

## Critics Seize on ‘Troubling Quote’ From Gen. Kelly’s Emotional Speech Honoring Marines

*Retired general gave speech four days after son's death in Afghanistan*

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Critics have seized on what they describe as a troubling quote from a speech that retired Marine Gen. John Kelly delivered to honor American service members just four days after his son was killed fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Kelly, a retired four-star Marine general and former commander of the U.S. Southern Command, was reported as President-elect Donald Trump’s choice to lead the Department of Homeland Security on Wednesday.

The *Washington Post* ran an opinion article Wednesday pointing out a “troubling quote” from a speech that Kelly delivered for Veterans Day in 2010, four days after his son, 2nd Lt. Robert Kelly, died in Afghanistan during operations against the Taliban in the war-torn country. The emotional speech honored the sacrifices made by America’s armed forces and particularly the Marines.

“Their struggle is your struggle,” Kelly said, according to a video of his remarks. “They disdain those who claim to support them but not the cause that takes their innocence, their limbs, and their lives. As a democracy ... we must support them. I know it doesn’t apply to anyone in this room today, but if anyone thinks you can somehow thank them for their service, and not support the cause for which they fight—our country—then these people are lying to themselves and rationalizing away something in their own lives, but, more importantly, they are slighting our warriors and mocking their commitment to this nation.”

Greg Sargent wrote in the *Post*’s liberal-leaning blog “The Plum Line” that the quote prompted criticism because it “seems to suggest that one cannot criticize a war without being seen as anti-troops.” Sargent, citing libertarians and advocates for civil liberties, wrote that some believe the quote needs attention and clarification during Kelly’s confirmation hearings, which will take place next year when the new Congress takes over.

“Senators should look closely at this speech and its implications,” the article quotes Christopher Anders, deputy director of the ACLU’s office in Washington, D.C., as saying. “As secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, General Kelly will have an obligation to tolerate and respect the wide range of values and views of our big country.”

“I think it calls for clarification,” Christopher Preble, vice president for defense and foreign policy at the Cato Institute, told the *Post*. “The context in which these remarks were made is different than in the context of being an aspiring head of the DHS. It is worth asking General Kelly to clarify exactly what he meant.”

The article further argued that a tweet sent out by the president-elect suggesting that individuals should be punished for burning the American flag begs for particular scrutiny of Kelly’s comments, as well as controversial statements made by Trump and his advisers about Muslims.

During the 2010 speech, Kelly emphasized the commitments that U.S. service members make to protect and defend the United States and the American people. He particularly singled out the current generation of American Marines for their strength, courage, and character.

“And what are they like in combat? They’re like Marines have been throughout our history. In my three tours in combat as an infantry officer, I never saw one of them hesitate, or do anything other than lean into the fire and, with no apparent fear of death or injury, take the fight to our enemies,” Kelly said in the emotional address.

“As anyone—and many of you have—who has ever experienced combat knows, when it starts, when the explosions and tracers are everywhere and the calls for the Corpsman are screamed from the throats of men who know they are dying—when seconds seem like hours and it all becomes slow motion and fast forward at the same time, and the only rational act is to stop, get down, save himself. But they don’t. When no one would call them a coward for cowering behind a wall or in a hole, none of them do,” he said.

Both of Kelly’s sons, John and Robert, joined the Marines like their father. Robert deployed to Afghanistan as a platoon commander to the Helmand Province amid fierce fighting there and died in Sangin in November 2010.

Reports emerged on Wednesday that Trump had selected Kelly as his secretary of the Department of Homeland Security. While the choice has not been officially announced by Trump’s transition team, Kelly would be the third retired general tapped thus far to serve in the incoming Trump administration.

Trump is expected to formally announce the appointment next week, according to the *New York Times*.