

**The United States Vietnam War Commemoration National
Announcement & Proclamation Ceremony
Vietnam Veterans Memorial**

Remarks & Introduction of President Barack Obama

by Chuck Hagel

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President and Mrs. Obama, Vice President and Dr. Biden, and Distinguished Guests all

This uniquely American day, Memorial Day, was born over 140 years ago out of America's Civil War...our most costly and terrible war – a war that tore at the heart and fabric of our republic. The next American war to divide America produced this simple and elegant Memorial that watches over us today. It reflects the images of the future as it records the names of the past. Memorials are built for the living and are to instruct our destiny, as they honor and remember those who fell in the service of their country. Memorials further instruct us of the powerful responsibility of our nation's stewards to make policy worthy of the sacrifices of those who serve and die. War is not an abstraction. It is brutal and is always accompanied by the haunting portends of

dangerous unintended consequences, uncontrollables and unpredictables. And even though this is so, America's men and women have always found higher purpose to their lives in service to their country. I often think about those quiet heroes that my brother Tom and I served with in Vietnam in 1968. And I am proud that Tom is here today. I never knew nor served with a better soldier or a better man than my brother Tom. These quiet heroes who we slogged through jungles with, fought side by side with, were wounded with, and sometimes helplessly watched die, always considered themselves just ordinary people. But they were far from ordinary. They viewed themselves as such because they were humble, patriotic and selfless.

They never asked for nor expected anything in return for their service other than respect and dignity. Tragically what they received upon their return from a confused and angry nation was neither. In fact they were blamed for the folly that consumed America for so many years. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial means many things to many people. Not only is there deep meaning and connection with our Vietnam veterans and their families to The Wall, but so it is with all Americans of all generations. Among these feelings for Vietnam veterans is their responsibility and honor to assist returning veterans from the wars of the last 11 years.

Assuring that these returning veterans are productively integrated back into society with the appreciation and recognition befitting a great nation. As we have painfully learned from the tragic lessons of Vietnam, society must always separate the war from the warrior. We do not celebrate the Vietnam War. We commemorate and historically recognize it. As I said at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial ground breaking on a cold windy March day in 1982, “there is no glory in war, only suffering.” Life is always more about the people than the event. Events are stages upon which individuals change the world. And today we celebrate those individuals who changed our country for the better... our Vietnam veterans and their families. We also recognize those who are assisting our military families today in special ways, like The First Lady, Michelle Obama, and Dr. Jill Biden. The character of a nation is always about who it chooses to be its leaders... and how it respects its veterans. In my lifetime America has not known two more committed leaders to its men and women in uniform and its veterans and their families than President Obama and Vice President Biden.

On behalf of this beautifully creator endowed land here to speak for all of us, on this special day when we are all Americans, is the leader of our country, the 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama.