

administration of former President Bush. During those years, and in my current position, I've had no greater privilege than the chance to work with members of the American Armed Forces. I believe that if anyone lacks for inspiration in the war on terror, they need look no farther than the men and women who do the fighting. Whether it's on cold mountain peaks in Afghanistan or the hot dusty streets of Iraq, they have been magnificent. And a new generation of warriors is the next chapter of American ingenuity, bravery, and valor. (Applause.)

I recently attended a ceremony at the White House honoring one of our bravest -- an Army private from Pennsylvania named Ross McGinnis, who was killed in Iraq in late 2006. Private McGinnis was in the gun turret of a humvee patrolling Baghdad when an insurgent threw a grenade directly at the vehicle. The grenade fell through the gunner's hatch and landed inside. Private McGinnis shouted a warning, but the four men inside had no way of escaping. Instead of leaping off the vehicle to save himself, Private McGinnis dropped inside, covered the grenade with his body, and absorbed the blast. In a split second, he saved four lives and lost his own. And the four soldiers he saved were there in June, when President Bush presented to Mr. and Mrs. Tom McGinnis the Medal of Honor earned by their son -- who at age 19 proved himself to be one of the bravest men in our history.

As President Bush said at that ceremony, "The day will come when the mission has been completed, and the fighting is over, and freedom and security have prevailed. America will never forget those who came forward to bear the battle." (Applause.) With daily challenges confronting us, and American boots on the ground 6,000 miles away, we know there will be more fighting, and more sacrifices. But our men and women are serving in a cause that is noble, necessary, and in the finest tradition of America.

The United States was founded on the principles of liberty, justice, and equality. We have served those principles, and sacrificed for them, to the far corners of the earth. We have thrown back tyrants, stood watch on the frontiers of freedom, and defended the weak against the violent. We have brought hope and relief to peoples who thought they had lost everything -- until the Americans arrived to save them.

We've done all this, not for glory or empire, but for freedom -- because we know that the spread of freedom makes our world safer, and brings us closer to the peace we all desire. In the process we've received more than our share of criticism, and we can take it. The fact is this world is a much better place because of the power, the influence, and the values of the United States of America. (Applause.)

As citizens who have served in that cause, every member of the American Legion can stand tall. You've earned a special place of respect in this country. I count it a privilege to be in your company, and I lack the words to express how much I've appreciated your friendship over these many years. I'm proud of you, and I'm most grateful for your hospitality this morning.

Thank you. (Applause.)

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