

## **“Service and Sacrifice” Remarks to ESGR August 07**

“Have enlightened, regulated, steadfast and free citizens and you will have disciplined and obedient soldiers.” *Democracy in America*, p.622

Good evening and thank you General Baca for your kind introduction. These introductions always remind me of one of the more interesting ones I observed -- Henry Kissinger. Kissinger was the keynote speaker at a foreign policy conference I attended. The master of ceremonies turned the podium over to Kissinger by saying, “Henry Kissinger is a man who needs no introduction.” To which Kissinger responded, “Give me one anyway.” Clearly, I’m not in that league but I appreciate your invitation and introduction even more.

It is a pleasure to be with you.

Let me begin by saluting your commitment to our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines and especially those in the Guard and Reserve and your mission to gain and maintain support from all public and private employers for the men and women of the National Guard and Reserve.

I can think of no time in more than a generation when this support was more important to our country and to those serving.

My career on active duty spanned the period from the draft force of Vietnam to the all-volunteer force of Desert Storm.

In that time I witnessed the growing centrality of the Guard and Reserve to our national security as well as their crucial value to states and localities.

As I understand it ESGR was created in the early 70s at a time when the military leadership recognized that the conscription model of Vietnam was neither fair, nor effective, nor sustainable, and the Guard and Reserve needed to be better utilized.

The fundamental element of the military strategy that emerged was the full integration of the active, Guard and Reserve into what, with Army parochialism, we called the Total Army or Total Force. With this change came a shift in the responsibility for military service from the citizens, or at least the male citizens, broadly speaking, even if unequally applied, to those willing to “volunteer”.

Often an active soldier views the Guard and Reserve as an augmentation. But my experience is different. I commanded the active army’s only civil affairs unit, the 96<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs Battalion (Airborne). Every other civil affairs unit in the Army or Marine Corps is in the Reserve. They were the primary force and we were the augmentation.

As a civil affairs battalion commander I saw Total Force concept tested, with quite mixed results, in a tentative call up of volunteer reservists for Operation Just Cause in Panama. I also saw it more fully implemented in the Desert Shield and Desert Storm, where my battalion was subordinated to a Reserve civil affairs unit. I must say with considerable success, but we and the Reserve units were deployed for only a relatively short period of time.

Today in Iraq and Afghanistan we are witnessing the first sustained effort to carry out the Total Force strategy of the 70s. And we are seeing both its strengths and weaknesses.

Certainly the force is more professional and effective but there are severe limits on resources (men and material) strain on the service members and the families and an increasing separation of the military from the society it serves.

The effort in Iraq and Afghanistan is demanding great sacrifices from our military members and their families and, especially our soldiers and marines – and for more than 3000, the ultimate sacrifice.

And I know that this hardship has fallen heavily on Guard and Reserve soldiers and their families, pulled from their jobs and communities without many of the support structures found on active bases.

I also understand that losing a valued employee to military duty places a burden on businesses, especially small businesses, that are the backbone of our economy and a vital element of our national power as well.

Again I want to thank you and those you represent for accepting this burden on behalf of our servicemen and women, their families and our country. The strain on our truly citizen soldiers and their families would be that much greater, if they felt their military service could jeopardize their employment and their livelihood.

What troubles me today is how inequitably the burdens are being shared in this country.

Only a few are really affected: actually serving overseas or directly connected to someone who is. For most Americans there is no personal link to the “War on Terror” other than having to take off their shoes at airport security.

Where is the sense of shared national commitment? Where is the sense of shared national sacrifice?

I’d like to spend a few minutes reflecting on the sense of service and what it means to our country.

As many of you know, at St. John’s College our students read and discuss the “Great Books” beginning with the Greeks through modern times.

Next week the freshmen class of 2011 – scary isn't it -- will begin their seminar with two Homeric classics – The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

In these works, Homer gives us numerous examples of service and sacrifice. We get several views in the *Iliad*. While there are many instances of personal courage and sacrifice in the *Iliad*, one of the least complimentary concerns the archetypal hero – Achilles – who refuses to fight, sulking in his tent, because he didn't get what he felt was his appropriate share of the spoils, in particular a young woman. He only returns to combat when his closest companion, Patroclus, is killed fighting in his place. Hardly an example we would emulate.

In the *Odyssey* Homer shows us the ultimate example of familial loyalty, support and sacrifice in Penelope and Telemachus the wife and son of Odysseus. They remain true to their husband and father for many years, amidst great turmoil and challenges, as Odysseus struggles to return home from the Trojan War. Penelope and Telemachus are ancient models for the families of our soldiers today.

Another of our freshmen readings is Herodotus' *The Histories*. Herodotus records the Greek-Persian war and one of its most famous battles, Thermopylae. Here 300 Spartans, led by their king Leonidas, fought to the last man in an effort to hold off the overwhelming power of the Persians under Xerxes. A version of this battle was recently made into a movie. This is an early example of the few sacrificing for the many; something many of our current soldiers can relate to.

Later in this same war Herodotus describes the Athenians abandoning their city, putting to sea and ultimately defeating Xerxes at the naval battle of Salamis. Even the great, Greek philosopher Socrates, as an obligation of his Athenian citizenship, fought against the Persians.

This summer, I began thinking about the idea of shared service and sacrifice as part of a seminar I led on Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian Wars*. Another ancient Greek text our freshmen read. In the vein of Herodotus, Thucydides records the sacrifices that the Athenian citizens were willing to bear to preserve their way of life – siege, plague, higher taxes and compulsory military service.

Of course it is one thing to be willing to sacrifice everything, if you're threaten with invasion and potentially annihilation and quite another to sacrifice, as the Athenians did in the Peloponnesian War, for a struggle seemingly far away -- in that case Sicily.

I certainly don't mean to suggest that military service is the only proper path for a citizen. For there is another even more profound example of service in one of our sophomore texts, the *Bible*. In the gospel of Mark, Christ admonishes his disciples who were seeking personal glory and recognition that, "whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave to all." (Mark 10:41) There are clearly other ways to serve.

Closer to home, in junior year the St. John's students study the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The willingness of the citizens who drafted these documents to sacrifice and serve is an example to us all. These so-called founding fathers, what we would now consider the "elites", pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor to establish this nation.

But this commitment of the "elites" is something that Alexis de Tocqueville, one of the most astute and early commentators on American society, felt would be unusual in our democracy. In his work *Democracy in America*, written in the early 1800s and read by the St. John's seniors, he observed that, "in democratic peoples the elite of the nation turns away little by little from a military career to seek consideration, power, and above all, wealth, by other paths." (p. 626)

In another recent seminar at St. John's entitled the "Clash of Civilizations" the conversation turned to whether there was anything that contemporary Americans would be willing to die for. I don't know the answer, but I do know that there are others willing to die for their ideals.

Again de Tocqueville is prescient. "Men who live in democratic countries do not naturally have a military spirit: they sometimes take it up when they are brought in spite of themselves onto the fields of battle; but to rise en masse by oneself and to expose oneself voluntarily to the miseries of war . . . is an option to which man in democracies does not resolve himself. It is only the most adventurous citizens who consent to throw themselves into a hazard like this; the mass of the population remains unmoved."  
(p. 634)

Have we, as Tocqueville indicates, become too rich and too comfortable to see the necessity for service, particularly military service?

How much longer can we look to a few to bear the burdens for the many? How long can we claim to be at war and not ask for some broader participation by our citizens?

In Iraq, I think we are already seeing the limits of the current approach. My guess is that the duration and scale of our deployments will be affected as much, and perhaps more so, by the availability of manpower as by political will. We'll be able to judge this even better with General Petraeus' and Ambassador Crocker's reports in mid-September. I'm not saying that we should renew the draft, but we do need, I believe, to consider ways better to "mobilize" the nation. In this context, we need to stimulate a sense of service and commitment to the country more broadly. Somehow we need to involve our citizens. Bumper stickers supporting our troops, heartening as they are to a Vietnam veteran like me, won't do it. Committing to providing proper care for the wounded veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan and their families is certainly a first step, but it isn't enough.

From my limited, some might say cloistered, vantage point at St. John's College, I think the will of our citizenry to do more may be there. But they haven't been called upon.

While we have a few veterans and current members of the Guard at St. John's, there aren't students lining up to enlist in the military, although a number do each year.

But I do see among our students a desire to serve others and our country – tutoring in local schools, working on Katrina relief and serving on a medical mission to Haiti. And this desire is going largely unfocused and unfulfilled at the national level.

I think it is important for our nation to encourage and harness this desire for service and to allow our citizens to share, at least in some small way, in the commitment of our soldiers, marines, sailors and airmen.

You are certainly playing a vital role and setting an example through your personal support and encouragement of community support for the Guard and Reserve.

I hope we can begin a national conversation about the role of service to our country. I'm not sure this will be a topic in the presidential campaign, but I would like to see it.

Meanwhile, perhaps we can encourage such a conversation here in New Mexico. You are already doing your part.

It has been a pleasure to be with you. Thank you and keep up the good work.