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CLOSING REMARKS
KOREA/COLD WAR ANNUAL GOVT BRIEFING
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I would like to start by thanking all of you for coming. This has been one of our biggest and best, and we have you to thank for it.

Closing remarks are usually short and limited to basically thanking you for coming and hoping that we have been able to answer your questions. As with my introduction of our keynote speaker Joe Benkert, I ask your indulgence while I depart from convention.

If I may, I'd like to share a number of things with you I'd like to share my vision of this mission, where I think it will go, and where I think it should be going. I'd like to share with you the answers to questions I get from people in some of my one-on-one conversations, because I think the questions are good, and I think all of you might be interested in the responses. I'd like to share with you also, some of the things we are doing to more effectively serve you, and why we are doing things the way we do.

First, my view of where we will go in this mission.

As a nation, we have always honored our fallen heroes, but not always in the way we have come to expect today. As technology has advanced, expectations and demands have changed. It is no longer acceptable to leave fallen soldiers where they fell, or to mark dozens of graves as "unknown" because we had no way of making identifications. Technology now enables us to do what was once impossible, and you, the American people, expect us to use that technology to give you answers.

I think that as long as you make these demands – and frankly, I think that will be as long as there are people not accounted for – the mission will continue to exist.

That's where I think we will go – and that it the right thing to do. Where do I think we should go, though? Along with the obligation to honor those who have made the supreme sacrifice for this country, we also need to have a realistic view of what all this involves. You have heard speakers over the past two days talk about the technical, security and political challenges we face.

Admiral Crisp, just this morning for instance, talked about how long it takes to negotiate agreements with foreign countries. I don't want to play one-up, but I'd just like to point out that the archival arrangement we concluded with the Chinese earlier this year took over ten years to finalize. And we still have many more years of pursuit on this one. For the two years I've been

in this job we have been negotiating with the Russians on revival of the Russian side of the US-Russia Joint Commission. And, I might add, these negotiations don't end with signed agreements. We constantly talk and make adjustments as relationships evolve.

As difficult as negotiations with foreign governments can be, working within the American bureaucracy – what we call the interagency – can be even more daunting. It's not that people don't care, but people tend to jealously defend their rice bowls, and that means when you come to the table with a proposal that does not immediately and directly support their missions, or even sometimes seems to threaten it, you encounter resistance.

So, realistically, while we value your input, respect your wishes and try to comply with your legitimate demands – the reality is we will not always be able to do what you want as fast as you want it done. Even when all the stars are aligned and everyone involved is in agreement, a bureaucracy, even one as small and agile as the personnel accounting community, can only move so fast.

You should also focus your effort and energy on ends rather than means. I periodically beat my staff over the head with this injunction.

Never get so wrapped up in defending or resisting a particular means that you lose sight of the end. Put another way, don't get so obsessed with fighting alligators you forget that you were originally sent to drain the swamp.

And, just what is our "end?" As I see it, as a government and an organization – as a people – our goal is to return every young man or woman we send abroad home alive (and I don't think anyone would disagree that this is our most important goal). If unfortunately they should be among the fallen, we seek to locate, return, and identify their remains.

And if we are unable to do that we investigate and explain why the remains are not recoverable. Now, that's a long statement and it is not elegantly phrased, but that is what we're all about. How we do it is not the important part – that we do it, that's what counts.

Now, I'd like to share with you some of the questions I get, and my responses.

First, what can we as family members do to help you get your mission done better? Well, that's both easy and hard to answer. First, your very presence here today helps our cause.

Your outreach to your neighbors, veterans' service organizations, local media and other citizens in your area helps us. What probably does not help, and this might seem counterintuitive, is pressure to get one-time infusions of funds. Extra money might seem nice, but it doesn't solve the longer term problems. It's like putting a band-aid over an infected cut. It doesn't heal the malady. We need to work inside the bureaucracy to institute long term improvements to our work.

Yes, we appreciate and will continue to seek help for funds to cover emergencies, but the longer term mission enhancement comes only after slogging our way through the bureaucracy,

articulating AND defending our positions. As long as you keep your elected representatives aware of the importance of this mission to you, we will have the political support to help us with the bureaucratic in-fighting. We have to be careful, though, that we do not rely entirely on this. If you wrap yourself in the mantle of Congressional patronage too tightly, the result is alienation of those within the bureaucracy who can be most helpful in the long run.

You know, probably the best advertising for this mission is you. There are around 400 public service announcements sitting in this room right now. I only ask you to continue to go forth and spread the word, just as we do every day in our outreach efforts.

Second most frequently asked question over the past two years – does it matter who is elected President? I honestly believe that it doesn't. This mission is not a political issue. Our young men and women who paid the ultimate price in service to this country were not democrats or republicans – they were Americans.

They didn't fight for votes or party platforms – they fought for their comrades and their fellow Americans. Regardless of who occupies the White House, this is an issue of importance to a large segment of the American population. In short, as long as you support it, it will exist. Third question is why do you people give more support to this or that conflict, and not enough to the one my family member was lost in? Well, I thought Admiral Crisp covered it well this morning, but let me give you my take on the issue. There is no simple answer to this, and if you focus on just one aspect, you can support any conclusion you want.

Again, though, we are constantly working to refine our strategies, policies and operations to address this as an issue of honoring the sacrifice of our fellow warriors. When I look out at a room like this, I don't see a particular war, or even a particular service or agency. I see a room full of Americans who have given their sons and daughter, husbands and fathers, their blood for this country.

What then are we doing to address your quite legitimate concerns? I've already mentioned some.

We are constantly reviewing and revising as necessary our strategies and policies to not only address the issue more broadly, but to communicate it more effectively. I believe in government transparency, but when I'm trying to get candid input from my staff in order to make decisions that could impact on how this mission is carried out years into the future, I won't do it on the front page. So, until we have clarified these strategies and policies, I do not share the details. Rest assured, however, once we do, they will be made available. We also appreciate your input as no policy is set in concrete. We always take them into account as we review and revise.

We are also constantly looking at organizational structure and resources to determine what makes sense. We make recommendations for changes where we think they are appropriate. I have a number of advisory bodies that I tap to get all this done, and they are working on it constantly. Now unfortunately, the wheels of government bureaucracy grind slow and exceedingly fine, so I ask for patience as we get on with it.

I have often said that despite my 46 plus years of government service, I have had my fill of bureaucrats. Don't get me wrong, bureaucracy has a role to play. The procedures can slow the implementation of a wrong-headed idea by forcing decision makers to review and reconsider. Unfortunately, however, bureaucracy too often gets hung up on rules that were created and never reviewed for common sense, or that they no longer apply. So I work in the bureaucracy – but am not OF the bureaucracy. And, I encourage my staff to do the same.

You have here today, representatives of a strong community of the 600 most dedicated public servants you will find anywhere on the planet. These are people who truly believe in what they do – make no mistake about it -- and I am intensely proud to have been chosen to be on their team. As you'll note in The Torch newsletter that we've distributed here today, in DPMO alone, our small staff brings to the mission more than one-thousand man-years of experience in accounting for your missing loved one. To me, this is astounding, and we've yet to make the same count in the other organizations of our community.

You are being very well served by these razor-sharp, highly trained professionals.

And finally, you. I am proud to have had the opportunity to get to know many of you. To feel the energy and commitment to answers you bring to the issue. Your loved ones gave their last full measure for this country, but you are the true heroes. For what you have given this country, there can never be an adequate repayment. All we can do is try to give you some closure; some assurance that this sacrifice has not been forgotten and was not in vain.

On behalf of the more than 600 people involved in this mission, thank you for all that you have given and all that you do.