

LTG BLUM: Thank you, thank you all. It is going to be a little tougher than I thought. Thanks. All of you, thanks for the warm welcome, thanks for the opportunity to come back home to Baltimore for the great conference. Special thanks to Governor Martin O'Malley and his Adjutant General Jim Adkins and his wife Mary Ann, who, I think they are in this building. Yes.

(Applause.)

LTG BLUM: And to the legion of volunteers, to include the Maryland Defense Force, spouses and friends, and corporate members that have done such a great job hosting this year's conference, and in organizing this 130th National Guard Association Conference. Please join me in a round of applause for the people that have put this thing on for us.

(Applause.)

LTG BLUM: I also want to thank Chairman Marty Umbarger of NGAUS, and I want to thank Frank Vavala, President of the Adjutant Generals Association of the United States and the retired Sergeant Major Frank Lever for being President of the Enlisted Association of the United States. These great organizations have done amazing work in and provided outstanding support for almost half a million citizen soldiers and airmen. Thanks.

(Applause.)

LTG BLUM: This will likely be my last address to this group as your sitting Chief. As most of you know, I hope, I have been your Chief for the last five and a half years, every day of which has been a time at which our nation is a war. So, it has been a distinct honor, duty and privilege for me to be your Chief and to lead this organization, this magnificent organization, in this truly remarkable time of our history. You have done fantastic things.

(Applause.)

LTG BLUM: I know all of you have heard, but for those of you who haven't, Lieutenant General Craig McKinley has been nominated to be our first Four Star Chief.

(Applause.)

LTG BLUM: You couldn't have made a better selection. We are going to be in good hands for then future. I think you also know that I have been nominated and if confirmed, I will say both of us, how is that, if we are confirmed, I will be serving in a new assignment. And this is great because my wife, Suzy, is especially ecstatic about this new prospect. She is just so proud, I have actually heard her bragging to all of her friends on the telephone and her cell phone about her husband being in charge of Nordstroms.

(Laughter.)

LTG BLUM: I am known for not being afraid to speak up but I haven't had the heart to tell her, Honey, it is NORTHCOM, not Nordstroms.

(Laughter.)

LTG BLUM: Seriously, together, working together as a team of teams, together we set out on an irreversible course that resulted in then largest military transformation in modern history. It couldn't have been done, it couldn't have happened without the strong support from several places. Our Congress, you heard Senator Leahy today. There are others on the Hill that feel the same way he does, thank goodness for this nation. Without that kind of support from the Congress all of our visions would just have been a dream, it never would have been a reality. Without the strong support of associations like NGAUS, AGUAS and EANGUS, which I am legally and ethically allowed to thank for what they do for our citizen soldiers and airmen, thanks, thanks, and thanks.

(Applause.)

LTG BLUM: Without the magnificent leadership of the Governors and their Adjutants General none of this would be possible. What they have done, what we have done, what this team of teams has done, is to take from a standing start and move from a back burner, under resourced strategic reserve that nobody intended to use or call, and with no notice, from a standing start make it an essential part of the operational force of the United States Army and the United States Air Force, and are absolutely indispensable to every combatant commander on the globe. Hoo Ah.

(Applause.)

LTG BLUM: You did what had to be done and you never looked back. And it wasn't easy, believe me. We had to evaluate how we were doing business. It is true, we had to make some very hard decisions. We had to make some tough calls, tough choices, but we did it so that we could defend our homeland and still be an essential force for the Army and the Air Force abroad. And we did it in a period of persistent conflict that our nation has endured.

I will tell you, I was indeed fortunate to have a solid team of professionals to help in this effort, and I have mentioned them. First and foremost it was the Adjutants General of the states and territories. But I would be remiss if I didn't mention people like Lieutenant General Danny James, Lieutenant General Roger Schultz, Lieutenant General Clyde Vaughn, Lieutenant General Craig McKinley. I am going to tell you, they made the impossible look easy. Thanks, guys.

(Applause.)

LTG BLUM: To do this we had to create a joint vision, something that never existed before, OHIO and in 2003, and all of us bought into this joint vision and made it a reality. In the last few years much has been accomplished. Our citizen soldiers and airmen have performed simply magnificently. Everywhere that they have served in uniform, whether it was in the swamps in Louisiana after a hurricane, whether it was on the Border, whether it was overseas, whether it was fighting Al Queda, or whether it was fighting drugs in our country, were providing hope in the Youth Challenge Program, they have been magnificent and they have cashed every check that we have written. Sadly, as we are all too painfully aware, some that were deployed and sent off to serve their State and nation did not get to return home. I think we owe our fallen heroes, collectively, a debt that will never be able to be fully repaid. I would like you to join me in a moment of silence for our fallen comrades who paid the last full measure for our nation.

(Moment of silence observed.)

LTG BLUM: That sacrifice was not in vain. Today your National Guard is better in every measurable way. It is better organized, we have modular units, we have modern units that match the Army and match the Air Force. It is better manned. I am so proud to report today that both the Army and the Air Guard are over 100 percent of their authorized strength.

(Applause.)

LTG BLUM: And for the next administration, you are going to hear this loud and clear, they are postured to grow.

(Applause.)

LTG BLUM: It is better trained than at any time in our 372 year history. Bar none. It is better equipped today by almost two and a half times where we were three years ago. And everybody in this room, and the three gentlemen at the front here and the organizations they represent and the Congress are to be thanked for making that possibility a reality. We had everything we needed for the hurricanes, and then some. We had everything we need to fight the war overseas, bar nothing. We want for nothing over there. And, guess what, we have now become the most combat experienced force in DoD.

(Applause.)

LTG BLUM: This is the most professional National Guard in our history, that our nation has ever fielded in the nation's history. And it is because we have organized them right, manned them right, trained them right, and finally we are resourcing them right. We are more ready, we are more reliable, we are more accessible, and we have become essential.

(Film shown)

(Applause.)

LTG BLUM: I think you can see by that four minute and 50 second capture of where I think this organization needs to go in the future, and where we have been in the last few years. If our nation did not have a National Guard we would have to be scrambling to invent one real quick. The National Guard is truly a national treasure. So I will leave you with these words. Thank you. Thank each and every one of you and everyone you represent. The magnificent citizen soldiers and airmen that I have had the privilege to see all over this planet and all over this great nation for the last five and a half years adding value to America, adding value for our nation, making our way of life safer and protecting it.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your Chief. Thank you for the support you have rendered me, and I know you will render General McKinley.

God bless the National Guard, our citizen soldiers and airmen of this nation, and God bless America. Thank you.