

The American Legion



For God and country

Suggested Speech

★ PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE ★ P.O. BOX 1055 ★ INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46206-1055
★ (317) 630-1253 ★ Fax (317) 630-1368

Flag Day 2010

The American Legion National Headquarters
Public Relations
P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206
(317) 630-1253
pr@legion.org
March 2010

The images are searing.

Three New York firefighters in the middle of rubble that was the World Trade Center, hoisting a banner of hope and patriotism.

Just a few weeks later, a giant flag draped the side of the Pentagon – its outer walls still scorched from where the hijacked airliner penetrated the nucleus of America's military might.

Debra Burlingame, whose brother was killed on 9/11, wrote eloquently in *The American Legion Magazine*: “The flag spoke for us when we were bereft of words. It was our comfort and our rallying cry: ‘America! America! God shed His grace on thee.’ And so we put them everywhere: on office buildings and storefronts, on cars and kids’ bikes. The flag was sewn anew onto the uniforms of Major League Baseball players and emergency room nurses. It greeted us and lifted our spirits when we needed it most, appearing in improbable places, like a highway overpass. That faded, dirty flag on I-95 pierces my heart. Where have all the flags of September 11th gone?”

It is up to us to answer this question. We see the flag make the traditional comebacks – particularly on days like today – Flag Day – along with Memorial Day and the Fourth of July.

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.

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 is a day to celebrate a society that gives us men like Antonio Hedgepeth. Antonio is an artist, whose work is displayed at the Pentagon, in churches and on military bases.

In fact, his paintings adorn the halls of the Armed Forces Retirement Home where he resides.

He paints scenes of our soldiers saluting our flag and of soldiers kneeling in prayer in the deserts of Iraq.

His paintings evoke memories of Fourth of July celebrations, Veterans Day and Memorial Day.

A disabled veteran of the Gulf War, Antonio does not let his disability interfere with his passion for God, country and the flag.

Antonio still paints with a burning desire even though he suffers from muscular degeneration, as a result of his Gulf War illness.

In Antonio's words, "When I look at the flag, pictures of democracy, freedom, our American way of life rush through my mind...I just have to paint what I see and share that same feeling of pride with others."

Because it is such an important symbol of our great nation, it deserves special status. It should not to be desecrated.

The American Legion has been an advocate for the constitutional protection of the flag since the 1989 Supreme Court ruling that flag desecration laws were invalid because of the First Amendment free speech protections.

\

Admittedly, we Americans do not display our Flag as much as we should. But cynics would be foolish to confuse this oversight with apathy or a lack of patriotism. If you want to see how Americans really feel about Old Glory, try taking it away from us or interfere with our right to display it – as one Homeowners Association found out last winter.

When Van Barfoot, a 90-year-old World War II Medal of Honor recipient, was told by his neighborhood board that his flagpole was not allowed, Americans everywhere expressed their outrage.

“The association underestimated the fight left in this elderly veteran and now they have to contend with the determination and persistence of Col. Barfoot’s 2.5 million friends in The American Legion,” the Legion’s National Commander Clarence E. Hill said at the time. “The flag is a symbol of our country. People should fly it proudly. That’s all Col. Barfoot wants to do. If he were desecrating the flag, instead, the association couldn’t do a thing to stop him. We proudly stand with Col. Barfoot and say ‘enough already!’ Let him keep the flagpole and fly the flag as often as he wants. He certainly earned that right.”

Do you know something else? Col. Barfoot and his fellow veterans also earned the right for you and I to fly that flag. It was no surprise that the homeowners association backed off and allowed Col. Barfoot to keep his flagpole, but what is surprising is that we don’t seem to appreciate our Flag enough until it is threatened.

The flag was indeed everywhere in the days and weeks after Sept. 11. Although it may not be as commonly displayed as it once was, it has never left our hearts.

And it never will.

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

#