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The Honorable Leon E. Panetta
Former United States Secretary of Defense
Democratic National Convention
Thursday, August 22, 2024
Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

I served in the Army, Congress, as White House chief of staff, CIA director, and defense secretary. I've looked into the eyes of warriors I deployed into battle. I gave the order directing our Special Operations Forces to fly two helicopters 150 miles into Abbottabad at night. By the time the sun rose, Osama bin Laden was dead.

Nobody attacks our country and gets away with it. Our warriors need a tough, cool-headed Commander in Chief. To defend our democracy from tyrants and terrorists, we need Kamala Harris behind the Resolute Desk. She knows a tyrant when she sees one. And our allies know a leader when they see one. On the Senate Intelligence Committee and as vice president, she's worked with more than 150 world leaders. She's looked our allies in the eye and said, "America has your back."

Trump would abandon our allies and isolate America. We tried that in the 1930s. It was foolish and dangerous then. It is foolish and dangerous now. "Isolationism," President Reagan said, "never was and never will be an acceptable response to tyrannical governments." Trump tells tyrants like Putin they can do "whatever the hell they want."

Kamala Harris tells tyrants, "The hell with that. Not on my watch!" She's worked with President Zelenskyy to fight back against Russia. She knows protecting their democracy protects our democracy.

Donald Trump does not understand the world. And he does not understand the service and sacrifice of our military. Our fallen veterans aren't suckers. They are not losers. They are heroes.

Kamala Harris will honor our veterans. And in Tim Walz, she will have a Vice President who served honorably for 24 years. Kamala Harris understands this moment of danger and opportunity. She'll keep America's military the strongest the world has ever known. And she understands what our military is for—to defend us from foreign enemies, not threaten Americans or put immigrants in camps.

Every president since World War II, Republican and Democrat, has shared the belief that America must protect democracy in the world. Every president has honored our veterans' sacrifices. Every president but one.

Now we face a choice: to vote for someone who stands with our military and stands up for democracy, or someone who disrespects our heroes and undermines our democracy? There is only one choice.

When she takes her oath of office—as she will—our allies will cheer, our enemies will fear, and we will have a Commander in Chief we can trust. God bless our veterans and God bless our country.

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