

Keynote speech by Major General Douglas A. Farnham on November 8, 2019
ROTARY CLUB OF PORTLAND, MAINE USA



Thank you for allowing me to say a few words today. I will be relatively concise because I've heard the jokes about general officers talking too much. Those of us serving today have the respect and trust of the American people, the benefits and services we need, great training, modern equipment and facilities, an all-volunteer force - almost all a result of the hard work and sacrifice of men and women who chose to serve before us.

One of the best things about my job is representing the Airmen and Soldiers of the Maine National Guard at events like this one. What a great event! Thank you for inviting me.

Our Maine political leaders have worked to make Maine an attractive state for Veterans to live by eliminating the state income tax on military retirement, by supporting the successful "Hire a Vet" program that has resulted in the lowest in the nation veteran unemployment and by supporting an engaged and passionate Maine Bureau of Veteran Services. In fact, the Bureau works hard to collaborate and coordinate efforts of so many organizations, and I am proud of their efforts related to the physical, and mental health, financial assistance, employment and homelessness. One reason I love representing our incredible Airmen and Soldiers is that they have made the choice to serve their State and Country. Maine citizens have always answered the call. Maine is proud of our tradition of service and Military service. And, we who are veterans, have experienced that pride.

Very rarely do I walk into a convenience store in uniform without someone, a customer in line or the cashier, thanking me for my service. It has been that way for my entire career. We have had strangers offer to buy coffee, lunch, or maybe even an adult beverage, during our entire careers. We have been cheered, and thanked walking in Memorial Day and Veterans Day parades, for our entire careers.

Many of the stores where I shop, the restaurants where I eat, the events I attend offer military discounts, this has been so, for my entire career. Today's military has experienced send-off ceremonies and welcome home ceremonies for employers, for our entire careers. While sometimes we are embarrassed by all the attention, we are grateful and we owe our good treatment to veterans who paved the way.

I heard former Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis say that, before he went into combat, that he feared letting down all the Soldiers and Marines who went before him, more than he feared the enemy. To some extent, one of the things that I fear is letting you down.

Okay, so far my remarks have been pretty much the standard remarks presented to our veterans. Thank you for your service. You kept us free. You set the bar very high. I've mentioned the importance of our programs to help veterans who need help. But, I also want to thank you for what you've done since your service. For generations, the Veterans have been part of the backbone of our State and communities. For the most part, they are strong, healthy

community members. Our veterans are mothers and fathers and coaches, business leaders and bankers. Veterans are neighbors, state employees, school board members, firefighters and community volunteers. Veterans are solid members of our communities and workforce. You served when your country needed you. You came home, and built, and sustained our families, communities and economy. You never stopped serving. You are role models for the next generations that have to make the same choices. Teach them....tell your story.

So, today, I want to thank you, not just for what you did, but, just as importantly, what you continue to do. Again, thank you for the invitation and congratulations on such a great Veterans appreciation event.