

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to thank you all for taking time out of your day to stand with us in recognition and honor of all those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice in service to this nation.

I would like to take just a moment and recognize all those among us who have served or are currently serving, as well as any here who have lost a loved one in service. We are humbled by your sacrifices, as we know they are great, and we commend the demonstrations of courage and strength that you have no doubt shown throughout the most difficult of times.

I would also, specifically, like to recognize one of our own local heroes, \_\_\_\_\_  
(add pertinent details here if applicable).

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More than 1.1 million men and women have died in wartime throughout the span of our nation's history. To put that in perspective, that's more than the populations of San Francisco, Boston, Seattle or Washington, D.C.

In fact, more people were killed in World War II alone than currently live in the city of New Orleans. This, of course, does not even begin to take into account those who were wounded or went missing. That number is closer to 2.8 million, just slightly more than the city of Chicago.

These numbers should truly humble us, as they represent people—individuals—who were brothers, husbands, mothers, sisters, friends. These were people woven into the fabric of communities across the nation. They were loved. They were mourned. And they were missed.

Personally, I cannot begin to comprehend the moment when you send your loved one off to war. You watch them disappear out of your line of sight, knowing it may very well be the last time you will see them. Hug them. Tell them you love them. But this has been a stark reality for many families in this country. So, too, have been the telegrams, the middle-of-the-night phone calls and the chaplain standing at the front door of the next of kin to tell them their loved one has been killed.

It is all too easy for those who have never suffered such losses to see past the holes that were left in the families and communities. That's simply human nature. As Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, "Those who have long enjoyed such privileges as we enjoy forget in time that men have died to win them."

But Memorial Day is a chance to reconnect to the genesis of our nation's innumerable freedoms. It is an important day on which we ground ourselves to the reality that every Gold Star Family knows: Our way of life has been shaped and made possible by those who have served—and by those who were lost.

I would encourage you to get to know those stories within your own communities. I think you'll be amazed at the stories of true valor you will find. Just this past March, the president posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor to Army Staff Sgt. Travis Atkins of Bozeman, Mont., who was killed in action in Iraq on June 1, 2007.

Staff Sgt. Atkins died shielding three of his fellow soldiers from a suicide bomber's detonation. His son, Trevor, who was just 11 at the time of the attack, accepted the award on behalf of his late father. And his mother, Elaine, who also attended the ceremony, recalled traveling to Fort Drum for the deployment ceremony before her son left for Iraq.

At the Medal of Honor presentation, Elaine said, "You know, a parent always realizes that some of them are not going to come back."

This is the reality of military service, and this is what we take to heart on Memorial Day: We are able to be here today largely thanks to those who are not.

There are many ways you can keep our fallen, as well as our injured and ill veterans, in your mind and heart throughout the year. If you are so inclined, organizations like DAV offer countless ways to give back to those who have endured the physical, psychological and emotional wounds of war.

It could be driving a veteran to a medical appointment, befriending a veteran who lives alone or in a nursing facility, or reaching out to the veteran who just left military service. Please, reach out to find ways you can help engage and be part of the effort to care for those who served.

Working together with friends, neighbors, veterans groups and entire communities, we can ensure that the sacrifices made by our nation's finest and bravest never go unappreciated and that their memories are never forgotten.

I thank you all for joining in today's tribute. I hope you keep our military men and women—and the sacrifices they made—close to your heart today and throughout the rest of the year.

Thank you.

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