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## **Veteran's Day Bedford 2015**

To the Readers of The Bedford Citizen:

The following address is not the address I delivered before the distinguished folks gathered at the Bedford High School auditorium on Veterans Day. It is the address I planned to deliver, until I became overwhelmed with the emotion of the day. I did read bits and pieces of this address, but instead I described the pride I felt being a part of the Bedford community. I pointed out the officers from Hanscom AFB present that day, as well as retired military heroes in attendance. I pointed out the uniformed police and fire personnel, who rush forward so others can retreat to safety. I pointed to our history, represented by the Bedford Minutemen, and our future, represented by the Junior ROTC. I should have mentioned our hopes and promise, represented by the boy scouts and cub scouts, but I'll consider this writing to be a second chance.

I described how proud I am that Bedford is considered a shining light among military leaders. It is a sought after destination for air force personnel with children, because they know Bedford High School will provide their kids with a superior education. It is a place many military personnel with families choose to retire. It is home to one of the best VA Hospitals in the country, and will soon be home to formerly homeless veterans who will live independently.

The Citizen, as it often does, asked me for a copy of my address to be shared on its sit. I responded, as I often do, that even when I write down a proposed script, I rarely keep to it. I have no writing that can re-create the talk. This holiday was no exception. So what I offer in its place is the script I wrote with the help of my legislative aide Mary Guay, but never delivered.

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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 Select Board members 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 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; these brave men and women are why I am able to serve as a Representative in the Massachusetts Legislature

I cherish the position that you have entrusted me, because among that trust is to show a commitment to our veterans. I am proud that while many people call me Representative in honor of my office, most of our veterans just call me Ken. I am proud to serve with Veterans such as Hank Naughton who just returned from a tour in Afghanistan last week. I am proud to serve with Veterans such as John Velis, a Democrat from Wayland, and Tim Whelan, a Republican from Brewster, both freshman who crossed party lines to draft an important veterans bill that was passed unanimously by the House last week and which I will tell you about in a few minutes.

Today is an important day, and it is not just any Veterans Day. This week marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first land battle of the Vietnam War involving the American Army. On November 14 and 18, 1965 the North Vietnamese army fired heavily on troops from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division's Company A, and other divisions. The men landing in a remote spot on LaDrang Valley were attacked. Before the battle of la Drang was over, 305 Americans had been killed and 524 wounded, along with an estimated 2,000 North Vietnamese troops killed and almost twice as many wounded.

And with regard to those casualties, here's a crying shame. A protocol for casualty notification to families back in the United States had not been set up, and families were notified by messages sent by taxi cab drivers or the wives of U.S. based officers who sent them. One of the darkest hours of our nation was the way we ignored the needs of American heroes who served in Vietnam. They came back to underfunded programs and understaffed VA Hospitals. We must never forget that regrettable history so that we never repeat it.

The name of our proud landmark to the veterans who have served from Bedford is going to have a mark signifying its name. No longer will this be just the area near the statute of Nathaniel Page to many of our residents. Instead, it will clearly be known as Veterans Memorial Park. I am proud to have joined the 123 residents who contributed to this noble

effort, and applaud the effort of Joe Piantedosi and his committee for their dogged pursuit of their dream that this area would be known by all as a tribute to our veterans.

Driving around town, and on my way to the State House, I'm often struck by just how many cars have yellow ribbons; "we support our troops" Here in Bedford we share a special relationship with the armed forces. Our schools host students from Hanscom Air Force Base, and we're lucky to have the Veteran Affairs hospital in town. We are about to host formerly homeless veterans at Bedford Green, an apartment complex that bears our name. The Bedford Flag is the oldest battle flag in English speaking North America.

In this Commonwealth, we not only support our troops, we live by those words. Massachusetts ranks first in the nation for veteran and military benefit programs. Every veteran in Massachusetts has a Veteran Affairs agent dedicated to that veteran; we are lucky to have Bill Linnehan as our agent in town. There is a world of difference to a veteran between knowing they can go to the second floor of the yellow building and talk to Bill, rather than approach some bureaucracy in a state office building like they must do in other places. There is comfort in familiarity.

I'm even more proud to say that ranking first doesn't mean the Massachusetts legislature has stopped fighting for additional veterans services. As I said earlier, two of my colleagues who just returned from active service got together and crafted a bill called the Stolen Valor Act, which makes falsely representing oneself as military veteran to gain a tangible benefit a crime. This new law goes further than the law of any other state or the federal government. In some places, it is a crime to falsely represent the receipt of a medal of honor to gain a discount. Here it will be a crime to pretend to be a veteran or serviceman at all. Think of how insulting it is to a veteran when a person who has not earned the uniform of this country or the status of a veteran to pretend to have this status just to get 20 percent off at the mall. The Senate president announced that he expects that body to pass this law next week, and I certainly expect the Governor will sign it into law by the end of the month.

In addition to protecting the integrity of military service, our new act increased the penalties for criminals who are caught stealing, damaging or desecrating veterans' graves and inappropriately removing a commemorative American flag. The bronze plaques reserved for deceased veterans are worth money, and have been removed and sold. Those plaques do not belong to the public. They do not belong to the family. They belong to the veteran. Once this act passes the Senate and the Governor signs it into law, not only will the thief be facing a jail sentence, so will anyone else who attempts to sell the plaque that veteran has earned.

And so here in Bedford we will continue to actively Support our Troops, as we always have. We will support those who are stationed at Hanscom, and reach out to them when we see them to make their lives a little easier. We will support Veterans in our town, and neighboring towns as well. We will think of the sacrifices both them and their families have made for us. We can never allow ourselves to let veterans forget their importance in our society. And when we speak with them, we will thank them for their service to our country.

Thank you for allowing me to share this important ceremony with you.