

# SOUND OFF!



BULLETIN

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

#34

*"VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER"*

12 OCTOBER 2009

---

---

Sometimes someone says something that causes us to say, "Wish I had said that."

At the Association of the United States Army's annual dinner on 7 October, Mr. Ken Fisher, CEO of the Fisher House charity, was presented with AUSA's highest award, the **General Of The Army George Catlett Marshall Medal**.

His speech on receiving that award lays out for all of us and for the American people the nature and the rightness of the fight to provide those serving today with all the benefits that they have earned. It also takes to task those who believe that high-sounding speeches and pats on the back are enough.

I felt that this speech was so "right on" that it deserved distribution to all of you.

Sandy Cook, Vice Chair

---

## Transcript of Remarks

Ken Fisher

accepting the GA George C. Marshall Medal

AUSA Dinner, Washington, D.C., October 7, 2009

### "Thank You For Your Service Is No Longer Enough"

---

Thank You General for that very kind introduction. As this is the "Year of the Non-Commissioned Officer," let me first acknowledge the Sergeant Major of the Army, Ken Preston, and all of the other dedicated NCO's with us tonight.

My thanks to the Association of the United States Army, and the Chairman of your Council of Trustees, Nick Chabraja; and your President, General Gordon Sullivan.

Let me acknowledge the leadership of the Army -- Secretary John McHugh and Chief of Staff General George Casey.

And finally, all of the heroes here on the dais and throughout the audience.

For someone who never served in our armed forces or held high office in this wonderful country of ours, it is overwhelming to be listed among the many great generals, diplomats, heads of state and heroes whom the association has recognized over the years. I am privileged to lead an organization that is focused on helping our nation's most deserving, courageous, and selfless citizens -- America's service men and women, veterans.... And their loved ones. It is a source of great pride that I have been entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing an organization that has made such impact on their lives, and I honor and respect that trust everyday.

So I gratefully accept the George Catlett Marshall Medal tonight along with all those who have truly earned it -- the staff and volunteers of the Fisher House program; the communities in which we operate; the doctors, nurses, and all healthcare professionals who do such wonderful work caring for our veterans and Soldiers; and our donors, who are the lifeblood of our organization and its many initiatives.

And I accept on behalf of my late Uncle Zachary Fisher who with great vision and purpose founded this program some 19 years ago.

I'm not sure if he could have foreseen the awesome impact of that vision, but I do know how proud he'd be that the military and veterans' communities have embraced and endorsed the foundation's mission so strongly.

And of course our foundation dedicates everything we do and every accolade we receive to those we are privileged to serve -- our nation's military and their families.

Our service to them is a credit on a ledger we can never balance. We owe them literally more than we can ever pay. Yet we remain humbled and awed every day by the gratitude and grace with which these magnificent American patriots receive the help we offer them.

It is a truly gratifying part of our work, but one which says something disturbing about how we treat our returning wounded soldiers. The English poet Alexander Pope, once said: "Blessed is the man who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed." But that is NOT the way it should be for these heroes.

Our military men and women should know we have their backs. That the nation will be there for them. That their sacrifices never ignored. That their wounds -- whether mental or physical -- will be healed. That their expectations about how they will be treated if they suffer injury or disability should be unlimited. And that the obligation their nation owes them will be met efficiently, respectfully and fully.

In some respects, we have come a long way as a country in our appreciation of our service men and women. Many of us in this room remember a time when those in uniform and returning veterans were greeted not with cheers and handshakes, but with indifference, disrespect, and even contempt.

After our actions in Korea came a generation of forgotten veterans. During and after Vietnam it grew even worse. Our Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Airmen took the brunt of the public's distaste for an unpopular war. They became the embodiment of political decisions they didn't make, their service and sacrifice mistaken for collusion with an establishment under siege and it was disgraceful.

Today, much has changed. After much effort --ironically by that forgotten generation -- we as a people have learned never to confuse the policies that require military action with the men and women who fulfill a sacred duty by answering the call to arms.

Today, at virtually every point along the political spectrum, it is good to see that it has become the norm to express appreciation and gratitude to our men and women in uniform.

It is obvious in our public discourse, even among those with very different views of our policies in Iraq and Afghanistan, that today's service people are doing an extraordinary job. Indeed, if there has been any single, undisputed fact that has emerged from the wars we have waged over the past eight years, it is that our military personnel have done everything asked of them and have done it well, with great bravery and honor.

As a result, today's returning soldiers are treated very differently than some of their predecessors. From the general public on the streets, in airports and train stations; in thousands of ribbon bedecked communities across the nation; from elected officials speaking out at every level; and through the national and local media, the message to America's armed forces is clear. We are united in saying to the bravest among us: "thank you for your service."

Yet there is a paradox alongside this sea change in public attitudes and the positive understanding and emotion that underlie them. It is this: Just when we as a people have accepted how much we owe our military and our veterans, it is becoming obvious that "thank you for your service" is no longer enough.

As I thought about this medal and what it means and the opportunity it affords me to speak out on a critical issue, have to share the frustration I feel as an advocate for our veterans, Soldiers, and their families. Because "thank you for your service" is just not enough anymore.

As I said before, I never wore the uniform of the U.S. military. And although I've traveled to Iraq and visited our troops in forward operating bases under very stressful conditions, most of the people in this room have much greater understanding and knowledge than me of what our soldiers are going through over there.

What I have observed in great detail and perhaps can offer some perspective about are the challenges that our returning wounded military personnel and their families face when they come home. The challenges can be immense. They are sometimes complex and often long-term. And they are made worse by the current state of our economy.

Due to improvements in body armor and the speed and quality of medical treatment, 95 percent of those injured on the battlefield now survive. Many suffer injuries that would have been fatal in previous conflicts. As a result, the path to recovery for the service member and his or her family is often long and arduous. We've seen Fisher Houses playing an increasing and critical role in that process, one that will continue for many years. And what that tells us is that our obligations to our newest veterans -- system wide -- will last decades and will remain critically important. At the same time, I can tell you from my experience about the amazing courage and absolute dignity with which these young men and women and their families face these difficult circumstances.

They are so very deserving. They are deeply dedicated to overcoming the challenges they confront. Helping them isn't charity but rather this nation's solemn duty. It is an investment in healing and recovery that can give these families the opportunity they need to rebuild their lives. In these very tough situations, they don't quit on themselves. Neither should we.

Those who have joined with us understand this -- and strive to ensure that our service people get what they have earned. They represent a wide swath of American society, from individuals, to corporations -- from business leaders to civic leaders. These are people who understand where we are today -- and given the chance, are willing to do something about it. They understand that thank you for your service is no longer enough.

Frankly, our attitudes toward our military must echo our actions on their behalf. And it's something we should not be hesitant to talk about, even at events like this. Awards are important. Recognition is important. Progress is more important.

It's a compelling idea. Maybe the thanks of a grateful nation can and ought to be more tangible. Maybe the warm feelings we experience when we shake a soldier's hand and offer best wishes ought to be accompanied by resolve. A resolution to not just SAY something but DO something.

Philanthropic organizations need to spend more of the money they raise on programs, not promotion. In the DoD and VA, ways must be found to streamline a system that is suffocating under the weight of its own bureaucracy. Veterans' organizations must come together and worry less about turf wars and more about advancing the larger agenda. Politicians need to translate their feel-good campaign rhetoric into action and ensure healthcare for our returning military and veterans is not only a priority, but that it remains a priority -- even in our tough economy, even with all our other problems and distractions, even with other pressing national goals.

Too often we have seen issues related to benefits desperately needed by our veterans' and wounded military personnel rise to the top of the list, only to see some other political interest take precedence. But I say to you tonight that the back burner is no longer acceptable.

I was proud to serve on the Dole-Shalala Commission in 2007 that reviewed the treatment of our wounded warriors and made specific recommendations to improve the system.

But the fact is that after seemingly countless commissions, task forces and reports, I think by now everyone has a good idea of what the issues are and what needs to be done.

And we all accept that neither the government nor the private sector can do it alone. Now is the time for everyone in the field to embrace the division of labor and responsibility that is necessary and work to coordinate their efforts, all pulling in the same direction.

At a moment in time when we know that "thanks for your service is no longer enough" can we as a country meet the challenges that realization requires? Can the veterans' affairs and military support system and a vigorous public-private sector partnership lead the way forward?

Well, as we contemplate those questions, perhaps we should consider the award I accept tonight and the man for whom it is named, George Marshall. Winston Churchill said an interesting thing about General Marshall. He called him the "The Organizer of Victory." I thought about what that meant in terms of putting resource against need. Imagine the immensity of the task he had both during World War II and after, with the implementation of the Plan that bore his name. And then consider the unbelievable results he achieved.

Sixty years later, the continent of Europe still bears the imprint of what he organized. With the support of the President, Congress and the American people, he found an immense solution to an immense challenge and implemented it.

We need a similar can-do attitude now.

We need to ask ourselves how we can improve our efforts, identify the most productive areas of activity and find or develop best practices for achieving our organizational goals. I believe the time is right for this renewed sense of purpose and vigor. Our nation has rediscovered the dignity and the majesty of citizen military service. I see it at Fisher House dedications, on board the Intrepid Museum, and at the Center for the Intrepid in San Antonio.

A 60,000 square foot, \$50 million dollar physical rehabilitation center funded entirely by 600,000 Americans and my father, Arnold Fisher.

Today's military AND THEIR FAMILIES have through their example helped rekindle love of country, true patriotism and respect for citizen service, all while bearing burdens and making sacrifices the average American has no concept of.

So I believe the moment is right. The men and women in the armed forces don't ask us to wait when we call upon them.

Our debt to them is an obligation and a solemn duty - a duty which every American should embrace.

It is time to clear the obstacles and broaden the effort. "Thank you for your service" was only a start for us, and it is no longer enough.

It's time to balance the ledger and match our actions to our words.

The opportunity to support America's Soldiers is the greatest privilege I could ask for. It is my way of serving this nation. But we as a nation must continue to press on. I know I speak for everyone at Fisher House when I say we will be here for as long as it takes. We will find and devote the resources given us and look forward to the day that we are no longer needed.

And like General Marshall we will help organize a victory at home for those who have served the nation so well abroad.

I spoke earlier of Alexander Pope and his warning about expectations. Let our service men and women reject that cynicism.

Instead let them be blessed by God and country, let their expectations soar and be fulfilled. And let them never be disappointed by the lack of compassion and faithfulness of their fellow countrymen. Let them finally get what they deserve the most - a system that cares for them, and a nation that honors them because "Thank you for your service is no longer enough."

Thank you for this incredible honor. May God Bless you, May God bless our Army, and may God bless this, the greatest nation on earth.

###