



Speaker's Name  
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**SPEECH**

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For many Americans, Memorial Day marks the start of summer. It is a well-earned day off—a day to spend precious time with friends and family and maybe fire up that grill. It is a privilege we in this country enjoy thanks to the sacrifices so many generations of men and women made on our behalf.

This is a somber day of reflection. A time to remember those men and women who helped deliver us our freedoms but who never got the chance to step off the battlefield.

This year, Memorial Day looks a little bit different than in years past. We're not out taking part in remembrance ceremonies, watching parades or enjoying fireworks with our families. I enjoy these things just as much as the next person, but the merriment often makes it easy to lose sight of what the day is truly about.

We are, I think, fortunate in some ways to have a single year where—as a nation—our heads are not turned the other way, heeding distractions instead of remembering the significance of what the day means to those who sacrificed, those who served alongside them and those families who survived them.

Behind it all, Memorial Day is about the selfless sacrifice of American heroes who raised their right hands to say ***it is I*** who will defend America, and if needed, lay down my life for my country.

That debt has been paid time and again in the name of all Americans so that we may continue to enjoy life's most treasured moments each and every day. And for too many American families, the absence of a loved one is a pain that lasts a lifetime.

Please join me in recognizing those among us who have lost a family member to military service. We cannot begin to imagine the magnitude of your loss. The sacrifices you have and continue to endure are a testament to your courage, strength and resiliency in the face of tragedy.

**<PAUSE>**

For many veterans, particularly we who are affiliated with DAV, Memorial Day is also a time we remember those who sacrificed for our nation, who were forever changed and whose lives were cut short as a result of that service.

After nearly two decades of bloodshed in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and now parts of Africa, we have to be concerned that our citizens may have become somewhat numb to war. But make no mistake about it, Americans are still fighting and giving their lives so that freedom will ring.

There were 22 American service members killed in Afghanistan last year. But 22 is just a number. A figure. It doesn't begin to describe those individuals, who can no longer speak for themselves. It's up to us to keep their memories alive.

Army Sergeant James Johnston, an explosive ordinance disposal soldier, was one of those 22. He died in Afghanistan last June, leaving behind a wife who was expecting a little girl. We remember and honor you, Sergeant Johnston. Today and every day. Thank you.

In March of this year, two Marines lost their lives in Iraq while battling Islamic State fighters in mountainous caves. Both joined in 2004. They only knew the Marine Corps during a time of war. On the day they died, they were engaged in a fight so intense and remote that it took six hours to recover the fallen Marines. We remember and honor Gunnery Sergeant Diego Pongo and Captain Moises Navas, both special operations Marines.

Today and every day, thank you.

It is up to us to keep the memories of these selfless heroes alive. Heroes, like Senior Chief Petty Officer Shannon Kent who, in 2019, became the first female sailor killed in battle against the Islamic State. She perished in a suicide attack in northern Syria.

A New York native, Kent was due to earn a doctorate in clinical psychology when she was sent on her fifth combat deployment. We honor and remember you, Senior Chief Kent. Today and every day. Thank you.

We are all duty-bound to remember our fallen. To tell their stories. And to care for their families who need our support when struck by unfathomable loss. Today is for them, too. We remember your sacrifice. We honor it. And we offer our humble thanks.

One astonishing fact of military service is that heroes like these men and women walk among us. They are titans in our communities. And I encourage you to seek out and learn the stories of your own hometown heroes. Many of them honor the fallen throughout the year by ensuring their survivors get a proper welcome home.

It's also important to recognize those who didn't wear the uniform but remember the sacrifices we honor today through their volunteerism at veterans cemeteries and in other important ways that honor our fallen brothers and sisters.

The men and women who answered freedom's call are remarkable people. They train as a team, and sometimes fight like a family, but they have each other's backs, no matter how dire the straits. So, let's be sure we have *their* backs.

It's especially important, during this time of isolation and uncertainty, that we honor the legacy of those lost by caring for those left behind.

The pain of loss is, at times, unbearable. Grief is a complicated emotion, manifesting in different ways for each of us. But it almost always helps to share that grief rather than keep it inside and let it turn our minds and souls bitter and angry.

Sometimes just sitting down to engage with veterans or their family members to talk can go a long way. Call. Email. Reach out online. However you choose to do it, keep connecting. I encourage all of you to find ways to involve yourself in caring for those who bear physical, emotional and psychological scars of war.

I thank you for thinking of veterans today and for helping to honor the fallen. I also challenge you to keep our fighting men and women in the front of your minds, today and every day. Thank you.

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