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November 14, 2017

Professor David Coombs's Post

The Immigrant Veteran: Service and Honor

Posted by David Coombs on 11/14/2017 at 12:37 PM



[RWU Law Professor, veteran and military law expert David Coombs offered the following remarks during Veterans Day observances at Roger Williams University on November 10. The address has been slightly edited for readability in blog format.]

Today we honor those who honored our country with its highest form of service. Those who once wore the uniform of our Air Force, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard – and my personal favorite, the U.S. Army.

The theme is “Service and Honor,” and our veterans certainly display both on a daily basis. But perhaps the most enduring example of service and honor is something that happens once a veteran leaves military service and rejoins our civilian ranks: they become our police, firefighters, business leaders, and elected officials. A veteran brings the same commitment of service and honor once displayed in the military to their civilian endeavors. And through that commitment, they change lives.

While all of our veterans have make an impact in their civilian life, today I want to focus on the impact from a select group of our veterans; a group that our nation should always treasure and strive to cultivate. Something that should never be forgotten is that ***our veterans are both native born and immigrant.***

If you want to see the power of opening our ranks to immigrant members look to someone like [Adam Babiker](#). Adam left his war-torn home in western Sudan in 2001, and went to Egypt where he was granted refugee status.

In 2006 he was resettled as a refugee into the United States. Three years later he enlisted in the U.S. Army, participating in Operation New Dawn where he helped Iraqi reconstruction efforts. After the Army, Adam relocated to Houston, Texas and volunteered with Interfaith Ministries to help new refugees through mentoring and other resettlement services.

You can also look to the example of [Emir Hadzic](#). **Eric** is a U.S. Marine veteran who recently retired after 20 years of service. He came to the United States in 1995 as a Bosnian Muslim refugee, and enlisted in the Marines in 1996. He is currently in training at the St. Louis Police Academy.

Emir has been an outspoken advocate for refugees. He [spoke at the White House](#) in 2016, and has been recognized on the floor of the U.S. Senate as an example of the many extraordinary people, who come to the United States as a refugee, and go on to make our country better.

Or you can look closer to home, to [Sean Horgan](#), a Massachusetts resident. Sean was born in Ireland and came to the United States with his parents as a child. He enlisted in the Marines shortly after becoming a U.S. resident. Sean served everywhere from the Arctic Circle to a tour in Iraq, where he led a rifle platoon of 44 Marines.

He is now the New England Director of Team Rubicon. An organization that unites the skills and experiences of military veterans to rapidly deploy emergency response teams into crisis situations – such as the recent fires and hurricanes that have impacted our country. He has grown his all-volunteer team to over 1000 members.

Sean has also helped lead the creation of the Greater Boston veterans Collaborative, which unites the efforts of veteran service organizations.

Adam Babiker, Emir Hadzic, and Sean Horgan are just three examples of how we are stronger as a country when we are inclusive.

Our veterans are a diverse group. They represent every corner of our country. Their members are every shade of humanity, representative of every religious belief, gender, and sexual orientation. It is through this great diversity that our military has time and time again demonstrated that there is no mission that it cannot accomplish.

Today, let's honor our veterans by seeking to follow their example by being inclusive of everyone that wants to join our ranks – whether native born or immigrant.

Let's strive to build bridges instead of walls.

Let's be respectful of each other, and realize that no matter what our differences, we are united in our love of this country, and our appreciation for those who were willing to lay down their lives so that we might enjoy the freedoms that we do as Americans.

On this Veterans Day, and on every day, may God bless all who served and still do in the defense of our great country.