

Thank you for inviting me to join you today during this Memorial Day Parade and day of remembrance. I think those men and women who, so long ago, imagined this holiday we now call Memorial Day, knew what they were doing when they designated this time of year as our time to honor the fallen. It is a time of renewal and strength after a long winter. They must have imagined all the flowers in bloom, a million or more representing those lost in battles here and on almost every continent around the globe. They must have imagined the opportunity to tell the stories of the past to the American people who will pass these stories on to the children of tomorrow.

Today we gather at cemeteries, monuments, and parks all over the country, march in parades in cities big and small from Hawaii to Virginia, North Dakota to Texas and we watch the annual Memorial Day concert on television. We do these things to honor the loyalty and bravery of our fallen in this noble calling - military service. While this day is typically spent recalling the valor of men and women who died in combat, we must never forget those quiet professionals who answered that noble calling to serve the people of the United States in peacetime as well. The history of our Nation and those who serve can be summed up in a short and simple, yet fitting phrase... they are ordinary people who by virtue of their service and sacrifice are extraordinary.

So many mothers and wives, husbands and fathers, extended family and friends do their duty every day to ensure their loved one is remembered. They carry on each day with pictures on mantels and mementos of a life not fully lived. They carry on understanding that their Soldier chose this life of service and thus they understood the potentiality of their death as a sacrifice for the sake of freedom. These men and women left behind, carry on their Soldier's message; raising-up their memory like an unfurled flag. Today we also honor the families of those lost, for you bear a burden that only you can comprehend. We are grateful for the support you gave your Soldier, so they could carry out the mission of protecting the rest of us.

It is our responsibility as citizens to remember the Nation's brave fallen men and women - whether they died on foreign lands in the heat of battle or after a lifetime in the uniform of our Armed Services. Never forget the men and women who know all too much the cost of our freedom, for their service to this country is the greatest gift of all.

Again, thank you for inviting me to be a part of this ceremony. God bless those deployed today in harm's way providing us the opportunity to enjoy this beautiful day in our great nation, God bless her through these challenging times, and God bless each of you... Thank you.