

Suggested Remarks for



Memorial Day 2013

(Acknowledgment of introduction, distinguished guests, officers and members of the DAV and Auxiliary, and others who are present.)

Across our nation this Memorial Day, our citizens and veterans will gather to pay homage to America's finest men and women who gave their lives in defense of freedom.

Honored will be those who gave what Abraham Lincoln called the "last full measure of devotion" in the fight for our liberty.

It's worth noting that our nation was at war 230 years ago as the American Revolution ended in 1783, and it was 200 years ago when our soldiers were dying on the battlefield in the War of 1812. It was 150 years ago, in

1863, after the greatest battle ever fought on American soil, that Lincoln uttered the words of the Gettysburg address as our nation dedicated “a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who gave their lives so our nation might live.”

Seventy years ago, more Americans were dying in World War II. In 1953, we ended the Korean War. In 1973, we ended the Vietnam War. And perhaps next year, we end the fighting in Afghanistan.

Wars are not without their glory. They are not without heroes. But they bring such wretched loss of loved ones.

Lincoln questioned that loss, as a man who knew loss, when he said, “we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain.”

Our nation is richly populated in cemeteries for our veterans. In private cemeteries, both large and small, and no matter how remote, are the stones and markers on the

last resting places of the men and women who Lincoln called, “these honored dead.”

Further, he said it was the job of the living to “take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure.”

Therein lies the key to the underlying reason to honor our nation’s war dead. We here, living today, have them to thank. The saying that they gave all their tomorrows so that we could have our todays is certainly most true on Memorial Day.

Lincoln knew even more the heavy burden of that responsibility. He said at Gettysburg that we “can never forget what they did here.” Lincoln went on to say it is the living who must complete the promise of the founding principles of our nation.

More than 1.2 million Americans -- men and women -- have perished as a result of military conflicts. Because of

them, we are able to live in a free society that even our most desperate enemies admire.

Who knows what these men and women could have attained? We will never know what was lost, but without a doubt, many were destined to have a major impact on our lives and society. Their skills, knowledge, ideas and the very uniqueness of their individuality were forever lost to us.

Today we take time to mourn the loss of these fine men and women, as well as those who have passed on after their military service ended. We mourn our most recent losses along with their families, and we are proud of our ancestors who are now family heroes. We recount their contributions even though we may have never known them. We remember them as those who have done so much to make this country great.

The men and women we honor today were real people – sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, brothers and

sisters, wives and husbands. They were strong and vibrant. They loved and were loved. And they are missed.

Today is not about celebrating the beginning of the summer season or a holiday from work. Today is a solemn day of remembrance, a day that should be properly set aside for contemplation. Ask yourself where you would be without the personal sacrifice made by these men and women.

That is why I want to extend DAV's sincere thanks to each of you who decided to come here today.

You do not take your freedom for granted. Its price is well known to you. By being here today, you are setting an example for others. And, at the same time, you are remembering that so many of our finest young Americans are still serving in harm's way.

At Gettysburg, Lincoln also remembered those soldiers who survived the battle and the war when he said, "The

brave men, living and dead who struggled here”
consecrated that cemetery far more than any others.

Those who make it home carry heavy burdens. They know they must fight to honor those fallen. And they know living life to the fullest in spite of severe injuries or illness is their new mission.

DAV, the veterans’ service organization which I represent, has strived for more than 90 years to fulfill our promises to the men and women who served.

Those 90 years represent more than just time. They represent generations of sacrifice and progress by our brothers and sisters at arms. DAV was founded by veterans who left the trenches of the First World War to fight for their rights as veterans.

Today DAV reaches out to our nation’s newest generation – and all generations -- of veterans. It is one of our top priorities. Since the beginning, we have been

advocates for every injured and ill veteran alive – representing more than 300,000 claims for benefits every year.

The need for unity and for a shared commitment to the best interests of our veterans is more important today than at any time in the history of the veterans' movement.

Hundreds of thousands have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many have served numerous combat tours. They will need our help when they pick up the mantle of proud veteran.

Consequently, DAV employs and trains veterans to serve as military Transition Service Officers and National Service Officers to guide their fellow veterans through the claims process. Our network of volunteers -- the largest of any veteran service organization -- ensures our veterans receive the care, benefits and respect they've earned.

The burdens on these men and women and their families are extreme. Fulfilling Lincoln's promise, "to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan" is perhaps the most fitting way we can honor those who never made it home.

Before I close, I want to make one last point: At no time in our nation's history has our country depended more on women veterans. With women making up 17 percent of those serving, they are in harm's way. With recent Department of Defense regulations, even more will enter the fray as front line troops. Now is the time for our nation to serve and honor them equally.

Our veterans health care facilities are now working to make medical care more accessible to women. Women are getting greater recognition for their service from their government and the people. But our nation must develop new and innovative programs to care and comfort the women of war.

We must prepare to care for both “he” and “she” who have borne the battle. It is one more remarkable testament to how special today’s generation is and continues to be. They, like so many in America’s history, are putting themselves in harm’s way for you, for me and for our future.

Thank you again for coming today, for your love of country and for your dedication to honoring the men and women who defend our nation – past and present.

May God bless America, the men and women who have fulfilled their promise to serve us, and today, especially those who have fallen in that service.

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