

Veterans Day Speech 2025 – “It Starts Here”

Good morning.

Take a second and look around.

We’re standing here, in our town, on a quiet morning, under a peaceful sky.

No sirens. No bombs. No one checking over their shoulder to see if it’s safe to gather.

That didn’t happen by accident.

That calm you feel right now was *bought* — by men and women who put on the uniform of the United States and said, “I’ll go. I’ll go so everyone else doesn’t have to.”

They left classrooms in the middle of a semester.

They left jobs halfway through a promotion.

They left Little League seasons unfinished and empty chairs at the dinner table.

Some came home older than their years.

Some came home with scars you can see.

Some came home with scars you can’t.

And some didn’t come home at all.

They did that not because they were thrill-seekers,

but because they believed in something that sounds simple and is actually incredibly hard:

That this country — with all of its problems, all of its arguments, all of its unfinished work — is still worth putting your life on the line for.

That’s who we’re here to honor today.

Now, let’s talk about that flag behind me.

It’s easy to see it as decoration.

A backdrop for a ceremony.

Something that just shows up wherever there’s a podium.

But that flag has had a much rougher life than we give it credit for.

It has been dragged through mud on foreign soil.

It has soaked up blood on fields most of us will never visit.

It has been held above the heads of men and women who were tired, afraid, and cold — and still moving forward.

And then, when the fighting was over, it was folded into a neat triangle
and placed in the arms of a mother, a father, a spouse,
who would have traded every “thank you” in the world just to have their loved one back.

So, when a veteran salutes that flag, they’re not saluting fabric.
They’re saluting memories.
They’re saluting faces.
They’re saluting friends who didn’t make it home.

And here’s what makes this moment so serious:

They were not saluting a perfect country.
They were saluting a country they believed could keep getting better.
That’s a big difference.

Now I want to say something that might make a few people uncomfortable,
but it needs to be said.

Right now, we are not acting like a country that understands what was done for us.

We are fighting a different kind of war — and it’s not “over there.”
It’s here.

We’re not firing bullets. We’re firing words.
We’re not drawing battle lines on maps. We’re drawing them on social media,
in comment sections,
across dinner tables.

There are college campuses — and we all see this —
where the national anthem comes on and hearts don’t race... they roll their eyes.
Where the flag isn’t a symbol of what we’ve overcome,
but a list of what we’ve done wrong.

Young people are being handed a version of America
that is all accusation and no aspiration.

They are being told what to be angry about,
but not what to be proud of.

They’re learning our failures — and yes, they should know them —
but not the whole story of how many people bled and worked and sacrificed to fix those
failures.

And here's the danger:

If you grow up only hearing what's wrong with your country,
you will eventually stop believing there's anything worth defending.

Our veterans know better.

They have seen the worst of humanity.

And still, they raised their right hand and said, "I will defend this place."

They didn't fight so we could pretend our history is spotless.

They fought so we could keep writing better chapters.

So where does that leave us?

It leaves us right here. In Somers.

I'm not naïve. I know we're just one town on a very big map.
But every big change in this nation has started somewhere small.

A kitchen table.

A church basement.

A town hall.

A ball field where parents talk in the stands while their kids run around under the lights.

If the world is going to respect the American flag again —
if we want that symbol to still mean something more than politics and protest —
then the turnaround has to start in places like this.

Not in a speech in Washington.

Not in a headline.

Right here. With us.

So, what does that actually look like?

It looks like this:

It looks like standing for the national anthem at a high school game —
not out of habit, but with intention.

Teaching our kids *why* we stand,

because men and women died under that flag,

and standing is a sign of gratitude and respect for the freedom they secured.

It looks like telling the full story when we talk about our country at home —
where we failed, yes,
but also how we fought, argued, marched, and sacrificed to make things right.

It looks like disagreeing about policy
without turning the person who disagrees with you into the enemy.

It looks like helping a stranger in trouble
without checking how they vote first.

That's what I mean when I say
we have to remember we're **Americans before anything else**.

To our veterans here today:

You carried a weight most of us never will.
You missed moments that can't be replayed.
You did your duty for people you would never meet
and for a future you would never fully see.

And then you came home, and you kept going.

You raised families.
You opened businesses.
You coached teams.
You volunteered.
You put down roots in towns like ours
and made them stronger just by being in them.

You didn't just defend America.
You helped build the version of America we're standing in right now.

So, here's what I think we owe you —
more than applause, more than a day on the calendar:

We owe you a promise.

A promise that we will not let your sacrifice
be the high-water mark of American courage.

A promise that we will not turn your flag
into just another prop in yet another argument.

A promise that we will not hand the next generation
nothing but bitterness and division.

We will teach them what you paid.

We will remind them what you believed.

We will show them that you were not fools for believing in this country —
you were right to believe in it.

Veterans Day is not just about looking back at what you did.
It's about looking forward at what we're going to do
with what you gave us.

So, here's my challenge — to myself, to you, to all of us:

When the anthem plays, stand a little taller and mean it.

When the flag passes by, don't just look at it —
remember the hands that carried it through fire.

When you talk about this country, be honest, but be fair.

Criticize, yes — that's part of freedom.

But don't forget to be grateful, too.

And when we disagree — and we will —

let's do it as Americans who still believe we belong to the same team.

If we can do that here,
if our kids see that here,
then this little town will send a message way beyond its borders:

That America is not finished.

That the spirit you fought for is not dead.

That the flag you defended still means something —
starting in this place,
with these people,
on this day.

To all our veterans:

Thank you for your service.

Thank you for your sacrifice.

Thank you for believing in this country.

Now it's our turn to show you
that we believe in it, too.

May God bless our veterans,
may God bless Somers,
and may God bless the United States of America.