

N.C. VETERANS COUNCIL
ADAMS MARK HOTEL
CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA
SEPTEMBER 29, 1984
2:00 P.M.

ADDRESS BY
U.S. SENATOR JESSE HELMS

For most of this week, it appeared highly unlikely that I would be able to come here today. The Senate is winding down its 1984 session, and this is a crucial time for those of us who are trying to continue to stabilize our nation in terms of defending the American people, and this is a crucial time for those of us who are trying to continue to stabilize our nation in terms of defending the American economy, taxes, federal controls -- along with various other aspects of an all-powerful government that would, if you and I sit idly by, would control your lives and pocketbooks.

All week long, we were assured that there would be a Saturday session, and possibly even a Sunday session. On

Thursday, it began to appear that there might not be a Saturday session. So here I am, delighted to be with this organization of dedicated Americans whom I admire and respect.

There have been many times during my 12 years in the Senate when I have been prevented from visiting with various groups. I have the old-fashioned notion that Senators are elected to stay in Washington when the Senate is in session -- and be there to vote on the crucial issues that constantly arise. That may not be good politics, but I regard it as my duty -- even though there is the calculated risk that the opposition feels no restraint about full-time politicking.

Senator Jeremiah Denton asked me to convey to you his sincere respects. We've been through a time in our country when it was not fashionable to have heroes. We are getting away from that attitude -- because it has been America's heroes -- people like you -- who have been willing to lay down your lives for your country, if necessary -- to make sure that freedom survives in this world. So you have "paid your dues" -- and, just as I regard Jerry Denton as a hero, I also place you in the same category.

I wish I had a distinguished war record. I recall going to the Navy recruiting office to volunteer on the afternoon of December 7, 1941, and again the following day. I suspect many of you

also volunteered that day, or soon thereafter. It took three months for me to obtain a waiver in order to be sworn in as an enlisted man in the Navy, but the Navy finally worked it out -- despite a slight hearing deficiency in my left ear. I remember that cross-country train-ride to San Diego, and the rigors of boot camp. And while I was disappointed at the limitations on my service, I was nonetheless proud to wear the uniform of my country. I wish I could have served as many of you served, but I served, as you did, where I was assigned and was grateful for the opportunity to serve at all.

Every political season, the air is filled with confusing political rhetoric. You have candidates who declare in one

that they are for a strong national defense -- and in the next breath declare that they are going to cut defense spending. They don't say where or how they're going to cut, of course, because their hope is that they can flip and flop and be all things to all people.

I have been constantly criticized by liberal politicians and editors because I refuse to slash away at President Reagan's efforts to rebuild our defense capability. I don't apologize for believing in, and supporting, a strong national defense.

And that's one of the things that I like about the VFW. I remember working with the leadership of the VFW when the Panama Canal giveaway was before the Senate. You stood strong and tall then, and I was

(and am) very proud of you.

The VFW wasn't deceived about the so-called SALT II treaty. Again, the VFW was willing to stand up and be counted. You recognized that ratifying that very bad treaty would have destroyed America's ability to defend our people.

Click 'em off, issue after issue -- and the VFW has been in there pitching. I want you to know that I am honored to be on the same team with you.

You understand how imperative it is that our nation be restored to strength and stability -- in national defense, in economics, and in our moral priorities.

One other thing: The VFW is having an effect on the attitudes of young people. I am in daily contact with young men and

women from North Carolina, and elsewhere around the nation.

I find it exciting just being with these young men and women. For a period, a decade or so ago, many seemed to have lost their way. Our country was under severe criticism. It was open season for all those who were eager to tell us what was wrong with America. It was a time when, as Jeane Kirkpatrick said recently, America seemed to walk around with a sign on its back that said "Kick me."

But the young people I see now are upbeat. They stand proud. They want America to be No. One. As a matter of fact, America always was No. One, but some people were afraid to say so.

And our young people are more realistic too. They respond to leadership such as you are providing. They understand that we are in a battle to save our freedom. They are willing, and eager to serve our country, and they are proud to wear our uniform. They know that their lives -- and the lives of all the American people -- are on the line.

We all saw the way they responded in Grenada to the call to save American lives and re-establish freedom on an island where communism had established a beachhead. In just a few weeks now, Grenada is going to have a free election.

But sometimes, they don't come back. Every man and woman who has ever put on a uniform knows that, and accepts it. A few

days ago in Beirut, Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Michael Ray Wagner, faced that truth. He was from Pilot, North Carolina. We laid him to rest in Arlington Cemetery last Wednesday, along side others who had made the ultimate sacrifice. We mourned for a fellow North Carolinian, but we remembered that there are many more North Carolinians like him in the outposts of freedom all over the world.

Some of you will recall that President Reagan asked me to go out to Korea last year to help draw attention to the thirtieth anniversary of the United States-Korea Mutual Defense Treaty. Congressman Larry McDonald was going out there too, but as you know, Larry, and flight KAL 007 never got there. The Soviets

proved once more that Communists will always be Communists, even though some of the professional diplomats in the U.S. State Department seem to forget that. The shooting down of KAL 007 was an act of brutal murder, an act which showed exactly what the communists would like to do to anyone who crosses their path on the road to world domination.

A couple of days later, I stood in the DMZ, right next to the barbed wire fence. For those of you who knew it well, it is still there. The communist flag still flies on the other side, and the loudspeakers still blare meaningless propaganda all day long. I thought of the Korea on this side of the fence, and the Korea on the other side -- the one, prosperous,

dynamic, with a people full of spirit; and the other, stagnant, backward, and a broken people. You could see immediately what the free world is all about.

And you could see it in our soldiers standing guard. Those assigned to DMZ duty are the pick of the lot. They are chosen first of all because they are good soldiers -- intelligent, well disciplined, in command of their emotions. Besides, they all had earned a black belt in karate. And as I turned from talking to one after another, I felt a thrill along my spine, for I realized that these guys more often than not were talking the sweetest talk this side of heaven, and I mean a North Carolina accent. They were a long way from God's country, but they were North

Carolínians through and through, and I was proud.

That's why I have always tried to give our soldiers and our veterans a fair shake. There are some people who will try to tell you that "Helms has voted against the veterans X number of times." I think you know that this is just cheap political talk. The truth is that I have never -- repeat, never -- voted to cut the benefits paid to our veterans. On the contrary, I have always voted to increase those benefits, particularly when we were suffering double-digit inflation in the Carter-Mondale administration. But some votes in Washington are not for real; they are intended to make headlines. I don't think that is in the veterans' interest to

propose increases that will drive inflation up and destroy the job market. I've never known a veteran who wanted special treatment at the expense of his fellow citizens.

That visit to Korea reminded me once again of the close connection between a strong defense and a strong foreign policy. The two go hand in hand.

To illustrate, let me return to the Carter-Mondale Administration proposal that we give away the Panama Canal. I was opposed to it then, and I am still opposed to it today. We had expert after expert come up to the Senate to explain why we should give up our sovereignty in the Canal Zone. They said that the surrender of our sovereign rights would win us new respect in Latin America.

The debate took longer than any other treaty ever considered by the U.S. Senate. In the end we came within one vote of defeating the giveaway.

What happened then? Six months after the giveaway of the Canal was ratified, Fidel Castro took note of which way the wind was blowing. Castro saw that a great power, the United States, had surrendered its sovereign rights in the Caribbean with virtually no pressure at all. Castro observed that we had given up secure rights to some of the most strategic military bases in the world. Castro saw that we had agreed to a time-table to remove our military forces, and to turn over the control of a strategic waterway to a weak, unstable nation.

So six months after the giveaway, he called a group of Nicaraguan Communist revolutionaries to a meeting in Havana. They were called Sandinistas.

Castro told the Sandinistas that he would back them to the hilt. He told them they would have to agree to his strategy, which was to set up a united front with a group of non-communist dupes. Their orders were to topple the Nicaraguan government, and then get rid of the dupes.

That's how the communist take-over of Nicaragua got started, just six months after the ratification of the Panama Canal giveaway. And it is through Nicaragua that he is trying to take over El Salvador. It is the giveaway of the Canal that set Central America aflame. President Reagan

was against it, but of course he wasn't President then. But now he has to try to clean up the mess.

On October 1, we reach a milestone in the schedule of the Canal giveaway. The Treaty requires us to give up Fort Gulick, in what was once the U.S. Canal Zone. It was at Fort Gulick that thousands of Latin American soldiers were trained in the military tactics and the U.S. way of life. The giveaway advocates told us that Panama would be glad to renegotiate our lease on Fort Gulick, and we would be able to stay indefinitely. But two days from now, Fort Gulick will be gone. The President can't do anything about it, because it was signed away by the Carter-Mondale administration.

A second case in point was the SALT II treaty which was never ratified.

There are some people who say we ought to be talking to the Soviet Union about arms control. Well, talk is cheap, but sometimes it is dangerous if you don't know what you are talking about. I favor negotiations with the Soviet Union to achieve real arms reductions on both sides; but I don't favor the kind of negotiations we have had in the past. Let me explain.

In 1972, we signed the SALT I treaty, and it was ratified. One of the least-quoted provisions was that neither side would seek to gain unilateral advantage of the other as part of the arms control process. But what happened?

In less than one year, the Soviets, using numerical loopholes, deployed the gigantic SS-19 ICBMs, followed by the SS-18 ICBMs. This increased their strategic nuclear capability by a factor of five to one in five years. And then they began secretly to violate other provisions. They tested three surface-to-air defense systems in anti-ballistic missile modes; they opened an illegal ABM test range, and tested rapid-reload ballistic defense missiles.

All this was happening while the Carter-Mondale Administration was negotiating SALT II. Meanwhile, the comparative capability of the United States actually declined during the late 1970's. That's because we built no new systems. Our

systems deteriorated with age, the deliverable megatonnage decreased, and we curtailed improvements in the command and control and communications systems.

That is why SALT II was a strategic disaster. If the Communists had not showed themselves to be Communists in Afghanistan, the Senate might not have awakened in time.

We know that the Soviets are building a gigantic new radar system in Siberia to function as an anti-ballistic missile system, and that it may be operational next year. This is completely illegal under SALT I. If the Soviets feel they have the ability to shoot down our ICBMs, they might very well think that they could launch a first strike and get away with it.

In the past four years, President Reagan has worked hard to get our defenses back up to par. Development efforts on the B-1 bomber were resumed. He is trying to get the new M-X ICBMs under production. We are beginning development of a small mobile Midgetman missile.

But perhaps one of the most important developments was President Reagan's proposal on March 23 last year to develop a new space-based, non-nuclear defense system. This is what his detractors call "Star Wars." But it is the most important shift in defense priorities that has occurred in the past decade.

The sloganeers are saying that this will "militarize space." Actually, it will de-militarize space. It is the

ICBM that militarized space, since the trajectory of an ICBM has to leave the earth's atmosphere before it comes back down to hit its target. The President's plan is to put a system of satellites in space that will track down any ICBM leaving the atmosphere and destroy it safely without a nuclear explosion. It would make ICBMs virtually obsolete.

There are some self-appointed experts who say it won't work, or it won't be 100% effective. I don't think anyone who ever wore a uniform would ever say that. We all know that no defense needs to be 100% effective -- if it scares off the enemy from making an attack.

I tell you that the President's

space defense proposal will be 100% effective as a deterrent -- as a deterrent -- even if it were only 50% effective as technology. No enemy could afford to launch an attack where the chance remained that we could retaliate.

And it will work. I have 100% effective faith in the genius of Americans to solve any technological problem. Besides we have already proved enough technology to make it work. We have all the components working to get started; we only have to put them together. Two months ago, we had a crucial test of intercepting a missile thousands of miles away from the launch, and it worked.

That's what's great about America. We respond to challenge. We respond to

leadership. We like to move forward, and we are moving forward after a long period when we seemed to be adrift. It has been wonderful to talk to you today. Again, I wish that I could have been there in person, but you've been a good audience nevertheless. Thank you and God bless you.