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Speech Recalls December 7th

Sixty-one years ago, on December 7, 1941, America found itself involved in our history's bloodiest war. As we journeyed together on a painful, but glorious path to peace and victory, new and strange names were added to the lexicon of our American military. Names like Guadalcanal, Saipan, Iwo Jima, Anzio, Normandy, Okinawa, and Guam.

Today we gather to remember and honor the 299,131 American men and women who stood in harms way and gave their lives on our behalf during that journey to victory. Today, in many towns and villages, fellow citizens will participate in parades and festivities and many inspiring speeches will be heard.

Senator Stevens and I, as veterans of that war, are grateful to America for the many honors it has bestowed on our fallen comrades. But, most respectfully, we feel that these glorious parades and inspiring speeches may have missed the real essence of why we were victorious.

We remember the thousands upon thousands of school children scouring the countryside looking for scrap metal -- tons of scrap metal that found its way to the front lines as bullets and bombs.

We remember the many thousands of victory gardens in every village, hamlet and town -- gardens that produced more than one-third of all the vegetables that Americans consumed during that war.

We remember the long lines of citizens volunteering to give blood and to buy war bonds.

We remember the 866 American ships, merchant ships, that were sunk by enemy

submarines while carrying our precious military cargo, and the nearly 7,000 American seamen who rest at the bottom of the sea.

We remember those gallant ladies, wives and sweethearts, who rolled up their sleeves and took over the places of their loved ones at the assembly lines.

They took over the tractors and the farms until the men returned. We also recall, that at that moment, the productivity of our nation rose by more than 35 percent in less than a month. The record shows that these sweethearts of America helped to build more than 60,000 tanks, more than 120,000 ships, and more than 300,000 aircraft.

We remember that in the early days of this war, when the days were the darkest, more than 6 million men and women, our fellow citizens, volunteered to serve our country. High among this list of volunteers were Native Americans, our first citizens, who volunteered in larger numbers per capita than any other group.

Something happened to America at that time. We are not wise enough to know what it was. But it was the strange, strange power that our founding fathers experienced in those early uncertain days.

Let us call it the spirit of America, a spirit that united and galvanized our people. We were ready for any challenge, any obstacle.

My fellow Americans, today the obstacles and challenges are many, and we ask, is that spirit of America within us?

Today we hear the ugly voices of hatred and read the violent rhetoric of terrorists. Terror has become, unfortunately, our way of life.

At this moment, there are men and women in the military in distant lands ready to serve in harms way to defend and uphold the values of our democracy. Senator Stevens and I have met hundreds of these brave men and women during the past six months. It is clearly obvious to us that they are instilled with the spirit of America to fight for our democratic way of life.

I hope and pray that if we are once again called upon to send these brave men and women into battle, we will find ourselves blessed with this special spirit of America that helped us in our journey to victory over a half century ago. God bless America.