citizens of Alaska.

President Bush said that the military makes every American proud ... please know that it goes both ways: we are equally proud to serve you and to serve our great Nation.

God bless all of you; God bless our men and women in uniform; and God bless America. Thank you and Semper Paratus.