Good morning. It is a great honor for me as president of Pittsburg State University to welcome all of you to the campus this morning and to this very special place – just a couple of acres – but a place of tremendous power and meaning in which we honor of all of America’s veterans.

To you, the veterans, and to you, the families of veterans, we say a sincere, “thank you,” for your service and for your sacrifice.

Part of the special nature of this annual observance at the PSU Veterans Memorial is the inclusion of students. This is an intentional act on our part, because this memorial is not just a place in which we honor generations of veterans. It is also a place in which we teach each generation about the responsibility each of us has to protect and preserve our democracy and our way of life for our children and our children’s children.

Sixth graders, we’re very happy you’re here with us.

President John F. Kennedy, speaking at similar observance more than 50 years ago, noted that the original Armistice Day, the precursor to our current Veterans Day, was an observance of a historic day of peace following a long and brutal world war.

Think about that for a moment. Veterans Day is a celebration of peace and a time to remember those who gave so much to ensure that peace.

Students, please take a few minutes to consider the veterans you see here today and imagine the thousands of veterans honored with pavers throughout this memorial.

Although it is certainly true that many performed heroically in combat and some gave their lives, all of them – veterans from every era and each generation -- shared something in common. They left their homes and families not because they wanted to fight, but because they wanted peace. They were willing to do whatever it took, even to the point of giving their lives, to protect the peace and the freedoms that we citizens too often take for granted.

This is one of the lessons that this memorial teaches us. In a world that seems to be perpetually in turmoil, our freedoms, our democracy, our peace at home depends on citizens who are willing to sacrifice to ensure that those principles we hold dear endure.
To the veterans, we say thank you today, for what you have done. We also thank and honor the families who have supported the veterans in their efforts.

Students, in a very short time the responsibility will pass to your generation. I am confident that you will be up to the task. Whether in uniform or as civilians, I know you will do your part to keep our nation strong and safe for future generations who will gather in this special place long after we have gone.

Thank you.