Good morning. It is indeed a pleasure and a privilege to be here today…as we honor the thousands upon thousands of courageous women in uniform…who have put their lives on the line so that ours might be safer.

Indeed, we are grateful for the many personal and professional sacrifices these women have made...especially in the past...when promotions were hard to come by...family responsibilities were wholly incompatible with military obligations...and veterans benefits, as well as military burials, were reserved only for men.

Thankfully, we have come a long way since then...as women continue to forge new inroads in today's military. Nowhere is that more evident than on our college campuses...where the number of servicewomen we enroll is growing larger every year. In fact, of the 26,000 active duty soldiers, reservists, and veterans we serve at University of Maryland University College...I am proud to report that around 7,200 of them are women.

As you might well imagine...their stories of sacrifice and determination not only inspire us...they also provide our faculty and staff with extraordinary insight around what it takes for these students to succeed. And to illustrate that point, I would like to share one such story with you this morning.

Like so many of our military students, Staff Sergeant Helen Howard was determined to earn a bachelor's degree. Which she did. After a long and certainly winding academic journey...fraught with more than a few obstacles along the way...including divorce and single parenting...13 cross-continent transfers, and a 15-month deployment in Iraq, where she was seriously injured. In describing this journey, she wrote...

Going to college as a wife, a mother, and a military service member certainly wasn't easy. And although it took awhile, I made it to the finish line, likening myself to an athlete, a long distance runner of 23 years.
Though weary and tired, my body and mind eventually found the strength to handle one more course...eight more weeks...one more exam...one last paper. But through it all, I was never alone...because UMUC was always there as my coach, my running partner, my personal trainer, my fan, and my cheerleader. It doesn’t get any better than that!

Now while Staff Sergeant Howard’s story is certainly compelling…it is not at all uncommon. Nor is the intensive support she received an exaggeration.

While military students of both genders face any number of challenges along the way...I have found that they are for the most part talented and tenacious students...who will do whatever it takes to achieve their academic goals. They are also pragmatic consumers when it comes to choosing a college or university that not only understands the military life cycle...but also design its programs and services around it.

Today's servicewoman is in search of portable learning opportunities...with flexible scheduling options...that move with her regardless of duty status or station. So in addition to classes and advisory services on base...she also wants online access to everything from individual courses to entire degree programs.

And like any other adult student, she is looking for coursework and prior learning credits that dovetail with both military training and experience on the job. What’s more...because military life can be unpredictable...she needs special accommodations at times when circumstances move beyond her control.

Military students must also have customized virtual support systems...that are not only military-friendly, but also readily available...24 hours a day...seven days a week...52 weeks a year. At UMUC, we furnish around the clock online access to everything from class registration, financial aid, and academic advising...to writing assistance, library resources, and student activities.

Likewise...in helping these students achieve their career aspirations...both in and out of the military...we have also developed a wealth of online career services...including virtual job fairs that connect prospective employers and employees in cyberspace...to exchange resumes and chat about available positions.

UMUC also recruits student advisors with military experience...funds special scholarships that help fill the gaps in tuition benefits...and provides customized counseling to help military students navigate the transition from active duty to
veteran status. Of course, higher education these days is becoming increasingly more complex...and not every university is as well-equipped as ours when it comes to serving our women in uniform. So in finding just the right academic fit, they need plenty of help going in...which has traditionally been provided by the military itself.

But given budget cuts over the years, educational service offices on base have taken a big hit...across all branches...and no longer have the resources to provide adequate counseling. And while military education benefits cover tuition expenses...they do not pay for textbooks...which places an added burden on household budgets that may already be stretched to the limit.

It stands to reason then that in addition to re-engineering our campuses, we should also take a hard look at providing better assistance on the military side...if we are to ensure that both our soldiers and our veterans receive the quality education they so richly deserve.

Thank you.

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