



Memorial Day

(Greetings)

Thank you all for being here for this important, yet somber occasion.

Memorial Day, as we know it today, was born as Decoration Day in Waterloo, New York, back in 1866 when Henry Wells, a local drugstore owner suggested that all businesses close for one day to honor, in a solemn and patriotic manner, the fallen soldiers who lost their lives during the Civil War. A group of confederate widows decorated fresh graves with wildflowers ... the townspeople

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111

Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002

Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

made wreaths and crosses to place upon the headstones,

flags waved proudly at half-staff ... and an American tradition was born.

Now, nearly 160 years later, I stand before you on this proud day of remembrance and ask that you join me in not only remembering those who made the ultimate sacrifice for the good of this great nation, but in truly reflecting on their legacy. There has been no other nation on earth whose sacrifice has been greater than ours ... nowhere in the pages of history has there been a country before ours that has paid a higher price for the freedom of others.

Sacred and hallowed ground at Arlington, and places like Ardennes, Normandy, Pearl Harbor and Manila are testament to the high cost of achieving and maintaining freedom around the globe.

President John F. Kennedy once said, “As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words but to live by them.” I ask that today you embrace those words in their entirety.

The lives of our fallen soldiers, our fathers, our mothers, our brothers, our sisters, our comrades, were lives not lost in vain or anguish, for each life lost has contributed to the evolution of America as we know it today; a free nation, a strong nation, a nation that stands the tallest when we stand together.

So, as we stand together today, we are reminded of the true cost of freedom, and while we as a nation mourn the lives lost, we celebrate the lives lived and are forever grateful. Above all, in an attempt to pay back our debt as

American citizens we also must not only remember the fallen, but it is our responsibility to teach our youth that nothing comes without cost ... and that sacrifices are meaningless without remembrance.

I ask that on this somber occasion, you not accept feelings of grief or affliction without an encompassing feeling of honor, patriotism, and pride. It is said that where one story ends another begins, a statement that holds true for our fallen service members. Though their lives were cut short, their contributions live on ... they have ensured that the Declaration of Independence holds true for everyone, some whose story is just beginning, some who otherwise may not have been entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The courage possessed by the men and women we honor today is something that cannot be learned. It is something that is felt deep within. The willingness to die for our beliefs is truly what makes America the home of the brave. The relatively few patriots who wear the cloth of our country leave the life that they have grown accustomed to and thrust themselves into unfamiliar and dangerous territories, eager to succeed in their endeavors.

From Maine's rocky Atlantic Coast to the Golden State's sandy beaches, this IS the land of the free, ensured by the generations who believed America is worth fighting for ... worth dying for.

Today, perhaps more so than any other day throughout the year, we set aside our personal beliefs regarding politics

and war and unite in tribute and respect to all those who afforded us the very opportunity to gather freely today. And I would be remiss not to mention the families left behind ... their sacrifice is also felt, and they, too have earned our gratitude and appreciation.

So, as we leave here today, let us recommit ourselves to keeping the memory of our fallen alive ... let us ensure our youth understand at an early age that their freedom was paid forward at great expense ... let us work to educate others on the true meaning of Memorial Day ... and let us vow to stand up for those who are unable to stand up for themselves.

On this sacred day, as we stand united as a nation under old glory – the silent sentinel of freedom – we see the

**faces of our fallen embedded in our symbol of red, white,
and blue. And we thank them, and them alone for our
nation's past, and for the hope and memories that continue
to propel us into the future.**

**God bless all of our departed heroes, their families, and
God Bless America.**

-VFW-