

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH GARY SINISE

SUBJECT: GARY SINISE WILL ANNOUNCE THE FORMATION OF THE GARY SINISE FOUNDATION.

MODERATOR: MARK HAMRICK, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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**MARK HAMRICK:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Mark Hamrick, I'm a broadcast journalist with the Associated Press. I'm the 104<sup>th</sup> president of the National Press Club. We are the world's leading professional organization for journalists. And we're committed to our profession's future through our programming, events such as this, while also working to foster a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, I'd invite you all to take a look at our website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). And to donate to programs offered to the public through our Eric Friedheim National Journalism Library. You can check that out on the website as well.

So on behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and those of you attending today's event. Our head table include guests of the speaker as well as working journalists who are all Club members. And so, if you hear applause in the audience today, we'd like to note that members of the general public are attending today. So it's not necessarily evidence of a lack of journalistic objectivity. I'd also like to welcome our audience on C-SPAN and Public Radio. Our luncheons are featured on our member-produced weekly Podcast from the National Press Club. That's available for free download on iTunes. You can also follow the action on Twitter. After our guest speech concludes, we'll have Q&A and I'll ask as many questions as time permits.

Now it is time to introduce our head table guests, and I'd ask each of you here to stand up briefly as your name is announced. And we'll begin from your right. First of all, a Vice-Chairman of our NPC Board of Governors, John Donnelly. He's a senior writer

with *Congressional Quarterly*. Kevin Wensing is Vice-President and assisting to the President-- Assistant to the President of the USO. Emi Kolawole is editor with the *Washington Post*. Art Wilson is CEO of the Disabled American Veterans Organization. He's a co-founder of the Disabled Veterans Life Memorial Foundation. And he is a guest of our speaker today. Donna Leinwand Leger is a reporter for *USA Today*. She's also a past NPC President. Mary Eisenhower is President and CEO of People to People International. And she's a granddaughter of President Dwight D. Eisenhower. And she's a guest of Mr. Sinise. And she's also a fellow Kansan, by extension as well. [laughter]

We'll skip over the podium. Melissa Charbonneau with Newshook Media, she is our Speakers Committee Chair, doing a fabulous job this year. She organized today's event. Thank you so much. We'll skip over our guest speaker for a moment. Eleanor Cliff is an NPC member, a contributor for *Newsweek* and *The Daily Beast* and a panelist on the McLaughlin Group. Robert Yuen is research director for CNN. Jonathan Flora is producer/director of the *Lieutenant Dan Band for the Common Good* film and a guest of Mr. Sinise. Rachel Ray is US TV reviewer with the *Daily Telegraph of London*. And Rick Dunham, Washington Bureau Chief for the *Houston Chronicle* and Hearst Newspapers. And he also is a past NPC President.

Now, round of applause.

[applause]

Our guest speaker today is widely recognized for his humanitarian work on behalf of U.S. military troops. And he is an award-winning actor. He now plays Detective Matt Taylor, the star of the CBS TV series *CSI: New York*. He starred in such blockbuster films as *Apollo 13* and *The Green Mile*, marking two of a number of collaborations with Tom Hanks.

It's worth noting here, in the Nation's Capital, and just steps away from our historic Truman Lounge of the Club, that he played a President in the television movie *Truman*, that particular President, as a matter of fact, as well as a former Alabama Governor, George Wallace, opposite Angelina Jolie, who also has appeared here at this podium.

But it is his Academy Award-nominated role in the 1994 Oscar-winning film, *Forrest Gump*, that has endeared him to so many fans. Playing opposite Tom Hanks as Forrest Gump's platoon commander, who was wounded in Vietnam and lost both legs, he is still known to many as Lieutenant Dan.

It is that role that launched our guest speaker on a path which has led him to the National Press Club here today. He is here to announce the launch of a national organization, the Foundation to Support Military Service Members, Veterans, First Responders, and Their Families. And it is the culmination of years of support for the U.S. Armed Services and their families.

He has served as the host of the annual National Memorial Day Concert on the Washington Mall. And he has made more than 40 USO tours, and over 150 appearances, to entertain our troops in military bases worldwide, from Iraq to Afghanistan to Guantanamo Bay.

And most often, he travels with his group, which you've heard about. You'll notice the cookies on the table are a tribute to that, Lieutenant Dan Band. They are, in fact, the focus of a feature length documentary, *Lieutenant Dan Band For the Common Good*, that chronicles the band's travels to entertain the troops. I've noticed it has a website, and they're doing the launch there very soon, where people can watch that.

Part of the film's proceeds will benefit the Gary Sinise Foundation, while dismissing the speculation that he's running for political office. [laughter] But we might follow up on that today. [laughter] Our guest has been an outspoken critic of government bureaucracy and red tape that often delays or prevents service members and veterans from getting care and benefits.

He has said the nation is not doing enough to help disabled veterans and U.S. troops wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan. And he knows some specifics. He's called on the government and private sector to spend more to help veterans and provide victims of post-traumatic stress disorder get them some help.

He is a star who moonlights as a soldiers' advocate. And our speaker has questioned his own industry at times for producing films that portray our troops in a sometimes negative light, as one-sided, depressing or disturbing, according to a *Chicago Times* report. In partial response, our speaker served as Executive Producer for the documentary *Brothers At War*, a film about soldiers on the front lines in Iraq, and the impact of that on their families.

Among his many awards and honors, he is the recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's second highest civilian honor, one of only two actors to get that, and 110 people in our nation's history to receive that honor. He also received the Medal of Honor's Bob Hope Excellence in Entertainment Award and the Harry S. Truman Good Neighbor Award.

As co-founder of Operation International Children, he has helped to provide school supplies for hundreds of thousands of children where U.S. troops are deployed. Here today to tell us about his new foundation, its plans to help veterans, wounded and fallen U.S. service members, as well as their families, please give a warm National Press Club welcome to Lieutenant Dan himself, Mr. Gary Sinise.

[applause]

**GARY SINISE:** Thank you. I can cut my speech short now. [laughter] I'd like to thank the members of the National Press Club for the invitation to speak today. It's a great honor to return, having first had the opportunity as National Spokesperson for the

American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial Foundation, and then again in support of the documentary film *Brothers At War*.

When I think of the people that have stood in this spot, our national heroes, great figures of history, Prime Ministers, Presidents, an actor from *CSI: New York*, [laughter] Friday night, nine o'clock. [laughter] It's my shameless plug for the show. Not that there's anything wrong with being an actor, of course. But my being here today does demonstrate how those of you in our National Press Corps pay broad attention to the world around us, eager to hear from all manner of people with differing points of view, and that's good for America. So thank you again.

I'd like to acknowledge a few people here today. Last night, of course, the Press Club had the opportunity to screen the documentary film about my band, our troops, first responders, and many wonderful people who support them. And, as of July 4<sup>th</sup>, the award-winning documentary, *Lieutenant Dan Band For the Common Good* will be available online at [ldanbandmovie.com](http://ldanbandmovie.com) for only four dollars. And generously, the filmmakers have offered to donate one out of every four dollars to the newly created Gary Sinise Foundation which honors and serves our defenders.

[applause]

So I want to thank Director Jonathan Flora and his wife and producer Deborah. [applause] You and your team have worked very hard. And I wish you all the best with the film. I'm proud to be a part of it. So thank you both. And congratulations on the July 4<sup>th</sup> launch.

Now, while I may be charting the course for my new foundation, it takes all hands on deck to keep the engine running and the ship steaming ahead. This mission could not be accomplished without the support of a fantastic team. Some of them are here today. And I want to say thank you to Stacy Wolfe, Ben Robbin, Eric Matthews, and especially our administrative director, Judy Otter, who has worked around the clock to make the launch of the Gary Sinise Foundation a success. [applause] Thank you all. [applause]

I'm also thrilled to have one of our foundation's founding contributors and Advisory Board members, Tony Saliba here today. Tony is a good friend and is also an executive producer of *Lieutenant Dan Band For the Common Good*. So thank you, Tony, for your friendship, tremendous support over the years. It's great to have you here, buddy. Thank you. [applause]

I'd like to also acknowledge two dear friends sitting on the dais today, Mary Eisenhower and Art Wilson. I've had the privilege of working with both People to People International and the Disabled American Veterans for many years. And I'm honored to have you both here today. Thank you for coming. [applause]

As I confessed, I'm an actor. And I've been blessed with good fortune that my career was lifted to a level where I enjoy some recognition, I can engage the interest and

energy of other people, and where I can find an audience for my ideas. Growing up in a working class home in Chicago, I learned, and have tried to live up to, the common virtues that my grandparents and parents based their lives on: hard work, honesty in all things, fairness, generosity. And, above all, the love of this great America that blessed them with the freedom to say what they would and choose as they wished

And, like so many of my generation, for many years, I more or less took that freedom for granted. Until September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. It was a bright, sunny morning in Los Angeles. But, as the television images from Ground Zero assaulted me, I suddenly understood how vulnerable even our great and powerful country truly is.

And, as I came to understand the dark forces loose in the world, I had a new appreciation for why my folks and their folks greeted every day in America as a new beginning. They didn't take it for granted. And now, nor could I. I wanted, needed a role in helping to face this new national challenge.

As I watched our military respond, so our young men and women able to bear the most extreme hardship, even to the most final personal sacrifice, my heart was with them. Having veterans in my family, and having worked with veterans' groups on and off over the years, I knew they were where I wanted to put my efforts, to employ such recognition as I had to devote much time and treasure to their wellbeing.

And so, I was called to greater action. And that journey has enriched my life beyond anything I could have ever imagined. I had intended to give. But, in the end, I have received more than anything I brought to this.

Like the actors my father and uncles admired during their military service, I volunteered for the USO, anxious to help our service personnel and their families know they wouldn't experience the negative reception and lack of support that awaited our veterans returning from Vietnam. It began by visiting the war zone, offering moral support, shaking hands, autographs, taking pictures. But soon, I was visiting the wounded in our military hospitals, and then entertaining the military in both the US and abroad.

And, over the years, through this work, I have met extraordinary people who have inspired me with their courage and perseverance to get through, no matter what it takes, the worst of times. Like my dear friend, former Marine and retired firefighter, John Vigiano, who on that terrible day lost his two sons when the Towers fell, one, John, Jr., a firefighter, the other Joe, a police officer.

It was on my first trip to Iraq in June of 2003 that John and I met and became fast friends. He introduced me to many of New York's bravest at the FDNY, who have inspired me with their selflessness, their brotherhood, and their willingness to help others. I'm proud to have played a part in the building of the Brooklyn Wall of Remembrance, which honors all first responders killed at the World Trade Center on 9/11. And I am privileged to support their Fire Family Transport Foundation. They are some of my most special friends.

In November, 2003, I made my second USO trip to Iraq. And, while I was there, I visited a school where U.S. troops interacted with the local children. The troops had completely refurbished the school and were so protective of the children there. This was an inspiration. As soon as I returned, I went to my own children's school and suggested that we put supplies together, school supplies, to send to our troops in Iraq, for distribution to the Iraqi schools.

What started as a grassroots effort became a permanent institution in 2004, when I cofounded Operation Iraqi Children with the author of *Seabiscuit* and, most recently, *Unbroken*, Laura Hillenbrand, now renamed Operation International Children. And, in partnership with Mary Eisenhower and People to People International, OIC works directly with the military and has, to date, delivered well over a quarter of a million school supply kits, more than half a million toys, thousands of blankets, backpacks, pairs of shoes, Arabic language books, and sets of sports equipment, all of which have been distributed by our troops to the children in conflict areas of Iraq, Afghanistan, Djibouti, and the Philippines. [applause]

After Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, Operation International Children established the OIC Katrina Relief Fund, sending school supplies to the affected area. And, through our military, we are now reaching out to the children in need all over the world, most recently taking part in the military's humanitarian relief effort in Haiti. It is my hope that, with the help of OIC's newest partner, the newly-established Gary Sinise Foundation, this effort can be expanded to support our troops wherever they need assistance in their humanitarian mission.

During the early handshake tours to Iraq, Germany and Italy, I realized my next logical step. And I persuaded the USO to let me take a group of musicians I played with on a tour. So I would not only be meeting and visiting with the troops, but entertaining them as well. And, wherever I went on these early tours, I would constantly meet service members who didn't know me as Gary Sinise the actor, but immediately recognized Lieutenant Dan [laughter] the character I played in *Forrest Gump*.

And so, along with my friend and fellow musician, Vietnam veteran Kimo Williams, I formed the Lieutenant Dan Band. And, in February of 2004, we made our first overseas USO concert tour to Korea, Singapore, and Diego Garcia. Since then, we have been nonstop, also doing concerts in Alaska, Germany, Belgium, the U.K., the Netherlands, Italy, Okinawa, Guantanamo Bay, and Afghanistan, as well as dozens of bases all over the U.S. Over 40 USO concert tours in all.

I've been on handshake tours four times to Iraq, Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, Afghanistan, Germany, Italy. And I've also had the privilege of supporting various organizations through hundreds of personal appearances, with and without the band, all in support of our men and women in uniform, and organizations that support them.

But, as I said, whatever I gave, I was more than amply repaid. I have been allowed to be a part of our amazing military community, to share in their camaraderie, in their daily lives, to see these people in so many ways the best of us, up close and personal.

As often as I can, I visit our wounded here at home and overseas. On each of these visits, I am struck by the humility of the young men and women receiving treatment, their courage and determination, and their acceptance and their dedication to our country and their fellow warriors. Lending a hand to these brave men and women is truly one of the most rewarding things that anyone can do.

And, for all they do, and all they have sacrificed, they don't ask much in return. Knowing they are not forgotten, and that their sacrifice is appreciated, makes a world of difference. The first, and in some ways hardest obstacle to being abuse is coming to terms with the enormity of the need.

For example, in partnership with the Stephen Siller Tunnel to Towers Foundation, the Gary Sinise Foundation is supporting an effort to build specially designed homes for three severely wounded service members who have survived losing both arms and both legs. The first surviving quadruple amputee is Iraq War veteran Brendan Marrocco. The fundraising effort to build his home began last year with a Lieutenant Dan Band concert in Staten Island. And I am happy to say that all the money was eventually raised. And the first of these Smart homes has been completed. And Brendan will be moving in soon. [applause] I saw Brendan at the house yesterday, and his spirits are high. He's an amazing young man.

Fundraising for the second home, for Marine Corporal Todd Nicely, began with a concert in St. Louis on May 27<sup>th</sup>. And we will begin raising money for the third home, for Marine Corporal John Peck, with a concert in Illinois on July 16<sup>th</sup>. These courageous individuals have given so much. And it's a good feeling to know that there's something that we can do to give back to them. They inspire me beyond words.

But, as I said, the enormity of the need is great. And there are many who need our help. I'm also privileged to support and now serve on the Board of Snowball Express, which creates hope and new memories for the children of military fallen heroes, who have died while on active duty since 9/11. Thousands of children have lost a dad or a mom in these wars.

Since 2007, each December, I've taken my band to play for the annual Snowball Express event. And I'm proud that this year, along with American Airlines Veterans Initiatives, and hundreds of volunteers, our foundation will once again be a part of this worthy effort to support our Gold Star children.

And there is Hope for the Warriors, an organization founded by military wives to support wounded U.S. service members, their families, and families of the fallen. Our foundation was a proud sponsor of their recent fundraiser here in Washington, D.C.

These are but a few of the types of efforts that have kept me busy these many years. While the list of heroism is endless, the needs of these heroes is just as long. And how we address this is a major national issue.

As Calvin Coolidge said, “The nation which forgets its heroes will itself be forgotten.” The sad reality from Vietnam is that we learned the hard way, that turning our backs and ignoring our warriors weakened our nation. The hope is that we learn from this and will strive to do better.

In a recent speech to the Young Cadets at West Point, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, expressed his fear of a disconnect between the American people and its military. He said, “Our work is appreciated, of that I am certain. There isn't a town or a city I visit where people do not convey to me their great pride in what we do. Even those who do not support the wars support the troops. But I fear they do not know us. I fear they do not comprehend the full weight of the burden we carry or the price we pay when we return from battle.”

As someone who can visit our troops in remote places around the globe, and has had a firsthand look at their skill, dedication and sacrifice, I hope to continue to address that disconnect by sharing what I have experienced, and expressing my belief in how fortunate we all are to have such an exceptional military force in the dangerous and unpredictable world we live in.

As journalists, you know such dark forces are loose in our day. It is our military that denies these enemies and preserves our freedom, often at the dearest possible cost. But it doesn't end with the battle. Countless millions, throughout the world, know our military from the other face of America's power, bringing hope and humanitarian relief wherever and whenever it is needed, without favor, to friend or foe alike.

When there is a natural disaster-- Japan, Indonesia, Haiti, it is not China's aircraft carriers that race to the rescue with massive amounts of aid and manpower. It is the United States military. It is critical that we do what we can to care for the needs of our active duty and retired service members and their families. Surely, that is the least our country can do for those who risk their lives every day defending our freedom. And it cannot be temporary.

That is why all my various efforts have been pulled together through the formation of the Gary Sinise Foundation. Our motto, Serving Honor and Need, has as its mission statement, “To serve our nation by honoring our defenders, veterans, first responders, their families, and those in need.” We do this by creating and supporting unique programs designed to entertain, educate, inspire, strengthen, and build communities. It is my hope that, by beginning this fundraising and program-generating entity, we will be able to do more to honor the men and women who serve, by meeting their needs.

I did not serve. But I have never been more rewarded than when I am with the military community and see the smiles a little visit can bring. It is a way to give back to those who give so much. I will never again take for granted how our freedom must be protected on a daily basis, minute by minute.

History teaches there have always been those who would rob us of our freedom in order to empower themselves. What I've shared with you today are feelings, beliefs, and aspirations that lie far outside the interests of my chosen profession. So, while my currency as a successful actor may have got me here, I am first and foremost a citizen of this marvelous and remarkable United States of America.

Today you gave me the use of your immensely valuable megaphone. I hope I used it to address issues of concern to all of us. Because everything we are, especially journalists, you who employ the First Amendment on all our behalf, everything is predicated on freedom. And I trust we all take great pride that we have so many exceptional people serving out there to protect just that.

As Winston Churchill reminded us during World War II, peace and tranquility would only be restored if everyone did their bit. He considered his bit no more important than that of the elderly woman knitting socks for soldiers. That is my aspiration, to do my bit, no matter how large or small. And I know that, in this, I am no different than any of you, or any Americans. We are a great people. We can rise to this challenge, meet it, and, as we have always done, master it. Those marvelous people who serve our freedom and comfort deserve nothing less. Thank you.

[applause]

**HAMRICK:** I don't want to dare stand in the way of an entertainer who could get further applause. But I know they want to have opportunity to have some questions answered. So, thank you very much for those prepared remarks. And we'll follow up a little bit. Obviously, in an audience like this, we have working journalists, we have people from the general public, and some people who are engaged in a similar kind of cause that you have been engaged in. When we're talking about your foundation, I wonder if you could talk a little bit about how that's structured, so that we can kind of take the news hook and play with that a little bit. Tell us about your staff, where it's located, and what the specific mission of the foundation involves.

**SINISE:** As I said, I've been very, very busy trying to support a lot of different organizations, going out and raising money by showing up. You know, somebody like me can show up and draw some attention to an organization, an event. I can donate my band. I can, you know, do that kind of thing. But I can only be so many places, you know, throughout the year.

And I got to the point where I said, "Geez, you know, I spend weekend after weekend, month after month, year after year, trying to support as many efforts as I can.

I'm either going to pull back or I'm going to ramp up in some way. And how can I ramp up when I'm already committed all over?"

Well, one of the natural things to do was to create an entity, a foundation that can draw in some additional resources, promote the programs that I'm supporting, try to guide people who are looking for ways to support, and organizations that are reputable, that I've been supporting, guide them to those organizations. You know, if people don't know which one to go to, we can-- we're in a fundraising effort ourselves with our foundation. We'll guide that money to the right place.

If you looking for organizations that I've been supporting over the years, I stake my reputation on all the organizations that are listed on our website. You can go directly to them. You can provide the Gary Sinise Foundation with funds. We just want to ramp up our effort and do good things. I've got a great staff. We're located in Los Angeles. And we're beginning this effort right now.

**HAMRICK:** Very good. One of our questioners asked, if you could get Congress or the administration to do just one thing for vets, what would that one thing be?

**SINISE:** Cut through all the red tape and get down to business. It takes a lot to get your benefits. [applause]

**HAMRICK:** But let's take it a little bit more micro than that. Because, I mean, there is an inherent inefficiency in the federal government, hence the growing suburbs of Washington, D.C. [laughter] And that's a bit of a joke, but it's actually true. And, when you see needs that are being unmet-- and, indeed, it's part of your mission to try to match resources with needs, whether it's the government, whether it's you, what are people missing out there?

**SINISE:** Well, I think, you know, there is a lot of veterans in need out there. I work with the American Veterans, the Disabled American Veterans. We have three million living disabled veterans, 1.5 million, I believe, those veterans are part of the Disabled American Veterans Organization.

There are other organizations out there that are trying to do what they can to fill the gaps. The government can only do so much, I realize that. So, we want to encourage organizations to get out there and do more. But, for example, you shouldn't have to go through all this red tape all the time to get your benefits.

I mean, I have a Vietnam veteran brother-in-law, crashed his helicopter, never applied for his benefits because he got home from Vietnam, it was bad to be a Vietnam veteran at that time. Disappeared into the system. Had some problems. We brought him in. We worked with him. We started taking-- The VA took four years, for a guy who crashed his helicopter, to cut through the red tape and get his benefits.

Now, I realize we're looking back and trying to search through records 30 and 40 years ago. But, what about some of the returning veterans from everything after Vietnam? We just want to make sure that we do as much as we can. Now, I'm also going to say that, looking back 40 years ago, compared to what's happening today with regards to our returning veterans, is a big difference. There is a big difference. There are a lot of wonderful organizations that have popped up. And we did learn some hard lessons from Vietnam, of how not to treat our service members. But, you know, we can never do enough, but we can always try to do a little bit more.

**HAMRICK:** And then, this is perhaps a variation of the same question. Someone is asking, what is the most troubling deficiency you've seen in the treatment and assistance given returning soldiers? Is there a particular one?

**SINISE:** You know, I'll have to, you know-- Returning soldiers that are injured?

**HAMRICK:** That was just how they posed it, so say whether they're finished with their service, whether they come home rather rapidly because--

**SINISE:** There's all kinds of stories. You know, I know good stories. I know some not so good stories. Let's say you're a returning veteran. Your service is going to be over when you get back. You've been in a platoon in the mountains of Afghanistan. You saw 10, 15 of your brothers killed in front of your eyes, and many more wounded.

You come back. There is a domestic problem at home, some problem there. You get out of the service. You're despondent. You disappear. So, you know, we have a lot of homeless veterans that have just tried to get away from it all. We have to reach out to them and do what we can for them.

And then, we'll have-- you know, we'll have our hospitals, Walter Reed, Bethesda, Landstuhl, Balboa. These are great hospitals. With all the problems that we had a while back with the returning wounded at Walter Reed, if I was injured, I'd want to be at Walter Reed. They have an exceptional staff there. I think they were just overwhelmed, at that time. It was good. The *Washington Post* discovered some of those issues, brought them to light. They addressed them. You know, we are taking very, very good care in the hospitals of our wounded veterans.

But then, what happens when they go out? What happens to somebody like Brendan Marrocco, who's lost both arms and both legs? What happens to somebody like that if the community doesn't reach out and take care of them? So I would encourage communities all around this country to reach out to your returning veterans, seek their families out. How can you help them? Especially if they're wounded and disabled for life. That community support is critical to how they're going to live the rest of their life.

**HAMRICK:** Well, in fact, someone asked that very question. If a person knows of a soldier or a family in need, should they try to alert a foundation such as yours as to

that need? What can we do about an individual situation that we think needs particular help?

**SINISE:** Yeah, and that happens all the time. People reach out to the foundations that have established themselves, you know, to be reliable. But also, those communities can take responsibility. You know, you have somebody who goes-- is in service to our country. They're disabled. They go back to a very small town somewhere in the United States, very small community. They're disabled for life. They might not be able to get a job.

That community should take care of that wounded warrior, find that wounded warrior a job. We need to find more of our warriors, returning veterans jobs out there. It's important that we give back to them and tell them, "Your service, in service to our freedom, means something to us. So we are going to embrace you, put our arms around you, and take care of you."

**HAMRICK:** This question is on military suicides. Last year, the Defense Department reported there were more than 1,100 suicides among military service members over the course of four years. That was an average of one every 36 hours. Is the U.S. government and military doing enough to address the problem? And, what can people in the private sector do?

**SINISE:** This is a very, very serious problem. I'm involved with some mental health issues. I work very collaboratively and partner with TriWest Healthcare Alliance, run by my friend Dave McIntyre. TriWest takes care of the healthcare of 22 states west of the Mississippi. He is very, very committed and actively involved with the military, to address this problem of suicide.

I'm kind of in the stress relief business. I'm in the morale-boosting business. So we teamed up. And we spent a lot of time with Medal of Honor recipients, going to bases, talking to these service members, reaching out to their families, trying to communicate to them that there are alternatives to taking your life. Sometimes they don't think there are. And that's a very, very serious problem.

It's important, the message that we send out to our military folks that we visit, is always to reach out to somebody who you recognize is in need. Those signs are clear. And we need to try to do a lot more. It's a very, very serious problem. There is a lot of people dedicated to this. We have to do a lot more.

**HAMRICK:** And then there are the people who have passed away. And just this week, it's been reported on a number of different fronts that the FBI now is joining an Army investigation of essentially wrongdoing at Arlington Cemetery, some of that allegedly, perhaps financial wrongdoing. The loss of remains at the Cemetery. What's your reaction when you hear a story like that? And, is it true that that would tend to serve to undermine morale in hostile territory?

**SINISE:** Well, I don't know that much about that particular situation. But I would think it would, yes. And I want to mention the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors. Bonnie Carroll is over here. And Bonnie started this wonderful program, to work with the families of our fallen heroes. TAPS is an incredible organization that reaches out as soon as a family is notified that their service member, their family member has been killed in action.

They do wonderful, wonderful work, and are focusing on making sure that those killed in action, their families are well taken care of, and they get what they need. That's a difficult business that Bonnie is in. But she has personal-- a personal relationship with that, because she lost her husband. And so, Bonnie is right over here right now. And I'm privileged to have you here, Bonnie, today. [applause]

**HAMRICK:** And, by and large, the work that is done in the private sector is, of course, very useful and very good. And then, there are occasionally some stories where, in the private sector, and not unlike the government, there are some stories that don't turn out so well. *Rolling Stone Magazine* this week is reporting on some foundations that were founded by musicians, where essentially they are having to be restructured or closed. So, as you look to balance all of your demands, you know, the acting, when you're on the road, how are you going to ensure that your foundation is operating as efficiently as possible, and that, indeed, it's a cause the people will find beyond the lure of your personality, which is powerful, that they want to give to an organization like that?

**SINISE:** Those screwy musicians. [laughter] With their foundations, yeah. I don't know-- I don't know how to address that, except by saying that personally-- I'll speak about my work. I've had my boots on the ground, here, for quite a long time, and been-- you know, have dedicated every spare moment to this work in the last ten years, and prior to that with veterans, Vietnam veterans and disabled veterans.

So, I'm not somebody who is going to say-- I would not-- I would stake my reputation and character on it-- I would not tell you to give, to donate to my foundation, and then make a mess of it. I'm just not going to do that. That's not me.

[applause]

**HAMRICK:** So, *Lieutenant Dan Band*, the film, that all goes back to a storyline that was involved with the Vietnam War. And you alluded, in your speech, about how essentially Vietnam veterans were not always welcomed home. Those of us who were alive then can remember that. Is it somewhat heartwarming for you, now, to see how the country has changed over time, and that leaving aside the politics of an individual engagement, that people seem to have almost universal support for U.S. military?

**SINISE:** Well, as I said, we can never do enough for our veterans, as far as I'm concerned. But we can always try to do a little bit more. And, you know, what's been heartening is to see how many Vietnam veterans have gotten involved with our active duty service members. I think it's a partially healing thing for them to be able to say,

“I’m going to take care of this soldier returning home, and make sure that nothing happens to him when he gets home. I want what happened to me never to happen again. So I’m going to take an active part in that.” And I’ve met hundreds of Vietnam veterans that are doing just that, reaching out.

I think, you know, we did learn some hard lessons from what happened to our Vietnam veterans. And it’s wonderful to see that, as Admiral Mullins said, you know, wherever he goes, if people don’t agree with the war, they say, “You know, but you’re pretty great. You know, I support the troops,” and all of that. That’s important.

Now, if you’re disconnected to the military, as he said, if you don’t have a personal relationship with somebody in the military, you don’t have a friend or a family member who’s serving, life goes on. The lattes are flowing. The pizzas are being made. The movies, theatres are happening. Gas is a little higher, but it’s still coming. And we’re still going about our business. People are working and making a living. I mean, we do have some job problems in the country and all that. But, you know, life goes on for a lot of folks.

But the military families are the ones that are feeling the sacrifice and the sting of this particular conflict right now. You know, 0.5 percent of our citizenry actually serve in the military. You know, 300 million people, and like under one percent are actually defending the country. That’s a small percentage.

So we owe-- we owe them. And, you know, it’s heartening to be able to do something, to give back. It’s a good feeling to be able to take care of these freedom fighters. They are our defenders. And I’ve been involved, as I said, with veterans for many, many years, through Democrat Presidents, through Republican Presidents. It’s not about all that. It’s about the fact that freedom is precious.

We saw on September 11<sup>th</sup> what 19 guys with box cutters could do. That’s box cutters, 19 determined guys with box cutters. God-forbid, they get a hold of something more serious. A backpack full of anthrax, something like that. I mean, all that is very-- you know, suitcase nuclear bomb. All that is-- That’s not fantasy. That’s all real stuff. And there are people that live 24/7, 365 days a year, wondering how they can destroy the United States. And, thankfully, we have people 24/7, 365 days a year, every single day, every single minute, trying to prevent bad thing from happening to the United States of America.

We all saw what happened on September 11<sup>th</sup>. We all felt that vulnerability, that fear of what’s going to happen. And then there was anthrax running through the mail. And we thought, “What’s going on? What’s going to happen to our country?” And we were like, “Where’s the military? What are they going to do?” Well, they’re still doing it. And so, we got to back them up.

**HAMRICK:** Questioner says, you’re one of a relatively, apparently small handful of prominent celebrities who’ve supported Republican candidates and causes.

My sense is, is that you don't wear your, let's say party politics on your sleeve. But, is it hard to be a Republican operating in the entertainment industry?

[laughter]

**SINISE:** Where'd you come up with that? Whose question is that? Look, I've supported Democrats. You know, I support-- I do what I can. You know, I'm a citizen of the United States. I can do what I want. I can vote for who I want. I grew up in Chicago. You know, it's Daley country out there. [laughter] You know. So, you know, I just try to pass the message that we live in a free country. We can say what we want, and we can choose as we wish. And we can stand up for what we believe in.

**HAMRICK:** How successful have you been-- Or, maybe the question would be, have you tried to engage other entertainment people in the cause of our soldiers and the military? So, have you tried to engage some of your colleagues in the business? And how successful have you been, if you have?

**SINISE:** Yeah. You know, I've taken different people on different trips with me. Remember Michael T. Williamson? He played Bubba in *Forrest Gump*. He went on my 2009 trip to Afghanistan. I've taken other people to various bases. Recently I took David James Elliot and Clint Howard down to Camp Pendleton when I played down there. They came, just showed their support.

Dana Carvey has performed for the troops at Fort Hood. Right after the terrible tragedy there, I set up a concert down there about a month later. And we went down there, did a big concert. I called Dana. He came in and performed. Recently, I did a concert at Camp Pendleton. Dana came down again, performed for the troops. So, there are people out there that are doing it. And I'm not afraid to call anybody. If I think they can help the troops, I'll do that.

**HAMRICK:** So, some people are interested in the creative side of your work as well. You played President Truman and have been apparently flouted as a possible candidate for a variety of offices. Have you ever had any interest in actually getting in the trenches of politics?

**SINISE:** I'm an actor. [laughter]

**HAMRICK:** So was Ronald Reagan

**SINISE:** Yeah. You know, we get paid to learn lines and hit our mark. [laughter]

**HAMRICK:** Don't hit this mark.

**SINISE:** No, I've never thought about any of that.

**HAMRICK:** What American or international political figure would you like to consider playing in a future project, given the fact that you have played politicians in the past? Or, have you even thought about that?

**SINISE:** Well, I haven't thought about playing another political figure. I've done a few of those. And that was fun. I'd like to play Jimmy Doolittle, you know, great American hero, Medal of Honor recipient. There's so many recipient stories. If you look, I've had the privilege to be a part of the Medal of Honor Society for a while. I'm on one of their Boards. Worked with the Medal of Honor Society since 2006. Met some amazing, amazing American heroes in the Medal of Honor Society.

I travel with them on a regular basis to military bases around the country, to deliver good messages to our troops. And, when I see the Medal of Honor recipients, and see the troops standing there, listening to these guys, they can make an impact. Jimmy Doolittle received a Medal of Honor. Great American stories. There are a lot of American stories like that, great heroes that I'd consider trying to play if I thought I could play them.

**HAMRICK:** And then, of course, you have the ongoing television series work. Are you planning to be in motion pictures in the near term? Anything you're working on at the moment?

**SINISE:** Sometimes that's not up to me. [laughter] But I'm lucky to say, and happy to say, that *CSI: New York* got picked up again for another season. So we're coming back for season eight, which is good. We start that soon. [applause] So that'll keep me busy as of July 20<sup>th</sup>.

But, you know, one of the things I do hope that happens is that people go to this [ltdanbandmovie.com](http://ltdanbandmovie.com) website. It's a very interesting thing what's happening with the *Lieutenant Dan Band* film that Jonathan and Deborah have made here. They're going to launch it online, so it'll be available all around the world, to people who want to just go and put four dollars in there, and watch the movie. It's not a download, it's a pay-per-view, for about a month's time.

Through that, you get to see-- you get to see some of the people that I interact with, you know, every year, every month. You see the entertainment side. It's an entertaining film. It's a moving film. And you get to see some of the people that I'm supporting. You know, it kept me kind of in the movie game, to actually participate in this film. The film was coming out. [ltdanbandmovie.com](http://ltdanbandmovie.com). We hope that a lot of people go to that. It's a cause-driven marketing campaign.

So, you know, generously, they've offered to donate one out of every four dollars to the Gary Sinise Foundation. And we're going to give that-- kick that back to the troops and their families and first responders and people who need it.

**HAMRICK:** One question about Lieutenant Dan before I ask my last question. And that is, it seems all too often celebrities often grow to resent a role that becomes so well associated with them. And you have embraced it and obviously done a tremendous amount of good. And are going to plan to do that in the future. Was there ever a time when you got a little irritated with that association? Or, have you been good with it all along?

**SINISE:** I had to get used to it. It was just something that happened. You know, when you're in a movie like that, you know, it was so popular-- *Forrest Gump* was so popular. But it wasn't just-- It wasn't just playing a character in a popular movie. I realized, you know, about a month after I was-- I did the film, I got a call from the Disabled American Veterans. That's how I got involved with the DAV.

And they wanted me to come to the national convention, because I was playing a disabled veteran, Vietnam veteran. And they liked the way I did it. So they asked me to come to the international convention. It was a very, very moving experience, something I'll never forget. Standing there in a room with thousands of disabled veterans, and having them applaud. Those that could stand up were standing up. Others were in wheelchairs, applauding me for playing-- for playing a disabled veteran.

And they all wanted to call me Lieutenant Dan. They all related to me as Lieutenant Dan. I started going overseas and doing tours for the troops. And they all related to me as this military member, Lieutenant Dan. The story of Lieutenant Dan is a resilience story. He's somebody who goes through, you know, the understandable anger of having his military career taken away from him, cut down.

Now he's a disabled vet. What's he going to do? He goes through that understandable anger. And through the love of a friend, who reaches out and pulls him up, he stands up again, at the end of that movie. He's strong. He's successful. He's moved on with his life. Prior to *Forrest Gump*, we hadn't seen a Vietnam veteran portrayed that way, as somebody who can move on and do well.

So, the story of that particular character resonates with the military community, that I interact with every single day. So, how could I say, "Hey, don't call me that"? [laughter] "No! No!" No. The character is alive for them. And that's okay with me. You know, if you're lucky to play somebody in a movie that resonates with people like that, it's not a bad thing. It's a good thing.

**HAMRICK:** Well thank you. We're almost out of time. But, before we ask the very last question, we have a couple of housekeeping items to take care of. And that includes mentioning some of our upcoming Luncheon speakers. Just tomorrow, we're sort of in our pre-Fourth of July feeling of patriotism here. We're going to have the NASA Administrator Charles Bolden here. And he will discuss our continued commitment to leadership in human space flight, as well as NASA's plans to extend human presence beyond low Earth orbit. And Astronaut Mark Kelly, the

Congresswoman's husband will be at the head table at that event. And we still have tickets available for that.

July 13<sup>th</sup>, Ted Leonsis, who is the owner of our hockey and basketball teams in Washington will be here. He's quite accomplished in the high technology realm. And we will talk about that aspect of his life as well.

Well, as you may know-- you've been here before. But there's going to be a little twist here. We typically like to present you with a true token of our appreciation, which is the NPC coffee mug. But don't leave yet, because I'm going to hand you that, okay. So there's another coffee mug, in case you might have broken an earlier one. But, checking out *Lieutenant Dan Band* online, on YouTube, plenty of service personnel thrilled by the experience, making videos of you out there in the-- all over the world. And I notice that-- [bang]-- [laughter]--

**SINISE:** Was that the end?

**HAMRICK:** That's not what I planned. That's not what I planned-- as if on cue. But it can stay on the floor. That's fine. I noticed that, very often, you're out there with the sunlight beating down on you. I thought, "Lieutenant Dan needs a National Press Club hat while he's performing." So-- [applause] something a little different.

**SINISE:** Thank you.

**HAMRICK:** Tremendous. Thank you. Thank you. How about a round of applause for our guest speaker today.

[applause]

**HAMRICK:** Thank you for coming today. I'd like to thank our National Press Club staff, including our Library and Broadcast Center for organizing today's event. Thank you. And we're adjourned. [gavel]

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