



### 2014-2015 Voice of Democracy Contest

Why Veterans are Important to our Nation's History and Future"

Colorado  
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My first taste of "American Pride" was when I was 12, at the grocery store with my mom. We went to the food court for dinner, and noticed an elderly man with a WWII veterans cap on. We approached him and introduced ourselves, and as I shook his hand, my heart swelled with pride. I was proud of my country. I was proud of the man whose strong hand was wrapped around mine. I was proud of the men and women who represented America by joining the armed forces. I'll never lose this pride. I will always be a patriot, a lover of the red, white, and blue, and an admirer of our veterans.

Our national anthem calls America the land of the free and the home of the brave, but America can only be free if she is brave. Economics tell us that nothing is free. There's no such thing as a free lunch — everything must be bought with a price. The same is true of freedom; our veterans have bravely sacrificed everything to pay the price for freedom. Courageous men and women like the one I met at the grocery store are the reason that America can still be free.

Throughout history, in wars like Vietnam, World War II, Afghanistan, and Iraq, our love for freedom has been tested. Enemies of liberty have sought to snuff out the light. However, proud representatives of America have ventured through jungles where armed enemies lurked in the unknown ready to strike and disappear. They have charged onto beaches under heavy machine gun and artillery fire where they knew they probably wouldn't make it out alive. They have colored the ocean red with their blood — shed for the liberty of people they will never meet. Thanks to them, my family can go to church on Sunday. Thanks to our veterans, I have no fear of being caught praying. Thanks to our veterans, I can say what I want, when I want, and where I want; thanks to our veterans, I am free.

Veterans used to get the attention they deserve. When a man returned home from fighting on the front lines, his family and friends would throw a welcoming celebration, he was thanked many times, and his face might even appear in the newspaper. Now it seems that though we have a national holiday for them, veterans aren't appreciated, respected, or thanked. A failure to celebrate veterans is a failure to raise up the next generation. If future leaders don't understand the sacrifice necessary to maintain a free nation, no one will make that sacrifice later on down the road. We won't be able to remain the land of liberty, if veterans of tomorrow don't rise up, and if we fail to instill patriotism in our young.

America is only as free as she is brave. I met a veteran, and that made me want to be brave. Veterans not only protect us by fighting, they lead the next generation of patriots. Without veterans, my generation—the leaders of tomorrow—will not know what honor looks like. We will not grasp the idea of bravery. We will not have the dedication to answer the call of duty, to stand up and say, "I will go," when terrorists fly airplanes into our buildings. No one will care. No one will be brave. Freedom isn't free. This means that veterans must continue to rise up if America is to remain the great land of liberty. Currently, the United States has Special Operations Forces in at least 134 countries around the world. Without them, the dark forces seeking to extinguish the flame of liberty will be successful.

Recently, in a high school district not far from my home, students began protesting because their history textbooks were misrepresenting historical events. Veterans could stop that, because they made history—they were there, and they witnessed it firsthand. If we take time to listen to their stories and ask them about their lives, we can learn what really happened. We don't have to rely on hearsay to know the facts, when we have the authors of history among us. These heroes deserve to be heard, and we are foolish if we don't take advantage of the opportunity.

As a high school student, everything I do is motivated by the future. I plan my future, I prepare for my future, and it's easy to take my future for granted. It's easy to assume that I'll have a future. It's easy to assume I'll have an America to live in when I'm older. Reality is, though, that freedom is not free—America is only as free as she is brave. Veterans are the backbone of America. Veterans provide the truth and inspiration necessary to maintain my generation's American Pride.