

The American Legion



For God and country

Suggested Speech

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Flag Day 2011

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Patriotism does not have an age requirement. In fact, sometimes it takes a child to remind us how special our country and our flag are.

Cody Alicea is a 14-year-old middle school student in Denair, California. Last year, during the week of Veterans Day, he made national news when an official at his school ordered him to remove a U.S. Flag from his bicycle.

Incredibly, the school had banned national flags after tensions arose between flag-waving Cinco de Mayo celebrants and spectators bearing the Stars and Stripes. Cody was asked to remove the flag, it was explained, “for his own safety.”

This did not set well with Cody, who comes from a family with a proud tradition of military service. People from across the country rallied around Cody's cause and it wasn't long before the American Legion Riders and other patriots were escorting Cody to school – surrounded by hundreds of flags.

To be fair, the school realized the error of its policy, retracted the ban and quickly issued an apology. But this was clearly a case of a student educating his educators.

Adults who come up with such misguided policies are usually not trying to be unpatriotic. They just need a reminder about the exceptional nature of this country and its flag. And that's why Flag Day is so important.

The Second Continental Congress adopted the flag of the United States by resolution on June 14, 1777. In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson issued a proclamation officially establishing June 14th as Flag Day. Although it is not a federal holiday, it is observed in communities across our great nation.

Flag Day isn't simply about honoring a particular design on a cloth. It is more about taking time to reflect on our freedoms and the principles of our great nation...for which that flag stands.

The flag is a reminder of who we are.

In a broadcast shortly following the Sept. 11th attacks, *Meet the Press* host Tim Russert raised the ire of many in the media when he wore a flag pin on the air, as he grilled a Taliban spokesman.

Apparently, Mr. Russert's show of patriotism somehow compromised his objectivity in the minds of some.

"Yes, I am a journalist, but first I am an American citizen," the late host told *The American Legion Magazine* in 2007.

Tim Russert knew that one of the reasons he was able to be a journalist and ask tough questions of the powerful is because he was in a country that allowed him to do so. It is the same reason that we are able to be police officers, farmers, engineers, office workers, business owners or any other occupation of our choosing.

America is not only the land of the free, it is the land of opportunity. The flag represents all that America has to offer.

It is our hope.

Many Americans were offended when a misguided pastor desecrated a Koran. Americans everywhere should also be offended when someone desecrates our flag.

Fortunately, legislation is being considered in Washington, which would give Congress the constitutional authority to protect Old Glory from desecration.

Retired Army Major General Patrick H. Brady earned the Medal of Honor for his heroism in Vietnam. He said, “Many Americans have raised their right hand and sworn an oath to protect and defend the Constitution from all enemies, both foreign and domestic. We believe that all Americans who put their right hand over their heart and recite the Pledge of Allegiance take that same oath. Both the oath and the pledge are taken in the presence of Old Glory to emphasize that our Flag is the symbol of our Constitution. We believe that – we the people – must exercise our right to rule by ensuring that the Court’s decision on flag-burning is not irrevocably fixed.”

And that decision – a 5-4 majority in the 1989 Supreme Court case *Texas v. Johnson* – invalidated flag protection laws that existed in 48 states and the District of Columbia. It is up to us to remind Congress that the flag belongs to “We, the People,” and the people want the Stars and Stripes protected.

Gatherings such as this are important, and we should always remember that it is much easier to fight for our flag in the halls of Congress than it was in the halls of Montezuma and other places where Americans have bled for Old Glory.

It is much easier for us to honor the flag in our comfortable surroundings than it was for Mike Christian.

Mike Christian was a naval aviator held in a Vietnamese prisoner of war camp with future Senator John McCain.

One day, using a bamboo needle and some cloth scraps he had gathered, Mike made a small U.S. Flag, which he sewed inside his shirt. Each morning, Mike would remove his shirt, and the POWs would say the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. When it was discovered by the guards, they beat him severely.

“After things quieted down, I went to lie down to sleep,” Senator McCain recalled. “As I did, I happened to look in the corner of the room. Sitting there beneath a dim light bulb, with a piece of white cloth, a piece of red cloth, another shirt and his bamboo needle, was my friend, Mike Christian. Sitting there, with his eyes almost shut from his beating, making another American flag. He was not making that flag because it made Mike Christian feel better. He was making that flag because he knew how important it was for us to be able to pledge our allegiance to that flag and our country.”

As Cody Alicea, Tim Russert and Mike Christian have reminded us, patriotism is exhibited by Americans of all ages and under all conditions. And while it's easy to be outraged over those who disrespect our country, our beliefs and our flag, it's important and more rewarding to remember those who inspire us with their pride.

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

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