

**The  
American  
Legion**



*For God and country*

## *Suggested Speech*

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# **Flag Day**

# **2013**

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Today, we honor not only the flag of our great country, but what it symbolizes. We are honoring freedom. We are honoring the freedom to worship as we please, to speak as we please and to vote as we please. We are honoring the hardworking men and women who have made this the greatest and most successful country that the planet has ever known. Flag Day is America's Day.

The 13 stripes on our flag are not just symbolic of the original colonies but they are symbolic of the founding fathers who hailed from those colonies. They are symbolic of their dreams for a great Republic, dreams that have been forged into reality by all the men and women who have defended this great nation.

George Washington once said of the original Flag, “We take the stars from Heaven, the red from our mother country, separating it by white stripes, thus showing that we have separated from her, and the white stripes shall go down to posterity representing liberty.”

Larry Eckhardt uses the flag to honor America’s fallen heroes. He is not a veteran nor are there servicemembers in his family. He is simply a patriot.

In 2006 the native of Little York, Illinois, attended a funeral for a soldier in his area. When there weren’t enough flags there to satisfy Larry, he bought 150 more. He loaded his truck and started hauling them to military funerals throughout Illinois. His inventory has grown to more than 2,200 flags and he has expanded his reach to cover several states. Larry and his volunteers line the flags up to cover 14 miles of a fallen hero’s final journey.

“I’m news that shouldn’t be news,” Larry told the Evansville Courier Press. “My hope is that others will take up what I’m doing in other states. I really want this idea to spread so that every time a fallen hero comes home – no matter where – there is an individual, group, or organization ready to provide the flags for their funeral.”

The American Legion provides honors at military funerals in many communities. We do so – not just because we are veterans – but because, like Larry, we love our flag.

As school children, we pledged to it. As Scouts, we saluted it. As veterans, we fought for it. And as Americans, we cherish it.

In 1989 the Supreme Court mistakenly ruled that flag desecration laws were invalid because of First Amendment free speech protections. The case, Texas vs. Johnson, confused outrageous conduct with speech and robbed legislatures of their ability to pass reasonable laws prohibiting that conduct.

Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens dissented from the Flag desecration ruling. He wrote, “sanctioning the public desecration of the flag will tarnish its value – both for those who cherish the ideals for which it waves and for those that desire to don the robes of martyrdom by burning it.

“That tarnish is not justified by the trivial burden on free expression occasioned by requiring that an available, alternative mode of expression – including uttering words critical of the flag...be employed.”

For nearly a quarter century The American Legion has been fighting for a constitutional amendment that would restore the right of the American people to once again protect their flag – OUR FLAG – from desecration.

All 50 state legislatures have petitioned Congress for a constitutional amendment that would restore to Congress the authority to prohibit flag desecration. Poll after poll shows the overwhelming majority of the American people want to see their flag protected.

Lopsided majorities in both houses of Congress have supported it. The House of Representatives has passed such an amendment in six consecutive votes and the Senate failing by only one vote of a needed two-thirds supermajority in the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress.

But The American Legion is persistent and we continue to support this worthy fight. Rep. Jo Ann Emerson of Missouri has introduced House Joint Resolution 19, which would once again protect the flag. It is up to "*We the People*," to tell our Representatives to pass H.J. Res 19 and for the United States Senate to follow suit.

The American Legion also believes that the Pledge of Allegiance should be recited frequently and in its current form. When President Eisenhower added "Under God" to the Pledge on Flag Day in 1954, he said, "From this day forward millions of our schoolchildren will daily proclaim in every city and town, every village and rural school house, the dedication of our nation and our people to the Almighty. To anyone who truly loves America, nothing could be more inspiring than to contemplate the rededication of our youth, on each school morning, to our country's true meaning."

Eisenhower's addition of "Under God," was universally accepted at the time. "In this way," he said, "we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country's most powerful resource, in peace or war."

The Flag of the United States is also a reminder of the possibilities and potential of the United States. It is the only flag to have ever been placed on the moon. This was not done as symbol of seizure or sovereignty, but as astronaut Buzz Aldrin said, "a philosophical moment of achievement." And it is an achievement that the United States has accomplished six times.

The flag has been an inspiration on many American battlefields and provided a comforting presence to rescue workers at New York's Ground Zero and further south as it draped the west wall of the Pentagon in the days following the 9/11 attacks. It is both a rallying symbol to Americans and a sign of defiance to her enemies. It was, after all, following the bombardment at Fort McHenry that Francis Scott Key famously observed, "that our Flag was still there."

And with the help of American patriots, that Flag will continue to fly forever.

Thank you for being here. God Bless you all and God bless the Flag of the United States of America!

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