

Remarks by the Honorable Navy Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
Fisher Distinguished Civilian Humanitarian Award  
Pentagon, Washington D.C.  
09 November, 2013

Thank you Juan Garcia, a great Assistant Secretary and also a Navy Reservist. I want to welcome you all here. We have a pretty stellar group of people, a couple of Assistant Secretaries of the Navy, a retired Lieutenant General in the Army, the Surgeon General of the Navy is here, and as Juan Garcia said the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps. And this weather seems just a little too mild and balmy for the Marines I know. I am very happy to be here and I think that it is incredibly appropriate that we are here in the Hall of Heroes, a Hall that honors the people that have been awarded our highest honor, the Medal of Honor, to recognize some of heroes in a different way, but heroes none the less.

The award we are presenting was established in 1996 by the Secretaries of the Navy, the Army, and the Air Force. Zachary and Elizabeth Fisher were the very first recipients of that award and the award was subsequently named for them.

We had a conversation in my office before this ceremony, and Ken Fisher and I talked about how confusing it is, the fact that this is the Fisher Award given today to a family named Fisher. No relation, but I can't tell you how confusing the read-ahead was last night. So I'm going to talk about the Fisher House Foundation, and then I'm going to talk about LEEK and Dave and Kate Fisher after that. The Fisher House Foundation is best known for its work building and supporting houses on the grounds of military installations, military hospitals and VA hospitals so

that family members have a place to go when they are visiting our wounded and injured. To date they have built more than fifty houses which support more than 18,000 families a year. That's what they're best known for but they do a lot of other things. They also support scholarships for military children and they run the Heroes Miles Program so that you can give some of your frequent flier miles to relatives so they can fly in cost free to be with their loved one, who may be undergoing rehab in the hospital.

Today that Foundation is run by Ken Fisher, who is with us today, senior partner at Fisher Brothers in New York. He is here to help us present the award. Ken took over management of the Foundation from his uncle Zachary and he has continued that incredible family vision. He talked about how big the shoes were to fill, following Zachary and Elizabeth Fisher. But Ken, from all of us, you fill those shoes very ably and you continue to lead the Fisher House Foundation in a remarkable way. He also is on the Intrepid Museum board and on the New York's Finest Foundation board, among a whole lot of other things. He literally supports our military every day of the year.

Now, the other Fishers. This year's recipient of the Fisher Distinguished Civilian Humanitarian award is LEEK Hunting and Mountain Preserve. Their program is on a 256 acre property in Potter County, Pennsylvania. I had to be educated on where Potter County, Pennsylvania is, they explained it very well. It reminded me a lot about Choctaw County, Mississippi, where I grew up. It is designed to provide therapeutic outdoor experience, including hunting and fishing, for our wounded veterans. The volunteers who work at LEEK provide each veteran a customized event, suited to their injuries and more importantly to their abilities. They also focus

on a camp environment where wounded warriors can help each other through the healing process, both mentally and physically.

Now, managing a program like the LEEK Lodge is a massive undertaking, especially with the personalized support that they give to our wounded service members. For that, LEEK Lodge maintains a huge network of volunteers including a lot of veterans of our nation's wars, including three from World War II. It has numerous individual and corporate sponsors to help maintain the program. They told me a story today in my office of a VFW Post in Ohio, a small Post, who raised \$30,000 for this program doing chicken dinners. That's the sort of support they have, the sort of help that they have inspired, not only around where they are but also as far away as a VFW Post in Ohio. Ed and Lew Fisher, who founded the program, have dedicated this work to their father, who was a regular charitable volunteer, and mentor, and an amputee himself.

Veterans are critical to our country. They are highly qualified, incredibly talented people, with specialized skills and the ability to learn new skills very quickly. They are flexible, experienced, and willing to work. Our wounded veterans in particular have overcome adversity in new forms and they demonstrate dedication and perseverance every day. These are qualities our society desperately needs.

Programs like LEEK Hunting and Mountain Lodge and the Fisher House are much more than just giving back to the men and women who have dedicated their lives to the defense of our country. These programs are also about the future. These programs help ensure that our

returning veterans are integrated back into society and that they are given the chance to continue to contribute in a very meaningful way. Our nation needs strong men and women who are able to overcome obstacles and who know how to inspire others. LEEK Lodge helps us find those men and women and help them continue to serve in a different and still very critical way.

So from the Navy, Semper Fortis: Always Courageous. And from the Marine Corps, Semper Fideles: Always Faithful. Thank you.