

VETERANS DAY IN BEDFORD, 2016

STATE REPRESENTATIVE KEN GORDON

Good Morning. Thank you Paul Purchia for providing me the opportunity to speak to this distinguished group. It is a privilege to gather with you along with my colleague in the legislature, Senator Mike Barrett, along with Bedford Selectmen Mark Siegenthaler, Mike Rosenberg, Caroline Fedele, Margot Fleischman and Bill Moonan, town manager Rick Reed, Veterans Services Agent Bill Leninnihan and other distinguished guests. I am honored to stand with the residents of the Bedford Green, in this the first Veterans Day ceremony we can share together. I expect there will be many more. I am honored with the opportunity to pay tribute to those who served our country, no matter the sacrifices that demanded

Today, we gather to honor veterans from Bedford, from the Commonwealth, and from around the United States. These brave men and women defended our freedoms and our way of life; they are why I am able to serve as a Representative in the Massachusetts Legislature. It is why we can gather here today with each other, and this weekend with our families.

Today is an important day, and it is not just any Veterans Day. In a few weeks we will commemorate the 75th anniversary of Japanese bombing at Pearl Harbor. December 7, 1941, of course the day that lives on in infamy. The casualty list included 2,235 servicemen and 68 civilians. 1,178 were wounded. Included among the casualties were 1,104 men aboard the Battleship USS Arizona. We can never forget that sneak attack on our armed forces. The next day, the United States and Britain declared war on Japan, and on December 11, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. We were committed to a military offensive in the war to end all wars.

At the end of the movie "Tora, Tora, Tora," this quote is attributed to Japanese Admiral Iro Yamamoto, "I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve." Of course, was right. And the result was the Allied Power's ultimate victory on both the European and Asian theaters.

Here in Bedford and in Massachusetts, we continue to honor not only the veterans of World War II, but those of the Korean Conflict, the Vietnam War and more recently wars in the Gulf, Iran and Afghanistan. I am proud that we have opened the Bedford Green, to give veterans in need of a place to live a home they can call their own.

And I am proud that just this week, with overwhelming support, our town meeting voted to honor the service of Bedford employees called up to the military or serving in the reserves by providing for them any lost wages during their time of service.

Just a few weeks ago I had the honor of participating in a hockey game called the American Heroes Hockey Challenge for the Skate for 22 Foundation. This group, founded by an Army and Air Force veteran from Burlington named Bobby Colliton, has assembled a group of veterans and active duty military men and women who get together on a regular basis to play hockey. It's more than just a game. The purpose is two-fold, as part of the "Skate for 22" they raise awareness of the alarming rate of suicide among veterans, which is between 20 and 22 across our nation every day. The second is an opportunity for these veterans to be with each other, so that if one sees another show the symptoms of anxiety, depression or PTSD, they may be there to help. Isolation is the ally of despair. So the most important time for these veterans is the time in the locker room, or the time they gather after the game, when they can just talk and support each other. It works the same way when our veterans gather with each other to play nine holes at the patriot golf course.

Of all the work I do as your State Representative, the opportunity to spread the word to other veterans I see, either directly or even by talking about this to you, is among the most important. So if you know of a veteran who could use a friend, please let me know and I'll send word to Bobby.

In our more traditional role of passing legislation to help our veterans, we have been hard at work with the governor. I described some of the bills that were passed by the House and Senate last session, and I can report they have been signed in to law. We expanded protections in employment discrimination so that never again will an employer be able to get away with refusing to hire a reservist simply because they think they may be called up. Some disabled veterans find that their military disability pensions disqualify them from certain housing benefits. We fixed that. We have a new law that will require cities and towns to give a preference to veterans in public housing. Many municipalities such as ours already do that, but now all veterans will be treated equally. And there is more.

We can never allow ourselves to let veterans forget their importance in our society. Thank you for allowing me to share this important ceremony with you.