

MEMORIAL DAY ADDRESS

(GREETINGS TO OTHER DIGNITARIES): It is an HONOR to join you today TO REMEMBER THOSE who have given the ULTIMATE SACRIFICE for our country.

As we OBSERVE MEMORIAL DAY, we do more than simply carry on a tradition dating back to 1866, we also FULFILL A COMMITMENT to some very special people.

Who were these individuals we pause to honor and praise? They were ORDINARY HUMAN BEINGS, just like us. But what they accomplished was EXTRAORDINARY.

They ANSWERED THE CALL to duty, thereby giving us today, tomorrow and all the tomorrows of OUR FUTURE.

Throughout America's history, from the patriots who fired the first shots in the Revolution...to the forces deployed around the world today, AMERICA HAS BEEN FORTUNATE to rely on citizens who willingly serve, fight...and die for their country.

It is NOT FOR MONEY OR MEDALS that such heroes step forward. It is TO ACT OUT THEIR PATRIOTISM; patriotism based on the ideals on which this country was founded: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Counting the 6,824 who died in the American Revolution up to those who have perished in our more recent conflicts, MORE THAN ONE MILLION AMERICANS HAVE DIED IN DEFENSE OF OUR COUNTRY. Together these defenders of freedom SACRIFICED EVERYTHING to give us the world we are blessed to enjoy today.

Think for a moment WHAT OUR COUNTRY WOULD BE LIKE had they NOT fought for us. Because of them, more people experience liberty and freedom than ever. It was VETERANS WHO PAID THE HIGH PRICE to get us all to this point.

We've FACED MONUMENTAL CHALLENGES for over two hundred years, and we HAVE SUCCEEDED IN BUILDING a nation that stands as an EXAMPLE TO ALL FREEDOM-LOVING PEOPLE.

Those who were FIRST TO DEFEND OUR LIBERTY at Concord, Lexington, and Bunker Hill ... fought for freedom right WHERE THEY LIVED. Their homes were burned, their cattle slaughtered, their crops destroyed, and their families killed.

The war they fought was very close, VERY PERSONAL, giving them immediate clarity of purpose.

In recent, more complex conflicts, our men and women fight in unfamiliar countries thousands of miles away. Although the surroundings and the language may be foreign, we are drawn to the troubled spots around the world by the same desire to PROTECT OUR CHERISHED FREEDOM and to foster freedom's dream for others.

This Memorial Day we honor all those ordinary people who ascended to the extraordinary by picking up the tools of war in the name of freedom. SOME DIED IN COMBAT, others from wounds afterwards; still others after a time of living in the peace they'd fought so hard to win.

So on this Memorial Day, we come face to face with the COST IN HUMAN LIVES of the battles that brought us here. Each one who faced the enemy down a rifle barrel, who endured as a prisoner or stood guard duty fighting loneliness and fear --- THEY GAVE US THIS PRECIOUS DAY and all the days of our future.

OUR SORROW over the lost will never die. We carry it with us constantly. But if we remember them ONLY IN SORROW, WE DO THEM A DISSERVICE.

They gave us the RARE OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE IN FREEDOM and we must make good use of that opportunity. “HONORING THE DEAD BY HELPING THE LIVING”...has always been the goal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the VFW Auxiliary. WE FULFILL THAT GOAL THROUGH OUR PROGRAMS and by going before Congress and each administration to submit the needs of America's veterans and their families. As we do so, we repeatedly ensure that those who GAVE THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE for America WILL NOT HAVE DIED IN VAIN.

NOT IN VAIN, not in this GREAT COUNTRY, and not on OUR WATCH.

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