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MCCAIN1112

McCain addresses local fundraiser for veterans

Sen. John McCain and others thanked Minnesota service members and veterans and asked others not to forget them.

Myron P. Medcalf, Star Tribune

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Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., spoke to more than 400 members of Minnesota's business and political community at a fundraiser Friday night in a downtown hotel ballroom. This was no political gala, however, but an event to recognize the men and women of Minnesota who have fought in various conflicts since 9/11.

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McCain was the keynote speaker at a fundraiser for the Minnesotans' Military Appreciation Fund (MMAF) dinner at the Minneapolis Hilton, where politicians including Sens. Norm Coleman, R-Minn., and Mark Dayton, D-Minn., were on hand.

Any Minnesota service member deployed since September 2001 is eligible for an MMAF grant; they range from \$250 for all personnel to \$10,000 for families of service members killed in combat. The group recently began to distribute its funds.

McCain, a POW in Vietnam for five years, thanked the Minnesotans for their service.

"Most of you are citizen soldiers," he said. "You took up the call when it came. You did what I did without the advantage of the training I had."

McCain said he "prays daily for deliverance from war," but he also said the war in Iraq was a necessary strategic move for the country.

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Soldiers experience a plethora of emotions, he said. Living veterans share a certain humility whenever they're recognized for their service because they know of others who didn't survive the conflicts in which they fought, he said.

"Anyone who loses a loved one knows great loss," he said. "And anyone who has a child knows great joy. A veteran knows great joy and loss, which are experienced in the same moment."

Supporters' talk of a McCain 2008 presidential run continue, but the senator did not address his political aspirations.

More than \$450,000 was expected to be raised at Friday's MMAF event, which will go to benefit Pfc. Lucas Rath of Spring Valley, Minn., and other Minnesota service members. Rath was awarded the Purple Heart after suffering two injuries in Iraq.

Rath made a plea to remember some of America's newest veterans of war.

"What's most disheartening is that most Americans don't know the story behind the Americans who have made this sacrifice," he said. "Please, do not forget us veterans."

Eugene Sit, co-chairman of the MMAF, delivered a check to Rath's home last week. He said the grants are only a small token of appreciation for Minnesota's soldiers, one-third of whom are citizen soldiers.

"I realize we're all very fortunate," Sit said. "There are a few who are doing the work of many."

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