

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH GARY SINISE

SUBJECT: ADVOCACY FOR AMERICA'S SERVICEMEN AND SERVICEWOMEN

MODERATOR: JOHN HUGHES, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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JOHN HUGHES: (Sounds gavel.) Welcome to the National Press Club. My name is John Hughes. I'm an editor for Bloomberg First Word, that's our breaking news desk here in Washington, and I am the President of the National Press Club. Our guest today is actor/humanitarian Gary Sinise. He will discuss challenges facing America's servicemen and women and what can be done to improve their lives and support their loved ones.

But first, I want to introduce our distinguished head table. This group includes Press Club members and guests of our speaker. From the audience's right, Angel Livas, President of D.C. Media Connection; Max Lederer, Publisher of *Stars and Stripes*; Jen Judson, defense reporter for Politico and co-chair of the National Press Club Young Members Committee; Amy Fickling, editor with Warren Communications News; Derrick Perkins, staff writer for *Marine Corps Times*; Jim Livingston, a Medal of Honor recipient and guest of the speaker. (Applause) Jerry Zremski, Chairman of the Press Club's Speakers Committee, the Washington bureau chief for the *Buffalo News* and a former National Press Club president.

Skipping over our speaker for a moment, Melissa Charbonneau, director of communications for FedEx, and the Speakers Committee member who organized today's event. Thank you, Melissa. Paul Shinkman, national security correspondent for *U.S. News & World Report*; Andrea McCarren, reporter with WUSA TV and a *USA Today* contributor; and starting Thursday, a military service dog raiser; Robert Yoon, director of political research at CNN; Dave Majumdar, communication and legislative fellow covering veterans issues for Representative Mike Honda. (Applause)

I also want to welcome our C-SPAN and public radio audiences, and you can follow the action today on Twitter. Use the hashtag NPCLunch. Even though this is a breakfast, use hashtag NPCLunch.

Now, Gary Sinise has devoted great energy to raising support and awareness for America's service members and their families. It was here at the National Press Club in 2011 that he announced the launch of the Gary Sinise Foundation. The foundation's mission is to boost troop morale and to help build resources and self reliance for servicemen and women who are in transition. The foundation's projects include providing custom smart homes for the severely wounded.

But even before the foundation, Sinise used his celebrity status in support of U.S. military personnel. His band has performed around the world raising millions of dollars to benefit the nation's veterans. The band, of course, is called the Lieutenant Dan Band. It is named for his Academy Award nominated role as wounded Vietnam War veteran, Lieutenant Dan in the movie "Forrest Gump." You might know Sinise for other roles as well. He spent nearly a decade playing Detective Mac Taylor in the TV program "CSI New York." He also had roles in movies such as "Apollo 13," "The Green Mile," and "Ransom."

But it's his role as service member advocate he seems to enjoy best. Sinise serves as spokesman for the Medal of Honor Museum. He is a patron of the GI Film Festival, which highlights movies that positively portray veterans and the military. He has co-hosted the National Memorial Day Concert for a decade and is certainly a familiar face here in Washington in that regard. And Sinise is a recipient of the Presidential Citizen's Medal. That's the second highest civilian honor for deeds performed for the nation's service members.

Tonight, the National Association of Broadcasters Education Foundation will award him its highest individual honor, the Service to America Leadership Award. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in giving a warm National Press Club welcome, to Mr. Gary Sinise. (Applause)

MR. SINISE: Thank you. Thank you very much, it's good to be back. I do want to say something. The last time I was here, there was a big sort of wooden medallion here on the back and about halfway through my speech, it fell down. So I'm glad it's not here. (Laughter)

I'd like to thank the members of the National Press Club, John, thank you very much for the invitation to speak today. It's a great honor for me to return to speak since first having had the opportunity in 2007 as National Spokesperson for the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial, which after a 16 year effort was finally dedicated and opened to the public on October 5th last year.

A second time addressing members of the Press Club was in support of the documentary film, "Brothers at War." And a third time, as John said, four years ago when we first launched the Gary Sinise Foundation. So I guess I haven't burned any bridges here at the Press Club yet, you keep asking me back. Thank you.

I'd like to speak a little today about how far the Gary Sinise Foundation has come in those four years with the work the foundation's doing and what the future looks like as we continue to grow. And I'd like to emphasize how important it is to have nonprofits in the military support space as our military service men and women continue to confront the dark forces of this world on many fronts with long and very tough deployments.

But first I'd like to acknowledge a few people that are here today. One of our board members, Bob Pence. Mr. Bob Pence is here, thank you for coming, Bob. I appreciate you being here, sir. I have a very distinguished guest here that John introduced, a friend of mine who was here with us today, General James E. Livingston was awarded the United States' highest military decoration, the Medal of Honor for heroic actions in 1968 during the Vietnam War. And on that fateful day, Captain Livingston and about 800 fellow marines ran up against a North Vietnamese company of 10,000 strong enemy combatants, 10,000 against 800 marines, what Captain Livingston says was a fair fight. (Laughter)

During the ensuing fight, Captain Livingston was wounded three times through heavy fire and despite his wounds, he coordinated attacks to destroy over 100 mutually supporting enemy bunkers, repelled a savage enemy counter attack and refused to be evacuated from the field until he was assured of the safety of his men. And he would serve two combat tours in Vietnam. He was presented the Medal of Honor on May 14th, 1970, by President Richard Nixon. Rising in the ranks, he retired from the Marine Corps as a major general.

General Livingston's philosophy on leadership is to lead from the front. He said, "If I am willing to do it, then I can ask you to do it." He never had a marine under his command come up and say to him, "I don't want to do this." Following his example, they all did their job and whatever he asked of them and performed superbly. And that is true and inspiring leadership. So General Livingston, thank you, sir, for being here. (Applause) We are truly grateful for everything you've given in service to our nation.

And I know we have several veterans here today, so I want to personally say thank you to all of our veterans for being here and for stepping forward to serve our country.

It has been said that the United States of America will always be the land of the free as long as it is the home of the brave. The veterans that are here today have insured that we live in a free country because they were willing to take the fight to the enemy and keep the enemy from coming to our shores. A community, a city, a country, can only flourish if its people have the peace in their everyday lives to enjoy their life and liberty and have the opportunity to pursue their happiness.

In doing so, they make their communities flourish with commerce and trade, and create an environment where each child's dream has the hope to be realized. We have seen a nation born of these ideals and from generation to generation, it has shown itself to be the greatest, strongest and most prosperous nation on Earth, the envy of the world.

Today, we have an all-volunteer force that wears our uniform and our collective home, the United States of America is kept safe by the men and women of the United States military willing to serve and sacrifice so much of our way of life is secure. And with these sacrifices being made each and every day, there comes much need. That is why today, more than ever, it is so important to have successful nonprofits in the military support space as government alone cannot possibly fill all of the needs.

Over the years, there have been so many experiences that have led me to realize that we must be there for our men and women in uniform to make sure that they are taken care of before, during and after the battle. After the tragic events of September 11, 2001, wanting to do something to support those who were going into harm's way in response to those attacks, I began to volunteer for the USO going on handshake tours and entertainment tours with my band to let our military know that they were appreciated, that we were thinking of them, and that their service and sacrifice did not go unnoticed.

During the Thanksgiving holiday in 2009, I was visiting Bagram Air Force base in Afghanistan and General Mike Scaparrotti, who was the director of operations for United States Central Command providing oversight to all military operations throughout the CENTCOM area of responsibility including Iraq and Afghanistan, he came to me and he informed me that there would be an angel flight early the following morning for a fallen special forces soldier who had been killed in action. The general invited me to the ramp ceremony where the U.S. military would load the casket of our fallen American hero on a plane to repatriate his remains back to America.

What my eyes saw and what my heart felt that day has always stayed with me. I watched hundreds of American servicemen and women from all branches, most of them including myself, never knew this soldier personally, but they gathered in formation in his honor to pay their respects and offer a farewell salute to a brave fellow American soldier. The mood was somber. The casket draped with an American flag was carried by eight members of his unit moving slowly and solemnly onto the plane as the formation was commanded to give their final salute to an American who gave his last full measure and devotion for his country. Indeed, a sight to behold.

Members of his unit, who the day before were fighting by his side, placed his casket on the bed of the C17, kneeled down around it and offered their final prayers and farewells to their brother. Then the rest of the formation followed suit, rank by rank, traveling up the ramp of the C17 to pay their respects. It was my sobering honor to be by General Scaparrotti's side as we entered the plane and knelt down beside the casket. I was flooded with emotion for this young man and his family, the painful and sobering reminder of the cost of freedom.

So in looking back on my own journey working with veterans groups in the Chicago area in the '80s, supporting our wounded through the Disabled American Veterans Organization in the '90s and then post-9/11 as I began to understand the full weight that our servicemen and women carry with them into battle and oftentimes bring home with them when they return from long deployments, I began supporting many military charities and participating in as many support concerts and fundraising events as I could to raise awareness, spirits and support them.

In 2011, I brought all my endeavors together to serve our veterans under one umbrella launching the Gary Sinise Foundation. In just four years, with the generosity and support of the American people, we have been able to start numerous programs to help make an important difference in the lives of our service members from building specially adapted custom smart homes, providing adapted vehicles and mobility devices for our most severely wounded veterans through our RISE program, RISE, restoring independence supporting empowerment, to putting on, as John said, Lieutenant Dan Band resiliency concerts at military hospitals to boost morale, to raising the spirits of the children of our fallen heroes providing emergency funding for needy military families, supporting first responders in communities all around the country. Each day, we are helping our veterans, military families and first responders find the strength and support they need to move forward in their lives and we are impacting the communities that they live in.

As John said when I last spoke here June of 2011, I'd been part of fundraising efforts to build three smart homes at that time for some of the most catastrophically wounded service members, three of our quadruple amputees who had returned from Iraq and Afghanistan. I'm proud to say that now of the five quadruple amputees from these wars, four of them are living in new homes and a home is in progress for the fifth. By the end of 2015, the Gary Sinise Foundation will have participated in the development or construction of up to 35 homes for those suffering very serious, life changing injuries. And these homes give our wounded heroes, their families, their caregivers, their freedom and independence back. I'm proud to say that prior to the creation of the foundation and the four years since, the Lieutenant Dan Band has performed 318 concerts worldwide in support of our nation's defenders and their families; 140 concerts for the USO and 178 fundraising and benefit concerts. We just performed at the Hotel Dell in Coronado on Sunday night for a big veterans support concert.

The band is part of our nonprofit and is now a program of the foundation. And through our invincible spirit festivals, which we put on at our nation's military medical centers, complete with a live Lieutenant Dan Band concert and a delicious cookout donated by celebrity chef Robert Irvine and the folks at the great food company, Sysco, we have lifted over 50,000 spirits of our heroes, their families, their caregivers, and hospital staff giving them a respite from the rigors of their medical treatment and reminding them of the hope and positivity along the road to recovery.

Through our Serving Heroes program, we have sown gratitude to our nation's defenders by serving them a hearty classic American meal. To date, we've served over 27,700 meals to five major travel hubs across the nation where our deploying troops go through, and we're looking to expand our efforts to include other venues at other airports throughout the country.

Our Gary Sinise Foundation Relief and Resiliency program has helped 1,294 veterans and their families through their times of urgent need; 162 children and family members of the fallen, 156 veterans, 944 wounded. With First Responders Outreach, Gary Sinise Foundation has provided support to train 45 firefighters in Black Forest, Colorado after the devastating fires there, supported the families of the Hotshots in Prescott, Arizona after 19 firefighters were lost in a deadly firestorm.

Donated two Lieutenant Dan vans to the FDNY Fire Family Transport Foundation to transport ill and injured members of the FDNY and their families to medical facilities. And we've awarded six grants to police, five and EMS services. Other programs include our arts and entertainment outreach, taking veterans to theater around the country for a free meal and performance.

And as part of our educational outreach, we have a new World War II program, a most recent partnership with the National World War II Museum in New Orleans, Gary Sinise Foundation has helped finance a historian who has to date recorded 35 World War II veterans stories, oral histories preserved on video in the museum archive, preserving America's history and their legacy. We will also include a trip next week for 50 World War II veterans from California to see this magnificent museum built in their honor.

So we've come a long way in four short years, and we are impacting the lives of our veterans in active duty across the nation. It is truly the most rewarding mission I've had in my life to serve the members of our military.

One of the hardest things to come to terms with when you endeavor to a life of service is the enormity of the need that exists today. It has to be upon us and our communities to close the gap and meet that need. With all the bureaucracy, inefficiencies and the difficult challenges currently being reported within the VA, it is important that there are successful nonprofits in the military support space and that we engage, encourage and inspire as many communities within this country as possible to address the needs of local veterans. So I applaud all the military nonprofits that are here today doing the good work.

During the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, we have seen remarkable advances in field medicine and care. While this may have reduced the number of casualties, many more have returned home injured or seriously wounded. As we have now been at war for the past 14 years, roughly 50,000 military personnel currently live among us bearing the severe wounds of war both physically and mentally. Their struggles can affect the entire household and ongoing treatment can quickly become ruinously expensive. We have become aware of the startling shortfalls in the care these men and women often face.

With the media, they have provided troubling glimpses of the health related complications that veterans experience in seeking care; the bigger picture is alarming. Survey data suggests 71 percent of Americans do not understand what combat veterans endure, and 84 percent of veterans polled said the public has little awareness of the challenges they face in life after combat. This suggests an urgent need to supplement existing support and raise public consciousness on a grass roots level. Emotional trauma is at epidemic proportions.

From 2002 to 2012, 103,972 cases of post traumatic stress were reported. According to a report from the Department of Veterans Affairs, an average of 22 American veterans continue to take their lives every day. Physical injuries often compound the emotional damage. In the same 2002 to 2012 time span, 1,715 battle injury amputations were performed. Beyond the personal struggles, loss of limb and/or physical disfiguration places tremendous stress on veterans families. Loved ones must often take on the role of caregivers and post traumatic stress can affect the entire family.

For our wounded, maintaining access to ongoing healthcare support systems is a daunting task. Reentering society and finding employment is especially difficult. More than half of all veterans report feeling disconnected from their communities. Their sense of disconnect is a solvable problem. Willingness to help and raising awareness will help where help is needed within individual communities, are important first steps. Local citizens in every community need to connect with these veterans and their families to provide support however possible. As citizens, who benefit from what they do for us, it is our duty. Very simple, if every neighborhood in every community in every town and city in every state sought out their local veterans and offered their hand, we would greatly reduce the problem and most likely have the problem solved.

It is a dangerous and unpredictable world. We need to keep our military strong and ready to face the evils of this world that would seek to destroy our way of life. They are our freedom providers and they and their families need our help. And as we all know, we all too often take our freedom for granted.

I recently returned from my third trip to Korea performing for our troops, and a third visit to the DMZ, a strange, very strange, and sad place. This time, while there, something happened that did not happen in my previous trips. As we came out of the building and approached the borderline, two North Korean guards came right up to the border's edge to take pictures of our group. I was two feet away and could look directly into the eyes of these guards, haunting and very sad eyes. They know nothing but worship of the supreme leader and are slaves to their master.

Perhaps there is no place on Earth where one can feel a palpable difference between freedom and slavery more than standing on the border between North and South Korea. The North Koreans know nothing, nothing, of freedom. For three generations, they have been oppressed by a dictatorship indoctrinated by a regime that has enslaved

them and sealed them off from the rest of the world. The North Koreans have a military that is there to suppress them and take their freedoms away.

But, with the United States by their side, like all of us here in the U.S., the South Koreans have a military that's very purpose is to protect their freedoms and provide life, liberty and the ability for every man, woman and child to pursue their happiness. Education is the key to making sure our generation and future generations know the high cost of freedom and what our military men and women sacrificed to endure and endured in providing it as it is precious and we must never take it for granted. Not everyone in this world gets to live like we do.

Is there any doubt there are evil forces in this world that given the opportunity would do anything within their power would destroy what we as Americans, and all western nations, have grown so accustomed to? Freedom, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? Like our brave heroes of World War II, when there were only two possible outcomes in the world at that time, tyranny or freedom, our defenders today stand as guardians of all that we hold dear against another evil that beheads and crucifies Christians, enslaves and oppresses women and children, and punishes anyone who does not submit to their twisted view of the world.

On October 22nd, 1962, addressing the nuclear threat posed by the Soviet Union and the U.S. response to missiles in Cuba, President John F. Kennedy said, "The path we have chosen for the present is full of hazards, as all paths are. But it is the one most consistent with our character and courage as a nation, and our commitments around the world. The cost of freedom is always high, and Americans have always paid it. And one path that we shall never choose is the path of surrender or submission."

Today, we face many threats to peace and security of the world, indeed full of hazards of the present and we are thankful to have American men and women who are willing to do the dangerous work necessary to insure that we remain free and secure. Still, with a disconnect between the average American and its military, I believe educating our citizens and our youth as to what our military men and women endure in combat with long deployments away from family and friends is in order so that we better understand why it is critically important to support them and take care of them.

This is why I want to talk to you today about the importance of the Medal of Honor Museum, the effort to build a national museum in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. Now, in retirement, General Livingston is a very busy man. Among other things, he is a member of the board of directors of the Medal of Honor Museum Foundation. In addition, he along with seven other Medal of Honor recipients comprise the museum's standard of care which will review all museum exhibits and programs to insure they are consistent with the mission of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, the society is the brotherhood of the 79 living Medal of Honor recipients.

Education can come in many forms. One way is through memorials and museums where the stories of those who served have a permanent place to have their voices heard.

Since the first Medal of Honor was awarded by President Abraham Lincoln on March 25th, 1863, more than 25 million men and women have served during our nation's conflicts. Fewer than 3,500 of them, less than .2 percent, have received the Medal of Honor. Those who wear the medal represent America's bravest and best, all who have served and sacrificed in defense of our nation. Their stories offer lessons for us all in how to live our lives with honor, integrity, and character.

My own history with the Medal of Honor Society and foundation goes back to 2007. I've been humbled and blessed to serve on the foundation's President's Advisory Group and now through the invitation of General Livingston, on the board of directors as a national spokesperson for the Medal of Honor Museum effort. It's been my privilege and great honor to get to know many of the recipients of the Medal of Honor personally and to hear their stories. To be among America's bravest to listen to them and interact with them has been a blessing and a true education. They have all shown me a quiet strength and modesty and they all say that they wear the Medal of Honor not for themselves, but for all those who fought so bravely alongside them and did not make it home. That we would remember them and their sacrifice.

More than 18 percent, 646 of the medals awarded since 1863, have been presented posthumously. But from the Civil War until World War II, of the 2,418 medals awarded, just 3 percent, 83, were presented posthumously. From World War II to the present, however, more than 60 percent of medals have been awarded posthumously; 58 percent in World War II, 73.8 percent in the Korean War, 62.9 percent in the Vietnam War, and 43.7 percent in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Within the last few decades, the Defense Department has reviewed records of a number of potential Medal of Honor recipients who've been passed over in the past because of their race, religion, or ethnicity. As a result of these reviews, a number of African American, Hispanic, Japanese, and Jewish servicemen have received long overdue recognition as Medal of Honor recipients.

Medal of Honor recipients hail from every walk and every station in life. They reflect the ethnic, cultural, economic, religious and educational diversity that is a hallmark of the American experience. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and more than half a dozen nations are represented. More than 20 percent of recipients were born outside of the United States.

Today as I mentioned, there are 79 living recipients, fewer than at any time since the Civil War when the medal was first awarded. The oldest recipient, a World War II veteran, is 94. The youngest a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, is 25, and their average age is 71 years old. The Medal of Honor is the nation's highest award for valor and combat. It is the only military medal that is worn around the neck. Its recipients are the only individuals whom the President salutes as a matter of custom. It is awarded by the President in the name of Congress to a member of the armed forces who distinguishes himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while engaged in action against the United States.

So the Medal of Honor Museum is in the works. Why? To preserve the stories of the Medal of Honor recipients presenting them to new generations sorely in need of true heroes to look up to and emulate, to help visitors understand what it means to preserve service above self and the meaning and the price of freedom.

The future site of the museum is located at Patriots Point in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, on the eastern shore of Charleston Harbor directly across from the *U.S.S. Yorktown*. Throughout the museum, visitors will have multiple opportunities to meet and interact and learn from the recipients through films, videos and dynamic elements and in depth explorations of personal stories and experiences that will honor and promote the ideals and values associated with the medal.

Two galleries will be devoted to the Congressional Medal of Honor Society's character development and citizen honors programs to educate our America's youth and citizenry. As one teacher recently commented on the character development program saying, "Our children want to change the world on so many levels. The Medal of Honor curriculum offers them the tools and opportunity to do just that now and in the future."

Again, education is the key to helping the youth of America understand and be inspired by the valor and selfless acts of courage that those who earned the medal have so valiantly portrayed in the most harrowing of circumstances. I'm honored to serve on the board of directors and as national spokesperson for this worthy and important project. And encourage you to seek out more information by going to the Medal of Honor Museum website, MOHmuseum.org. And for the Gary Sinise Foundation's efforts, you can learn more about the Gary Sinise Foundation at Garysinisefoundation.org.

James Michener in his book *The Bridges at Took-Ri* writes movingly of the heroes who fought in the Korean conflict and in the book's final scene, an admiral stands on the darkened bridge of his carrier waiting for pilots he knows will never return from their mission. As he waits, he asks in the silent darkness, "Where did we get such men?" Today, as I stand in the presence of General Livingston and all our veterans here today, I ask again, where did we find such men and women who are willing to go into harm's way to keep us free? The answer is very simple; we find them where we've always found them, in our villages and towns, on our city streets, and in our shops and on our farms. America's families defend us all. One generation fighting for America's future, one generation inspiring the next so that again a young American would rise out of the communities that would dare to stand and face those who would do us harm and say boldly and with conviction, "Not on my watch."

And to those who stand guard deserving to know there is a grateful nation standing behind them and who may, from time to time, question whether their service will go unnoticed or who would ask, "Will our sacrifices, the sacrifices of our fallen, our wounded, our military families, be forgotten?" I say, and I encourage all our fellow Americans to say, not on my watch. Thank you. (Applause)

MR. HUGHES: Thank you very much. Each generation of war has prompted lessons learned, PTSD awareness out of World War II and Korea, and separating troop support from war support coming out of Vietnam. What do you think we should learn from the veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan?

MR. SINISE: There's much to learn. Thankfully, and I will say this, I have Vietnam veterans in my family so I'm very motivated by what I learned from the Vietnam veterans in my family years ago, back in the late '70s and early '80s when they came home from war. And a big catalyst for me today in supporting our Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and trying to insure that they have the services they need, they are showing the appreciation that they deserve are from what happened to our Vietnam veterans and the shocking reality at the shameful way they were treated when they came home from war and the services that they needed that they didn't get.

We have much to learn. We have, as I said, there's a major epidemic within the military community of those suffering from post traumatic stress and thankfully, there are a lot of services within the VA that are being provided, but also within the military nonprofit support space.

I think part of my feeling about this is that with the thousands of military charities that there are out there, the military nonprofits that are filling these gaps and trying to provide services like service dogs, for example, these dogs are very important to mental health. Thankfully, there are those military nonprofits because we all know that the challenges that the VA has, some wonderful people working within the VA, but it's a challenging environment for our veterans. Thankfully, there are these military nonprofits out there. They're trying to address needs on multiple fronts.

The TAPS organization is here today, Bonnie Carroll, who is providing a great service to the families of our fallen. There's a post traumatic stress involved there for our Iraq and Afghanistan families that they go through. Thankfully, there are services out there that are being provided, and I encourage anyone who is seeking service or seeking help from the Iraq and Afghanistan community to continue passing on the information of where these services are provided. There's a lot to learn from those who served in past wars and certainly those who are serving now. We can never do enough for those who are serving our nation. There's a lot more to be done, and we can always try to do a little bit more.

MR. HUGHES: With nearly a decade of war winding down, how do you see the mission of your foundation changing as fewer and fewer combat veterans come out of the armed forces, and with the wars winding down, do you worry that it's going to become more difficult to get the American people and the political system to appreciate and properly serve veterans?

MR. SINISE: It already is more difficult. Our service members continue to be deployed in harm's way, yet they're off the front pages. But the residual effects of these wars will last for decades as they continue to last from previous wars. We still have

challenging environments within the veteran community from all wars, don't we? And I've never been in combat, and I know many of our veterans here have. It never leaves you, it never goes away. You can certainly move beyond it, but the more we can keep consciousness and keep people aware of what's happening within our military community, the more services will continue to be provided.

I think this is where the challenge becomes greatest as we do draw down, as we do leave the battle space and leave the front pages. Is that, as I said, the residual effects of these wars will last for decades and we need these services to be provided continually. That's where somebody like me can come in and be useful, you know. I can talk at the Press Club and express myself and get a public platform around the country to try to keep this awareness up and help as many military charities as I possibly can because the need is enormous. There are lots of unmet needs out there, and we will continue to face these challenges. So keeping awareness up is important, it's primary. Thank you for having me today to be able to keep awareness up and to talk to members of the Press Club about this.

What you can do is help keep this in the consciousness of the American people. We're tired of war, we've been at war for 14 years. Yet, our military continues to serve, they continue to have challenges. Our military hospitals continue to serve those who've been injured years ago. I mean, I know people who've been going through rehabilitation for years and will continue to do that. One of our families here, Luiz and Claudia Avilla are here today. We're going to be doing a home building project for Luiz and Claudia. They're at the hospital every single day. God bless you for serving our country, thank you for being here today. We can never do enough for you and what you've done, Luiz.
(Applause)

MR. HUGHES: This questioner says for those not familiar with the story, please tell why you took on the leadership of this noble cause? But to broaden that out a little bit, you talked about after 9/11 getting involved. Was it really after 9/11 that it stepped up or did you really have this passion even years before and growing up? Talk about your own evolution to where you are today as such a devoted servant to this effort.

MR. SINISE: Yeah, as I said, it begins with the family members, it begins with the family members. On my side of the family, a World War I veterans, my grandfather, served driving an ambulance in France on the front line in France. Two uncles in World War II, my dad served in the Navy on my wife's side of the family, her two brothers served in Vietnam. I learned much from them. It's really the Vietnam side of the family that opened my eyes in the late '70s and early '80s because by the time I was old enough to absorb things as a young teenager, the family members on my side of the family, they were well beyond their service. So I don't remember my grandfather ever talking about World War I, I don't remember my uncle talking about World War II until I started doing a lot of this work. And then I would take him everywhere I went and just get him talking.

And as a matter of fact, he would spend Memorial Day here with me at the concert every year. He, unfortunately, passed away at 90 years old this past October. As

did my brother-in-law, Jack Treese, who was a combat medic in Vietnam and stayed in the army for 22 years. I learned so much from him, so much from the veterans, from my wife's two brothers. They really got me thinking, and so I got involved with Vietnam veterans groups back in the '80s in the Chicago area supporting them.

So, ten years later, I had this opportunity to audition a play a Vietnam veteran in "Forrest Gump." I really wanted to do that, having veterans in my family and being involved with Vietnam veterans in the Chicago area. So luckily, I got the part. That led me to an association with the Disabled American Veterans Organization, as I said. That relationship goes back 20 years. And then after September 11th when we were attacked, it just felt this is where I could employ my service, to helping those who serve and those going out in response to those devastating attacks.

And so I volunteered for the USO and started visiting our troops. So this is decades old and it all came together four years ago when I created the Gary Sinise Foundation, launched it right here at the Press Club. And now, my objective here is to have this foundation be here long after I'm gone serving and honoring the needs of our military and veteran community. Like I said, I don't think we can ever do enough for our freedom providers.

And this is a dangerous 21st century, and we're going to be facing a lot of challenges and the military is going to be called upon many, many times in the coming decades.

MR. HUGHES: The *Washington Post* recently ran a story headlined, "Military tributes at baseball games: true honors or hollow gestures?" How would you answer that question? And also, talk about the change after Vietnam to today in the appreciation and recognition veterans now receive from what they once did. What has really driven that change primarily, do you think?

MR. SINISE: Well, I can't respond to the baseball game thing, or sports thing. I really don't know anything about that. But I think we learned some hard lessons from Vietnam and General Livingston stayed in the military for 33 years. I know that for my brother-in-law, Jack, who stayed in the military for 22 years after Vietnam, it was a good place for him to be. But for my other brother-in-law, my wife's brother, who was a helicopter pilot in Vietnam, he got out after his tour.

And it was very, very challenging for him to try to blend in and forget to pretend he wasn't a Vietnam veteran, which at that time so many who had been to Vietnam had to do. So it was a challenging time and our nation treated our veterans in a shameful manner and it was a difficult time for our country, and certainly a difficult time for our veterans. It was a hard time for the army, I know, very difficult time for our marines.

But we learned, I think, the reason you see over 40,000 military nonprofits out there today, and there are over 40,000 that have popped up in the last 14 years, and I think one of the reasons is because people are aware of what happened in the late '60s

and early '70s to mid '70s when our Vietnam veterans were treated poorly. And like me, many of them wanted to dive in to try to prevent that from happening to our active duty service members in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Education, as I was saying, is such a critically important part of letting our young people understand why it's important to support this .1 percent of our population that serves in the military. It's a very, very small percentage of over 300 million people are serving in uniform defending our country. A lot of young people, if they don't have a personal connection like I do to somebody who's serving in the military, there's a disconnect. There's a serious disconnect between the average American citizen and its military.

So keeping awareness up, education, that's why I'm supporting the Medal of Honor Foundation Museum. This museum project will act as a beacon of education for what service and selflessness and character is all about. We want our young people to understand something greater than themselves, a service. And that doesn't mean that it always applies to war and the war fighter. But the legacy of the Medal of Honor is about so much more than that, isn't it? It's why this museum project is important, that's why I'm supporting it. That's why I encourage you to go to MOHMuseum.org to learn more about it. We have a national World War II museum in New Orleans honoring the service of our World War II veterans and educating our young people as to what happened when freedom and tyranny were the only choices in the world. And I think this Medal of Honor Museum will be a great education for people.

MR. HUGHES: We just have a few minutes left, and before I ask you a question or two about Hollywood, I just have some housekeeping. The National Press Club is the world's leading professional organization for journalists and we fight for a free press worldwide. For more information on the club, visit our website. That's Press.org, and to donate to our nonprofit Journalism Institute, visit Press.org/institute. I'd also like to remind you about some upcoming programs. On Thursday, Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, will discuss Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment.

On June 20th, and for the next two Saturdays after that, our Journalism Institute will hold a series of training sessions on cyber security. And on July 8th, Washington Capitols coach Barry Trotz will address a National Press Club luncheon. I'd now like to present Mr. Sinise with our traditional National Press Club mug. (Applause)

MR. SINISE: Ah, thanks. Thanks, John.

MR. HUGHES: Those, of course, are very special, valuable gifts and you now have four, I believe, so you're working on the set. So, in the time remaining, I wanted to ask you, you mentioned about you can use your celebrity status to promote these causes. And, of course, you keep working on that end of your career as well, and you've got a new series upcoming. Could you tell us a little bit about this new TV series you're beginning?

MR. SINISE: Oh yeah, the job. (Laughter) Oh yeah, the day job, wait. Well, I've been-- "CSI New York" went off the air in February of 2013, so since then I've been pouring all my energy into the military support and veterans support foundation, building the foundation, traveling around the country and the world raising awareness and that kind of thing.

But I was approached by CBS about doing a pilot for a new spin-off series of the show "Criminal Minds." So, we shot the pilot and it was an episode of the "Criminal Minds" series where they introduced a new team of the international division of the FBI and the behavioral analysis unit. So, and they picked us up so I'm going back to work. July 27th we start shooting in California. And we will explore the international division, as I said, so every week will be in a different country chasing bad guys and trying to protect Americans. (Applause)

MR. HUGHES: And in preparation for this role, you're doing some work out here as well?

MR. SINISE: Oh, yeah. Yes, tomorrow I'm actually going out to the FBI and I'll be visiting, getting some briefings out there, meeting some people, doing some research for the part so I get to go out to the FBI tomorrow. This will be my first time there. I'm very much looking forward to it. One of our technical advisors is taking me there. He's an FBI guy who moonlights as a writer.

MR. HUGHES: Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in giving a round of applause to our speaker today. (Applause)

MR. SINISE: Thank you for having me.

MR. HUGHES: Thank you. I'd also like to thank the Press Club staff including its Journalism Institute and broadcast center for organizing today's event. If you would like a copy of today's program, or to learn more about the National Press Club, again you can go to our website, Press.org. And again, I want to thank all of the service organizations that have joined us today for this breakfast. It's made it extra special and we at the National Press Club are grateful for all of the work that you do. And thank you so much. We are adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

END

