

Two Veterans

We lost two Veterans last week; one you know and one you don't. On Saturday, Sweetie and I drove to Grand Forks to pay our last respect to a Veteran, Stanley Whicker. Stan enlisted in the Air Force when he was 16 years old and entered active duty the day after his 17th birthday. He served honorably during the Korean War, was discharged and returned to civilian life. He met the love of his life, JoAnne and they had two daughters, one of whom I call a friend. Early in their marriage, they had a motorcycle accident that left each with a broken arm. They learned to work together; one holding the breakfast toast; the other buttering it. The couple had a successful local business. He served in leadership roles in both the American Legion and VFW. Stan and JoAnne formed a group that maintained Veterans' graves in their local cemeteries. At his funeral, the most touching time was when a man in kilts played the bagpipes as his coffin came into the church and as it left the church. Stan was a true patriot.

The second is, of course, John McCain and here is part of his farewell letter to us.

"I owe that satisfaction to the love of my family. No man ever had a more loving wife or children he was prouder of than I am of mine. And I owe it to America. To be connected to America's causes -- liberty, equal justice, respect for the dignity of all people -- brings happiness more sublime than life's fleeting pleasures. Our identities and sense of worth are not circumscribed but enlarged by serving good causes bigger than ourselves.

Fellow Americans' -- that association has meant more to me than any other. I lived and died a proud American. We are citizens of the world's greatest republic, a nation of ideals, not blood and soil. We are blessed and are a blessing to humanity when we uphold and advance those ideals at home and in the world. We have helped liberate more people from tyranny and poverty than ever before in history. We have acquired great wealth and power in the process.

We weaken our greatness when we confuse our patriotism with tribal rivalries that have sown resentment and hatred and violence in all the corners of the globe. We weaken it when we hide behind walls, rather than tear them down, when we doubt the power of our ideals, rather than trust them to be the great force for change they have always been.

We are three-hundred-and-twenty-five million opinionated, vociferous individuals. We argue and compete and sometimes even vilify each other in our raucous public debates. But we have always had so much more in common with each other than in disagreement. If only we remember that and give each other the benefit of the presumption that we all love our country we will get through these challenging times. We will come through them stronger than before. We always do." John was a true patriot.