

**SPEECH DELIVERED AT
VETERAN'S DAY CELEBRATION
NOVEMBER 8, 2007**

Welcome to our sixth annual Veteran's Day celebration. We thank our special guests who are with us this evening, everyone who participated in the planning of this event, and special thanks are extended to Shaker High School social studies teacher, Mr. Dan Weaver.

The theme of this year's celebration is community, and while I usually take a few moments at this event to remember my own father, Lawrence Birch, who served as a Marine during World War II and who was wounded at Iwo Jima, tonight I wish to focus my brief remarks in a different direction. My focus is on how we can all make a difference.

My cousin, Neal Sher, is an ophthalmologist in Minnesota. Recently, a story about Neal's work appeared on the local television news there. The story was entitled: "Minnesota Surgeon Has 'Vision' for Supporting Troops."

Neal is an expert in laser eye correction, and the military has a priority list of who can receive this costly surgery. Because the waiting list is long and some people never qualify, Neal began doing this surgery at no cost for soldiers and has now performed this procedure on several dozen soldiers. By doing so, he is giving them something they can truly use.

Sgt. Tyler Fields is one of the recipients. During this first deployment in Iraq, Fields carried spare sets of glasses. "Just in case I'd have to switch out so I could see and do my job proficiently," said Fields. "Otherwise, I would put someone else's life at risk."

Scheduled to return to Iraq last year, Fields was determined to get vision correction surgery. "If you're going to be constantly doing patrols, glasses can get in the way," he said. "I was really impressed that a doctor would do that for free," said Fields.

Neal knows that he is giving the soldiers something important. "To be able to see really helps your ability to be a soldier, to do your job, and to survive," he said.

The surgery made a difference, and Fields felt safer performing his duties during his second tour in Iraq. "I didn't have to second guess anything," he said. "This way, I just put on the goggles and I'm good."

If Fields sends his army buddies my cousin's way, that's fine with him. "They're asked to sacrifice a lot. It's the least we can do," said Sher. The least he can do is actually quite a lot - - helping troops keep a watchful eye and, hopefully, see their way home.

I tell you of my cousin's work tonight, because I am proud of him and because he represents what caring individuals can do to support our troops. I challenge us all to think about what small and large actions we can take to support our women and men in uniform.