

**The
American
Legion**



For God and country

Suggested Speech

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Memorial Day 2009

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Patriotism.

Let's focus for a few moments on that word.

If I were to ask you if you felt patriotic, what would you say? When did you first get that excited feeling in your heart as the flag passed by during a parade or the National Anthem was sung? What would be your answer? More than likely you were first aware of these feelings back in grade school when you learned the Pledge of Allegiance or sang, "My Country 'tis of Thee."

Memorial Day reminds us that without patriotism we would have no heroes to honor today.

Oliver Wendell Holmes called this "our most sacred holiday" and he urged that "we not ponder with sad thoughts the passing of our heroes, but rather ponder their legacy – the life they made possible for us by their commitment and pain."

At its core, Memorial Day has always commemorated the universal all-encompassing understanding of, “No greater love than this does any man have, that he lay down his life for his friends.”

Lincoln in his memorable dedication of the Gettysburg battlefield in 1863 spoke of the inadequacy of words at times such as that, “The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.”

We as Americans, as a people have embodied the spirit of “we’re all in this together” and “united we’ll stand together.”

However, there have been times in our history when this hasn’t been our sentiment.

Prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, Americans were extremely divided as to whether we should enter the war. Twenty years before, World War I had been called the “war to end all wars” with nearly 53,000 Americans killed in battle.

On December 7, 1941, opinion changed. The next day more enlistments occurred than any other day in our history and with the loss in battle of more than 291,000 servicemembers during World War II, the price was indeed high.

Stephen Ambrose, one of America’s most respected historians wrote, “Americans did not get too tired to fight. Even though they paid dearly in human lives, determination outweighed that price.”

That determination meant never letting this happen again.

In his writings Ambrose cited a letter written by General Dwight Eisenhower sending Hitler a warning, “beware the fury of a roused democracy.”

From the moment the Japanese dropped the first bombs at Pearl Harbor, it became an American fight. When the first troops were sent to wage war, it became an American effort.

This holds true still today. Our words can't hold a candle to the numerous sacrifices of so many. But we honor them, remember them and are deeply indebted to them.

We recognize too that the struggle, that age old struggle to be free, goes on today.

Today we live in a post-9/11 world. The country changed forever on that fateful day.

Gone are the days when we'd sit back and believe that our oceans would protect us from those who wish us harm. We acknowledge that in order to continue to protect the freedoms we hold close to our hearts, we have to take the battles to the terrorists and promote freedom throughout the world.

Our brave men and women are doing that right now and we salute them, support them and honor them.

Yet as these brave American men and women find themselves far from America's shores, in lands foreign to them, they face situations their parents hoped - and prayed - their children would never have to experience.

Yet the call to defend freedom came and they answered. They are all heroes – facing enemies every day and yet they stand resolved to carry out their mission to keep America safe. Many will return home with the pride of having served their country honorably. Others will return to be honored for fighting and falling in the line of duty.

Just as their predecessors in the two world wars, Korea, Vietnam, Beirut, Grenada and the Persian Gulf, the Global War on Terrorism is being won by ordinary Americans making extraordinary sacrifices.

They are men like Army Sergeant Michael Boatwright, a Texan who loved riding bulls, listening to country music and deer hunting. He was a member of the Future Farmers of America in high school.

He joined the Army after high school and found he loved being a soldier. He had just re-enlisted and had made the decision to make the Army his career when he was killed in Baghdad by an improvised explosive device.

His mother said of Michael, “He took his Army values very seriously, loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage.”

Another extraordinary sacrifice came from Marine Corporal Travis Braddock-Nall of Portland, Oregon. He played the drums, loved punk rock music and drove his mom crazy with his series of tattoos.

In May of 2003, he was scheduled to leave Iraq. He had plans to come home, attend college and learn to fly helicopters. He learned before his departure that more help was needed in his platoon and he elected to stay three more months.

One of his fellow Marines said of Travis, “The platoon wasn’t surprised by his decision. He would always step in and take his spot.”

Travis was killed two months later in an explosion during a mine-clearing operation near Karbala.

We owe these two young men and all the other men and women who serve a huge debt of gratitude and respect.

The American Legion has always shown great pride in our nation’s fallen heroes and unending support for those America sends to continue the fight for freedom in many corners of the world.

The Legion’s Preamble states in part, “to preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in the Great Wars” and so today we gather again to reflect, remember and give thanks to the many fallen heroes from a truly grateful nation.

The American Legion's National Commander, David Rehbein (RAY-BINE) believes in two short words that state what the Legion is all about. Those two words are "pride" and "purpose".

Pride in the uniform we once wore. Pride that we've chosen to continue our service to America, our veterans, troops and communities. Pride in our flag and all that it symbolizes.

Pride fuels the sense of purpose.

The devoted war-weary veterans who came home 90 years ago realized they still needed to stand by their fellow comrades. This was their sense of purpose.

The purpose then is still relevant today and will continue in the generations to come.

Those who serve now and have served in the Armed Forces are no less committed to protect our nation than were the men who signed the Declaration of Independence. Their final words state, “for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.”

Today our armed forces maintain this same commitment and honor that was declared over two centuries ago when America first fought for her freedom.

So today, on this most sacred day, we pause to reflect on what has been given and sacrificed. Let us never forget.

God bless you all, and God bless America.

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