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Subject: Thanksgiving Message from Your Secretary of Veterans Affairs
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MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

The blessings of freedom and justice, opportunity and prosperity, so dear to all Americans, were not gained without sacrifice, nor preserved without purpose.

These blessings are at the heart of our American celebration of Thanksgiving, a holiday that acknowledges both our colonial roots and the beneficence of the Almighty. Vital in that history was the sharing of the harvest by American Indians, enabling the preservation of our early settlers during those first winters in the New World. Sharing one's blessings and giving thanks for the bounties of the harvest, long a part of Native American culture, became part of our American Thanksgiving celebration, as well. This cherished tradition endured and flourished as our Nation grew and prospered.

Of this rich, new land, Thomas Jefferson once proclaimed to fellow Virginian, James Monroe, "My God! How little do my countrymen know what precious blessings they are in possession of, and which no other people on earth enjoy!" [Letter, June 17, 1785]

The principles and values that define us as Americans found their origins in Jefferson's time and have been sustained since by the vigilance and valor of generation after generation of men and women who, in both peace and war, have safeguarded our way of life. At the Department of Veterans Affairs, caring for those who, in President Abraham Lincoln's words, "have borne the battle" remains our noble mission.

President Lincoln further established the last Thursday of November as a national "day of Thanksgiving" for the benevolence and bounty that has been given to the American people. On this uniquely American holiday, let us remember our good fortune at living in a land of plenty—safe, secure, and free from tyranny and oppression.

Another courageous generation of young Americans serves today as a force for good in some of the most remote and unforgiving places in the world. Many will observe Thanksgiving and the upcoming Holiday Season without the warmth and companionship of families and friends. Their missions are difficult and dangerous, and they perform them without hesitation. In this season of Thanksgiving, let us pray for their well-being and safe return. As we gather at our own tables on November 28th, let us not only give thanks for the blessings in our own lives, but give thanks for the men and women who now serve, and for those who have served on Thanksgivings past, ensuring for us and future generations of Americans the "precious blessing" of liberty.

“Happy Thanksgiving” to all our Veterans and their families, to the Survivors of the Fallen, and to my VA colleagues across our Department, who serve them so faithfully. May God continue to bless this great and wonderful country of ours.

Eric K. Shinseki