

# The American Legion



*For God and country*

## ***Suggested Speech***

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## **Flag Day 2015**

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March 2015

**Stars and Stripes can be portrayed in many ways.**

**Stephan Ross wore a Star of David patch and a striped uniform while living in the Dachau (Dah COW) Concentration Camp as a boy.**

**Seventy years ago, just outside the camp's gates, an American soldier jumped off a tank and handed Stephan some food rations. So grateful for his new-found freedom, the emaciated boy dropped to his knees and kissed the soldier's boots. The U.S. soldier then handed him a very different set of stars and stripes, that of a small American Flag.**

**It is the same Flag that Ross and his family would keep and treasure, as Stephan made a new life for himself in the United States, where he would later earn three college degrees and become a founder of the New England Holocaust Memorial in Boston.**

**According to the Memorial's website, Stephan Ross sees the Flag as a symbol of freedom, life, compassion and his love of the American soldiers.**

**The hope and opportunity represented by our national symbol was not lost on 19<sup>th</sup> Century French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville (TOKE vill), who wrote that America – quote – “as it holds the keys of a new world, its flag is respected in the most remote seas.” – unquote.**

**The late journalist Tim Russert reflected on what the Flag meant to him during a 2004 interview with The American Legion Magazine.**

**In a broadcast following the September 11 attacks, the *Meet the Press* host was criticized by The Washington Post because he wore a flag pin on the air, as he mercilessly grilled a Taliban spokesman.**

**“Yes, I am a journalist, but first I am an American citizen,” Russert told The American Legion.**

**While most of us are not journalists, we are all something. We are teachers, police officers, construction workers, office workers, business people or we practice some other occupation.**

**But first and foremost, we should consider ourselves AMERICANS.**

**Our Flag not only symbolizes our freedom, it represents who we are. The only reason we get to choose our occupations – or even if we wish to have a career at all—is because our country gives us these marvelous opportunities and choices.**

**The Flag becomes a symbol of national pride when an astronaut reaches the heavens and places it on the moon, or a group of uncommon heroes fight through the ravages of hell to raise it on Iwo Jima’s Mount Suribachi.**

**When a student council at a California university recently voted to ban displays of the Flag from a campus lobby, Americans from all over the country expressed their outrage. It did not help when a group of professors signed a letter of support for the ban.**

**One misguided student said she didn't like how the Flag "triggered" people. Well, she was certainly right about that. It triggered a wave of patriotism and appreciation for our national symbol.**

**The overwhelming majority of Americans do not like to see their Flag disrespected. In fairness, the university's chancellor criticized the Flag ban and the student government executive council quickly voted to overturn it.**

**But the message from the American people was clear: Don't Mess with Old Glory.**

**Today, we are honoring not only the Flag, but also 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 world has ever known.**

**Flag Day is America's Day.**

**It was President Harry S. Truman, an active and proud member of The American Legion, who signed an act of Congress in 1949 which designated June 14<sup>th</sup> as Flag Day.**

**Of course, Give `Em Hell Harry would have been horrified to know that 40 years later the U.S. Supreme Court would strike down laws in 48 states and our nation's capitol which protected the Flag from desecration.**

**For more than two decades The American Legion has been trying to right this wrong. Congress currently has legislation that has been introduced which would amend the U.S. Constitution and allow us to once again protect our Flag from desecration.**

**It is not and should not be easy to amend the U.S. Constitution. In order for an amendment to pass, it requires a two-thirds majority in the House and Senate and the ratification of three-fourths of our states.**

**It is up to us to make it happen. Call or contact your congressional representatives and senators. Let them know that if the Flag is exceptional enough to cover the coffins of our fallen veterans, it is important enough to protect from the misguided and unappreciative protestors who would desecrate it.**

**Those who would desecrate the Flag of the United States are not practicing free speech. They are committing a hate crime against America.**

**The greatest tragedy of Flag desecration is the disrespect it teaches children, disrespect for the values our Flag embodies and the disrespect for those who have sacrificed for those values.**

**President Calvin Coolidge famously did not say a lot, but “Silent Cal” had plenty to say about Old Glory.**

**“We identify the Flag with almost everything we hold dear on earth,” he said. “It represents our peace and security, our civil and political liberty, our freedom of religious worship, our family, our friends, our home. We see it in the great multitude of blessings, of rights and privileges that make up our country. But when we look at our Flag, and behold it emblazoned with all our rights, we must remember that it is equally a symbol of our duties. Every glory that we associate with it is the result of duty done. A yearly contemplation of our Flag purifies that national conscience.”**

**Ladies and gentlemen, President Coolidge was right. But in addition to a yearly contemplation, we should remember to Pledge to our great Flag as often as we can and to always show her the respect that she deserves.**

**It is not the colors, the design or the combination of stars and stripes that make our Flag great. It is the principles for which she stands that make it a symbol like no other.**

**Thank you for being here. God Bless America and God Bless our Flag.**

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