

SUGGESTED REMARKS FOR THE VETS TOWN HALL HOST

OPENING REMARKS

In the tradition of warrior storytelling, today veterans will describe the pride, grief, rage, or quiet reverence that the experience of war has bestowed on them. Each veteran will have 10 minutes to speak about what his or her service means to them. This event is solemn and completely non-political. There will be no question-and-answer period afterward, no discussion of U.S. foreign policy, no debate on the merits or justifications of war. We are simply here to listen and learn about what it was like to serve in the wars that this nation has chosen to fight.

[The Host can and should add his or her own personal remarks to the Opening Remarks.]

GROUND RULES

First, to our friends in the press, thank you for attending. Please respect the intent of this event by remembering that all testimonies are deeply personal, and that the veterans cannot be quoted or identified without their expressed permission. You are encouraged to ask the staff or the veterans themselves whether they are willing to go on the record.

[If there are cameras present, the host should make it clear at the beginning – and from time to time thereafter – that cameras will be turned off for anyone who does not wish to be recorded.]

[Recognize any elected officials in attendance.]

[Note that there are resources for veterans in the lobby, and counselors in attendance.]

In order for the town hall to be successful, my role is to ensure that the event honors the following agreements and expectations. A number of veterans have already indicated to us that they'd like to speak. I'll introduce each by name, branch, occupation, and years of service. Once all the predetermined veterans

have gone, I'll open up the floor for other veteran attendees to speak. Each veteran will have 10 minutes to speak about what their service means to them. You do not need to use the full 10 minutes, but we ask that you do not go over ten minutes, either. We also ask that you tell us about your own experiences, whatever they may be, rather than speaking broadly about an issue or an organization. You are a member of our community, and it's your stories, reflections and insights that we are anxious to hear.

Non-veterans also have a crucial role to play. Listening without judgment or interruption is one of the most powerful and supportive acts a person can offer, and that is what is expected of veterans and non-veterans alike. You may hear something you disagree with, you may have a question, or you may want to say encouraging words with the intention to help. However, we ask that you refrain from commenting in any way during the event. If veterans wish to continue a conversation with you afterward, that is entirely up to them. But the point of this event is simply to give veterans a chance to speak, and to bring the community closer around them.

Having laid out these ground rules, I'd like to introduce our first veteran speaker here at LOCATION.

INTRODUCING SPEAKERS

"[First name] [Last name] would like to speak to the community. [First name] is a [branch] veteran, who served as a [occupation] between [start year] and [end year], during [era]."

OPENING THE FLOOR

[Once you've gone through the list of speakers, thank them for telling their stories and open it up to other veterans in the audience who would like to speak. Direct them to the podium. Remind them that each veteran has a maximum of 10 minutes to speak and that we will need to begin wrapping up the town hall at TIME or so. We have the space until TIME.]

CLOSING REMARKS

[If there are no more speakers prior to TIME, that will mark the end. Otherwise, if a speaker crosses TIME, let him or her finish, and then close.]

Today, veterans of all wars had a chance to address their community directly and without intermediaries. As a guest or speaker, you took part in a process that returns the experience of war to our entire community, rather than just leaving it to the people who fought. Not only is this vets town hall tremendously beneficial to veterans, but it may help bring communities and even the entire country together as well.

[Thank the veterans—both speakers and those who merely attended—thank the non-veterans for coming. The Host can and should add their own personal remarks to the provided closing remarks. End by reminding folks to feel free to stay and chat, but we only have the space until TIME.]