

Surgeon General Richard Carmona, M.D.
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Surgeon General's Speech

Good morning. How are you all? It's wonderful to be with you. I feel like this is a homecoming for me, so thank you so much for inviting me to be with you all at USLA, for all you do and what you've done through all the years, but also for not forgetting this old retired life guard. I'm back among my friends. Especially to the Go JG group, thank you for being here and thank you for your own commitment to health and fitness and safety and being lifeguards.

So many of us started out as youngsters before there was a JG program and it's such a wonderful program. I think the motto of USLA really fits me and serves me real well: Lifeguards for life. It's very apropos, appropriate for me. I think that once you're a lifeguard, especially for ocean lifeguards, open water lifeguards, that that culture never leaves your blood. And I know over the years even after I wasn't guarding any more and I'd have a little free time to go to the beach with my kids and I'd be sitting there, either my wife or my kids would always say, "Look, he still thinks he's a lifeguard. He's out there spotting. He's looking for something." And you'd have this sense that whether you're on a blanket or walking the beach, it's almost as if it's automatic, the head just starts going in a 180 back and forth scanning no matter what you're doing. I can remember so many times sitting there and looking up and watching new kids on the tower and watching what they were watching and seeing if they're seeing what I'm seeing, and my wife would always say "Well, can't you get it out of your blood? What's the matter with you?" I'd say, "I can't." You know,

it's just a part of who you are. And even at this age, as a middle age guy who tries to stay in shape, still works hard at that to set an example, even when I'm on the water this morning, I was sitting out there, nobody in the water, but I still found myself scanning, just looking as if I was working.

Being an open water lifeguard is a huge responsibility and an accomplishment for all who have the privilege to serve. There are core competencies that you develop as a young man or woman working as a lifeguard of any type, especially in the open water which is a greater responsibility, that last you for the rest of your life. Every one of those skills that I learned as a young lifeguard, that I took throughout my years of guarding, I still draw on every day and they're more and more important today. There are many people that I have to give a great deal of thanks to. There's a couple of guards that believe it or not that still are out there, fossils, that are still guarding many, many years later up in Orchard Beach in the Bronx where I worked and the Rockaways. We have still some people that are in to their forty something years. And, you know my first chief out of Rockaways, Carl Martinez, and my second chief, Frank Pia, still are very, very involved in life guarding nationally. I had a chance to work with them for many years and they demonstrated to me the value of leadership, the value of mentorship, made me a better guard going up the chain of command through the years, becoming lieutenant and then supervising other young guards and training at the training academy, recognizing that immense responsibility that we all have.

One of the uniquenesses of this, is that you really become part of a legacy because there is a certain fraternity, there is a certain bond, that draws us all together as lifeguards even after many, many years. And it's a very unique fraternity and I was reminded of that

this past summer. I was at Stanford for a big discussion group with world leaders and went up to a retreat in Northern California and many, many US and some world leaders were there. And Art Linkletter happened to be there. Now you youngsters, you probably don't remember him, but Art Linkletter is just one of the most phenomenal men in the world. He's an entertainer; he's been an entertainer for over 75 years. He's 94 years old now. And we had just met for the first time and we exchanged niceties. There was a number of very well known world leaders and national leaders who were sitting in this group out there when I made the presentation. We were off to the side having a sidebar conversation and the first thing he said to me, "I read your resume." And I thought he was going to ask me about being a doctor or a police officer and there's all these things. And he said to me, "I saw you were a lifeguard." And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "I used to guard down in San Diego in the 20's ad 30's." For the next hour we sat and spoke guards' talk. I mean people were looking at us in amazement. And, he said to me, "So, you still swimming?" I said, "Yeah, Art." He said, "Well, I work out every day. I've got a lap pool at home. I swim 500 yards at least, maybe more every day. I walk a couple miles. I've taught my grandkids and my great-grandkids to swim and some of them are guards. You know, I think in a pinch I could still get out there and do a rescue." 94 years old. And it was great because we discussed, and then I asked him, you know he last guarded in, I think he told me in San Diego in the 20's and 30's. He said, "Hey, you know one of my good friends. We used to swim and work out together and we were both guards." And I said, "Well, who was that?" And he said, "Well, Ronnie Reagan." And then he tells me Reagan stories about life guarding and it was really an extraordinary discussion. But he said, "You know, life guarding made me the person I am today. It taught me to be disciplined; it taught me I had to stay in physical shape to be

able to do the job. It taught me about responsibility, about mentoring, leadership. You know, it really has made me a better person.”

I started thinking about that and I recognized that he was absolutely right on target that, life guarding has that ability to make you a much better person. The more you put in, the more commitment and more time you have, the better person you are. And as I look at my own transition in life, the first real job I had with responsibility as a kid was as a lifeguard at 16 years old when I went to open water as one of the new trainees and got indoctrinated in more or less the lifeguard boot camp. Over the years you know I went through that pipeline. Ultimately, for the kids I'll tell you, I never planned to be Surgeon General. I didn't do so well as a youngster. I was not as smart as all of you. I dropped out of high school when I was 17. Got a little break in my life guarding right then. Went into the army and got an equivalency diploma. The army saved me because I made some bad decisions as a kid. I started off ok life guarding, learned about responsibility, accountability, and so on, recognized the immense responsibility I had as a lifeguard. Then when I went into the army, I had to get a GED because I couldn't get into Special Forces where I wanted to go. But one of the first things that happened when I had to try out for Special Forces, because as you go into the pipeline for selection one of the things you had to do is a water course, the first thing I had to do was swim 500 yards. Well, people were struggling but I said, "This is easy. There's nothing to this." I mean, I had to do it with clothes on and everything, but that wasn't a big deal. And one of the things I recognized as I went through that training and then later training when we were out in the ocean at Key West and other places doing scuba and stuff, I felt right at home in the water and most of the other people that were in the class with me, who were going through the various phases of training, water scared

them. They didn't know how to act; they didn't know what to do. Many of them failed out of the pipeline because they didn't have a comfort level with the water and I felt as comfortable in the water as I did on land, maybe even more comfortable at times. And so, I recognized that I got a great deal of value having developed that expertise in the water and having become a lifeguard made me a better soldier at the time. I went through Special Forces training; I thought I was going to make the military a career.

I stayed in for a while but left eventually because my colleagues encouraged me to go to college. I wasn't prepared for college. I hadn't taken SAT's or PSAT's, had no notable transcript that was able to be sent to anybody, so I was very fortunate that the Bronx Community College in New York had an open enrollment program for Viet Nam Veterans and they let me in. I became an A student; I did real well. But one of the first things that I did when I went back to the real world was start life guarding again. I recertified and my career began once again. And I again look at those times as some of the most productive in my life. Like my wife says today, she'll see me daydreaming once in a while after a particularly bad day, because you know Washington is a combat zone, you get beat up pretty good every day, and I'll come home and I'm shaking my head and she says, "Richie, come back." And I'll be drifting away in my mind and she says, "I bet you're thinking about the beach, right?" She's always right all the time because you know I remember a few tough times when the job was bad and I'd just get fed up and frustrated, whether it's this job or another job, she would always joke to the kids, "Your father's outlet is always threatening that he's going to go back to being a lifeguard where it's the last job he had where he was happy, where they paid him to do good things, to work out and stay in shape. Now he's got these great jobs, but they have so much frustration. And you know a lot of that is true when

you think about it I'm sure for all of you. It was probably the last job I had where I got up every morning and I just couldn't wait to get in the car and get to the beach. My big decision for the day was when was I going to get my break to get my work out in and was I going to get my swim, was I going to get the wave, and then how many rescues you were going to do that day, and it was all so positive. Like most of you, you know, we used to sit there sometimes laughing and saying, "Can you believe they pay us for this?" I mean it was just absolutely incredible. It's just one of those very special jobs that you get so much back from and you learn so much from. Even to this day, no joke, I spoke to Frank Pia just a couple of months ago on a project he was working on, I was helping, and I asked him, "Frank do you still have those days?" And he said, "Oh, every day. I love to go back. I just love to go back and turn the clock back." He'll even go do it today. A couple of the guys I guarded with are still up there, both chiefs in New York and they are well past their 40th year up there and they still get the benefit of that.

So becoming surgeon general wasn't a planned journey for me; it was entirely fortuitous. But being a lifeguard has made me a much better person, a much better doctor, a much better surgeon general, certainly understanding first response from the ground up. An element of first response that most cops, which I've been, and paramedics, which I've also been, don't get, is waterside response and all of the skills that you have to bring to waterside response. Of course, that's broadened today with prevention and so on.

Now, my Surgeon General role...the Surgeon General of the United States is statutorily responsible to protect and advance the health, safety and security of the United States. Sounds like a lifeguard to me. Doesn't it? It is. It absolutely is. It's the same thing. I mean my area of responsibility is a little bigger than a beach, but it's having me do the

same job to advance and protect health, safety and security of those who are at the waterside or those who are in our world as it relates to a whole lot of different challenges beside water. My job as surgeon general is really a tough one.

As I said, I didn't plan to be here. It's a series of fortuitous events. I never expected to be selected. In fact it was a call out of the blue late one night to come and become surgeon general, or at least be considered for it. And the first thing I did one day, a call came, young man was the 8th voice mail and said, "Dr. Carmona, please call us. We'd like to talk to you about a job." Left his number. Said he was from the White House. And, of course, I laughed, because I thought this is some of those life guards I used to hang out with trying to set me up, and they're all going to laugh. I said, "Well, I'm not going to get into that." Then I looked at the id, caller id, it had a 202 area code with a 456 prefix, which now I know is the White House. I've got it on speed dial now, but before I didn't know that it was. First thing that came to mind, was I called the next day and he spoke for about 10 minutes about the greatness of Washington and working for the President and he didn't tell me what it was and then he said, "Well, the President's looking for a new U.S. Surgeon General." I was holding the phone and kind of laughing, and I said, "Well, this really, I know for sure now there's another Rich Carmona in the country, and you've got the wrong one." because I had no idea why they would call me. But I figured, being a smart guard and a smart street kid, that there was no downside; I was gainfully employed. I went ahead and said, "Sure, I'll sign on and go through the pipeline." Figuring that in a couple weeks, they'll figure out they got the wrong guy, send me home, and I'll still have my job, there's nothing lost.

So the first thing I really did was to memorize a rejection speech, because I wanted to be rejected with dignity. Because when calls came in I didn't want to be caught off guard.

I didn't want them to say, you know, "Tell me, ... Well, Dr. Carmona, I'm sorry they've selected Dr. A. You're a wonderful person..." and the usual stuff, and then I would be going, "OK," and feel undignified. So, I had this whole paragraph worked out. "Thank you, it's been a pleasure to be considered, to be back in uniform for my country." Every time the call would come and I would have the opportunity to say that and they started inviting me back to Washington. Then I started getting with famous people in Washington, and then I got real concerned, because I figured that I really wanted to work there if I'd slip through the federal government this far. You know, maybe it would be a good place to work.

Then the final call came, and, in the midst of the week there, I started seeing my name in the newspapers as somebody on the short list. You know there, with these big positions, the papers get a hold of it. It starts getting your name's in the paper as being on the short list and the short list confers an unerring credibility; it means you're really important now because you're on the short list. But you never know how short it is; you don't know who's on it, but they've eliminated a lot of people. So I ended up on the short list, and then I got [static] call and they said, actually just before that they had called at the end of March, two and a half years ago, and said, "Well, Dr. Carmona," and I thought this was going to be my rejection call, a very high placed source at the White House, said, "Dr. Carmona, we'd like to know what you are doing on the 26th of March." I said, "Well, who's we?" They said, "Well, by the way, we'd like to know what you and your family are doing, especially your children." I thought, "Well, I'm screwed now, they want to interview my kids. I'll never get the job." So I told them, and they said, "Well, the President made his decision and would like you to come to the White House on March 26th to be announced as his nominee for the next US Surgeon General." It was absolutely incredible.

Showed up at the White House, and President Bush treated me just like a family member. He spent the length of the whole ceremony to take pictures with my kids and talk to me and put me at ease. It's funny because we were standing in the Oval Office, which was back here, and there's a big room like this as you come out to the Green Room. All the cabinet members are there and everything, and he said, "Look, don't be nervous, Rich." He said, "We do this all the time. Here's what we're going to do. At about two minutes before we go in, the Secret Service is going to come in here, and they're going to ask me if I'm ready, and I'm going to say, 'Yes.' Then speakers up there start to play *Hail to the Chief*." Then he looked at me and said, "Now that's for me." I said, "Ok, sir." And he said, "Now the Marine Band will be over there, and you're here, and Secretary Thompson will be there, and I want you over here on my left shoulder. I'm going to be in the middle, and we'll make a right turn and we'll walk into this room. It'll be filled with cameras and all the tv and radio and newspapers, and your family will be in the front row. You ok? You ready for that?" So the music starts, I start hearing *Hail to the Chief*, and he's standing in front of me. There's a bunch of other staffers all around, and as I looked down, he's got cuffed pants on his suit, and the cuff is like torn on the back of his heel. I said, "Just a minute." I went forward and I fixed the cuff on his pants, and I stepped back, and Secretary Thompson looked at me and said, "Carmona, you're going to do real well." Old life guarding skills: just take care of everything.

So as Surgeon General though, once you get through all that, it's a very difficult process to come through and then go before the United States Senate and go through confirmation where everybody in the world watches you. That was a very intrusive process, often very malicious. You know, you become a public figure over night. I came to

understand the process more or less like you can where special forces train, or airborne training, or lifeguards school, where you get thrown into this pipeline, and you get beat up a little bit more time here as you go through the pipeline, and if you come out on the other end with vital signs, you can have the job. And that was pretty much it.

Then you have to decide what do you do as Surgeon General. I had to come up with some ideas and priorities and a portfolio as to where we're going to advance the country. And just briefly, the portfolio that the President and Secretary were very happy to advocate, and advocate for, and agree with what I had said, was that we have to become a nation first of prevention, that for far too long we have been a treatment oriented society. I know that from my own experience, because as a trauma surgeon, on any day, two or three out of every four patients that we admitted to the emergency room were there and didn't have to be there. They were people that made bad decisions, people who committed a crime, people who drank and drove, people who did domestic violence, people who use drugs, on and on and on. Or, people who made serious bad decisions their whole life, weren't physically active, gained weight, got hypertensive, had heart disease. Didn't make a difference, because no matter why they came before us in that emergency room, we had to spend a lot of money to fix them and then ultimately put them back out into society to probably repeat the same mistakes. So, prevention has to be the thing we do first and, of course, guarding is a lot about prevention also as you know. We don't just sit there and wait for people to go down. We try and make the water safe. We try and make the beach safe. We educate, and, as a last resort, try to be pre-emptive when we see people doing things that are foolish that might cause them some problem. It's about prevention, because I think whether you're a trauma surgeon having to resuscitate somebody or a lifeguard going in to

make the rescue, in a certain way we both have failed because somebody didn't appreciate the danger, somebody didn't appreciate the risk and threats before them, and then we have to act to save a life.

My second priority is new to the Surgeon General and that is one of preparedness. I am the 17th Surgeon General of the United States. My predecessors had to deal with a lot of things, but none of them had to deal with terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. That's part of what we call the all hazards approach. All hazards being the things that we more commonly deal with -- hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, other tragedies that are not man caused generally, but accidental -- and having to engage these new threats and put them into our repertoire, understanding terrorism, understanding the tools of the terrorist, the weapons of mass destruction, whether they be conventional weapons or unconventional weapons, which are the ones that scare us the most: the nuclear, biological and chemical. Chemical we understand, because we call those hazmat. Hazmat teams know how to deal with that and most lifeguards are pretty much concerned with that. What we really don't understand a lot is the biologic and nuclear. We're trying to get that information out to the community just as quickly as we can—paramedics, police officers, guards, everybody else who may be a first responder needs to have this information and build an infrastructure that broadens our EMS, fire and law enforcement systems to incorporate these new threats, because the fact is after 9/11 the world changed. Before 9/11, whoever thought of a plane as a weapon? Whoever thought of a germ, a pathogen, as a weapon? Now, it's common place. How do we incorporate that in to all we do to make our country healthier and safer and to prevent anything from occurring?

Those are all important issues. And one of the things that's real important, especially to Go JG members, is that you're embarking on a lifelong commitment. Here you're going to be a lifeguard; this is a profession, this is not something that you just hang out and do. One of the things you recognize, especially when you associate with USLA professional guarding, is that this is a very coveted profession and people expect you to perform to a very high level. Be professional at all times, keep enhancing your skills, physical fitness, eat right. The fact is, that those are all the things that we actually need every American to do, and they are the cornerstone of what life guarding is about: healthy living, community service, staying physically fit, avoiding risk in your life, helping others. It's really a wonderful profession for that. The fact is, that in your career, you will go through many transitions of learning about the science of guarding and the science of health. When I first went through life guard training, there was no such thing as CPR. We used the Holger-Neilsen method and the Sylvester method. Nobody touched the mouth. You pulled arms up and down and pushed on people. I see some old timers here who still remember those days. I still have some of my hand outs from those days. And then late '60s and early '70's, we started having the emergence of mouth-to-mouth and CPR as we know it today, and then there were lots of other things that happened over the last 3-4 decades. We had debates over the best way to rescue. Some people using rescue buoys; some people not. Some people doing different techniques in the water; some people not. We had the emergence of different organizations like the Red Cross; WSI programs that came in. But all of those things as you grow older and become more sophisticated in your leadership from JG to guards, you'll have to continue learning. So one of the things about life guarding is, it's like being a doctor or a nurse. It is lifelong learning. You don't just get a couple weeks in

training and put it behind you and say, "That's it." Every year there's new information; every year you're challenged. And what you'll find out, too, if you stay in guarding long enough, every year you become physically challenged, because it ain't that easy to get up every morning after getting beat up in the surf and working out and testing and so on and so forth. I used to joke quite often that if it wasn't for Motrin and ice packs, I probably couldn't have lasted as long as I did. It is a lifelong commitment to what we do. It's a wonderful opportunity. I welcome you to the brotherhood of lifeguards, because I don't think you appreciate the wonderful fraternity that you've entered into yet because you're still young and learning about it, but it's a great camaraderie world wide. As I said, meeting a very famous man, we could have spoken about many things -- Mr. Linkletter chose to spend an hour with me talking about life guarding and swimming. As I travel the world and different places, as soon as somebody finds out you're a lifeguard, there's this immediate bond. What beach were you at? You start exchanging information about techniques and training and so on, and, inevitably, do you know this person or that person. It is a wonderful fraternity.

How can life guarding, how can junior life guarding, help the surgeon general and help our country today? Well, there's a lot of things that can be done. First of all, the skills of a junior and senior life guard, the skills all of you possess here, are core competencies that we desperately need today in keeping our country safe and healthy. As I said earlier, the fact that you are physically fit, the fact that you are experts in the water, the fact that you know prevention and safety, the fact is that you are first responders, you're first responders with a focus on water. But when I look over the entire country and say, "Well, who do I need to help us keep our land safe?" Life guarding is a very pivotal part of that,

especially the Go JG program. As you know we've been doing some work the last year to incorporate the junior life guards into our medical reserve corps. The president put together what's called the Freedom Corps, and there are several aspects to that. The most important one that I'm dealing with is the medical reserve corps and what that is, is a volunteer group of health and health related professionals around the country who provide community service, usually through an EMS system or metropolitan medical response system or a number of other venues that can be organized in a community. Nobody had thought about life guarding and with the thousands and thousands of life guards that we have in the GO JG program, it's a wonderful opportunity to get youngsters involved in community service, senior life guards involved in training and education and be more involved in our EMS system and response to all hazards, because again you have the skills. Whether it's an emergency on the beach or it's an emergency on the street, the approach is the same way. The ABC's are the same; the issues of incident command, the issues of chain of command, and so on, are all the same. So you have those core competencies and you've been tested already as guards because you respond to emergencies every day; you deal with issues every day. So the important thing that I'd like to ask all of you JG group, as well as the leadership here of the USLA, consider expanding your horizons and becoming part of the medical reserve corps in your community, working with the metropolitan medical response system. Be a broader responder than a life guard by taking your skills and using them for other purposes because we need all the help we can get now to protect, prevent, respond, mitigate, recover if and when bad things happen and you all have those skills to know how to do that. Many of you already are EMT's depending on where it is that you practice your guarding skills. So I'd ask you to consider

that because right now we have over 30,000 volunteers nationally within our medical reserve corps and about 240 registered medical reserve corps within various communities throughout the United States doing just that: expanding the role of whatever the doctors, nurses and other health professionals are doing in the community. I would like to see life guarding take a position there of leadership and be involved with our medical reserve corps also. So please consider that.

In addition, as you think about my job as surgeon general and what I have to do to deal with an obesity epidemic that's unprecedented in our country with 400,000 people a year dieing from obesity related disease. We have 9 million children in this country right now who are overweight or obese and many of them have diabetes. When I was a young doctor a couple of decades ago, you never saw a kid with type II diabetes. You see them all over now; every pediatrician has cases of type II diabetes. It's tied to inactivity, it's tied to the way we eat and the obesity problem, and yet, when you look at Go JG and guards, you don't see that problem. Why? Because they tend to eat healthy. They tend to stay physically fit and they don't have those problems. What great role models for the rest of the country to see youngsters like this and older guards like many of you who live those core values, who stay healthy, who stay fit, can mentor others, can set the example by what they do every day. So, I'm asking for your assistance because I think life guarding is a very close held secret outside of life guarding and I think that there's so much that we can do with your skills as well as your leadership and the examples you set in all the communities that you work in.

We look at other epidemics of health. If you look at obesity and smoking, smoking takes about 440,000 lives a year. 440,000 people die every year from smoking related

disease. If you put smoking and obesity together, it's nearly a million lives lost every year that's preventable and that doesn't count all of the ones that are sick that haven't died yet that we pay for. So a lot of what we pay for in health care today, because of the health care crisis, is preventable. If people exercise, if people didn't smoke, if they ate a healthy diet, if they didn't become obese, it'd be a whole lot cheaper and there'd be a whole lot more care for everybody to get, but you've got to practice prevention first. That's part of the problem and crisis that we have.

In preparedness you all can provide valuable insight. You can provide expertise as regarding the water and how we can not only keep the water safe for our swimmers, but now the water before us, right there, presents a target of opportunity. It presents a potential threat to the United States because of adversaries who use the water as a vehicle to hurt us. What better group of people to be informed and work with us than lifeguards who are the experts at the water side. And in many communities they are already doing that. Again, I reach out to you and I ask you be innovative, think about how you can make your community safer and broaden the scope and responsibility of our lifeguards, especially in the open water.

Another area that I'm responsible for is health care disparities. The fact is that minorities typically have less access to health care, and they have poor outcomes when they have access to that health care. Once again, life guarding is a non-discriminatory job. If you're healthy and you're fit and you can swim and you're willing to take the training, you can be a life guard. So help me to recruit and retain more minority students into life guarding, showing them the right way of life, showing them about health and safety and welfare and doing the right things. It's an important thing to do. So, as in many professions,

minorities are often not well represented. We have to reach out and get more in there so that we can better reflect our populations.

In closing, I'd like to tell you that there's not a day in my life honestly that I don't think about the wonderful years I had as a life guard and all that being a life guard has brought to me to make me a better person, to make me a better doctor, to make me a better surgeon general. Those skills help me every single day. I want to thank the USLA for thinking of me and giving me this honor to more or less have a homecoming and see some of my old friends and give thanks for all of the things that life guarding gave me over the years. The legacy I leave as surgeon general will certainly be tempered with my life guarding experience over the years, and I realize more and more that as I move forward as surgeon general. You come into the job and you're very enthusiastic and passionate, and you want to change the world and save lives, just like a life guard. But then, when you get to the beltway, your enthusiasm is tempered by the reality of Washington. You recognize that things don't get done as quickly as you'd like and saving populations is maybe not as easy as saving a life in the water. It's a little bit more difficult because you have to be a diplomat as well to survive, not just have those core competencies. But as I think about the legacy that I would like to leave, it certainly will be driven a lot by my life guarding experiences. As I serve you all as the doctor of the nation, as a surgeon general, I recognize that the bar is high for me because many of the constituent groups that I was part of look at me and say, "Well, he was one of us." People expect a great deal of me, not just as surgeon general, but as a surgeon general, maybe the first surgeon general, who was a life guard. So I recognize that legacy is important, and I hope that when I finish in this position, that the president who took a chance on me and the secretary and congress who confirmed me

unanimously, which was unprecedented, all can have their faith reaffirmed in me, that you all, which are where I arose from as a life guard, can look at me and also feel that I've represented you well, not only as your surgeon general, but as being one of you, as a life guard. I also recognize that the position of surgeon general of the United States now is no longer just US Surgeon General, it is truly a global position. I have offices in Afghanistan, Iraq, around the world. I have 800 duty stations around the world for my people and every day, anonymously, they work not only keeping the United States healthy and safe and secure, but also to help other nations stay healthy and safe and secure. And one of the greatest tools that I realize I have now as Surgeon General, that my colleagues don't have, is that health can be used as a tool for diplomacy to achieve peace. What I call health diplomacy. And as I travel the world and I sit with Arabs and Israelis and nations that have been divided for lots of reasons and I have discussions with these leaders, it is always incredible to me how adversaries can sit at the same table. I did this last two years ago at the World Health Conference with the Arabs and Israelis, moderating a meeting with them. Although die hard adversaries, for hours we sat and discussed how each country desired to make their country healthier and safer, clean and secure. And I recognized that I had some unique tools to help effect what I call health diplomacy and maybe use that tool to achieve peace in some way in a very unstable world.

Thank you for allowing me to be with you today. It's a privilege to come home.