

Welcome Everyone,

In observance of Memorial Day, the flag of the United States is raised briskly to the top of the staff and then solemnly lowered to the half-staff position, where it remains only till noon. It is then raised to full staff for the remainder of the day. The half-staff position remembers the more than one million men and women who gave their lives in service of their country. At noon, their memory is raised by the living, who resolve not to let their sacrifice be in vain, but to rise up in their stead and continue the fight for liberty and justice for all.

Memorial Day is a day of somber reflection and profound gratitude. The first Memorial Day held at Arlington Cemetery in 1868 was our nations attempt at healing itself after our own civil war. A war fought by Americans, against Americans...Civil war...brother against brother, tearing at the fabric of a very young nation. There were 20,000 men, both union and confederate soldiers, buried afterward at Arlington Cemetery.

On that 1st Memorial Day in the new Arlington Cemetery, the mansion once owned by General Robert E. Lee of the confederate army, was draped in black morning tape. After the ceremony and speeches, the children that were orphaned by that war, walked through Arlington Cemetery gently scattering flowers. They said prayers and sang hymns to honor the fallen resting there. Today there are 400,000 men and women buried at Arlington Cemetery.

Here in Bloomington our first veteran, Delos S. Nelson, was buried on October 27th, 1918. Today there are 90. We pay tribute to their memory and lives they lived. To their courageousness and ultimate sacrifice in service to our country. Today we recognize our veterans with a marker at their grave. It is important that we remember these Americans and their fine example of how to create a better world, stronger nation, and kinder communities.

Wars are terribly divisive and disruptive. They leave scars on the people fighting them, civilians caught in them, and the lands they are fought on. They leave widows and orphans in their wakes. Our soldiers in service to their country, travel to faraway places to execute our nations policies. In school we are taught briefly about our nation's contributions to wars and their outcomes. Dates and places, who was on who's side, what treaties came to be after.

I played Avalon Hill War Games as a teen. History lessons of a sort. World War 1, World War 2, the Korean Conflict, and Americas Revolutionary and Civil War. History lessons in the "art of war", strategy. At age 12, I could have asked someone about World War 1 in my small town and been directed to go talk to "this guy", he was there. Today there

are no more World War 1 veterans with us anymore. The last man to fight in that war died in 2011. There are only 65,000 World War 2 and Korean Conflict veterans alive and 5.4 million Vietnam veterans with us.

War is an extreme depiction of human behavior, astonishing suffering and cruelty, as well as the daily heroism and fortitude of hundreds of thousands of people. War and its aftermath can breed acrimony and hatred, dividing people farther. The conflicts of today we witness in real time on our digital feedback. I've seen economic chaos, famine, groups with crazy ideals try to make their dreams reality. I've watched as part of the general public becomes disillusioned with the inability of democratic governments to lessen the suffering of the people we see.

We must listen to the wise voices of loved ones that have seen and heard this before. It seeps in from the past. Listen to those with experience, they are knowledgeable and will not lead us astray. They are our families and our families' stories. They know that fighting doesn't solve problems. Caring and love are essential parts of our wellbeing, and talking and sharing and listening is the path.

After each conflict it is our nations duty to learn, grow, and transcend the tragedies of the past. Come together and help each other heal. Talk to each other...the young and old, republicans and democrats, soldiers and citizens. Let us not forget what was seen and heard. We must learn from it. Learn to listen to each other, learn to trust one another, learn how precious life is, how precious our freedom is, how lucky we are to be Americans and live, "in the land of the free, the home of the brave".

Today we gather together to express our admiration for our fallen veterans. These men and women do not need our praise, they are safe from immortality. We came for our own souls, so we may feel the spring, the water of their lives that flowed quickly by. We recall their stories, honor their memory, and drink from their spring again. We say their names and recall the faces of our loved ones. To us there is something deeper, love with reverence, for their service and what it is dedicated too. Our freedom and the freedom of the human spirit.

Today we pay homage to the greatness of America. I want my understanding of the sacrifice of those who died to be more nuanced and respectful. There isn't anyone alive who doesn't have family to honor today. That fact alone should make us all feel a little closer.

As a nation, our history is a book still being written. This chapter, like many others before, has some of our military service members stationed abroad in a world of uncertainty. These military families are not whole. We want you to know if you need us, we

are here. We will stand with you always. I would also like to recognize, along with our serving military members, those of the National Guard and Reservist and their families. Thankyou. We hope when this chapter closes you can close your arms around your loved ones and be whole again.

As I conclude my speech, I also want to remember this is Decoration Day. Mark and I have for the last 15 years decorated the graves of family members that have passed. We are indebted to them for the treasures they bestowed upon us. Our traditions, time spent together, love and the many blessings of family and friends. Their lives and stories along with these treasures we will dutifully bestow upon the next generation. The future is yet unwritten and I have hope. Hope that one chapter of our history is that all our military service members return to their families. Hope that "Peace on Earth" isn't something we wish for...

We find it.

God bless our troops,

God bless America,

God bless Bloomington.