

**The
American
Legion**



For God and country

Suggested Speech

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It is never over. Missions may end but the legacies left and the pain of their absence endure.

By the time our last remaining troops returned from Iraq in December 2011, nearly 4,500 of their comrades lost their lives during Operations Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn.

We continue to lose American heroes every day in Afghanistan and in military training accidents and missions around the world. The loss to their families, friends, fellow servicemembers and country is permanent.

Some were only teenagers and most of those killed were under age 25. In the eyes of their loved ones, they are forever young.

Remembering our fallen once a year is not enough. The widows, widowers, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and children remember EVERYDAY.

The empty seat at the dinner table, the smaller gathering on Thanksgiving, and the voice of a loved one heard only as a distant memory are constant reminders that they are gone.

But there are also people who can enjoy time with their families because of the sacrifices that others have made.

Scripture tells us that “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

Marine Corporal Jason Dunham epitomized this. A 22-year-old native of upstate New York, Corporal Dunham was on patrol when his unit was attacked in Iraq. When the enemy hurled a grenade, Corporal Dunham used his helmet and body to smother the explosive, absorb the blast and save his fellow Marines. Eight days later, on April 22, 2004, he died from the injuries inflicted by the blast. He was the first Marine to receive the Medal of Honor since the Vietnam War.

From the American Revolution to the Global War on Terrorism, one million American men and women like Corporal Dunham have made the Supreme Sacrifice. They died so that we could continue to cherish the things they loved ---God, country and family.

That is why we are gathered here on Memorial Day...to honor the memory of our fallen warriors who have given everything for their country.

We are also reminded on this day that in each generation, brave men and women will always step forward to take the oath of allegiance as members of America's armed forces, willing to fight and if necessary die, for the sake of freedom.

In reflecting on the sacrifices of their comrades during World War I, the founders of The American Legion saw four common reasons or pillars, if you will, as to why Americans so often in the past and still to this day answer their nation's call – even to the point of sacrificing their lives.

They do it to provide a strong national defense --- to keep America safe and secure against those enemies who would destroy our American way of life.

They do it for their fellow comrades...for those fighting by their side against all odds and for those who eventually separate from the military but proudly claim their status as veterans.

They do it for American core values of God and country --- family, patriotism and our religious heritage.

They do it for their children...so that they can grow up in an America that is strong and free.

It is through this last pillar - children...that we can continue the spirit of Memorial Day each and every day.

More than 6,400 American men and women have died in Afghanistan and Iraq in the latest wars. Many were parents.

The innocence of their grieving children will be challenged by the dramatic change affecting the balance of security and comfort in their family routine. Their hearts will feel the sharp sting of their loss, leaving them only with memories of their loving mom or dad. Life as they have known it will be much harder from now on.

There are many tangible things we can do to honor the service of our fallen heroes. First and foremost, is to take care of their families. In some cases, this means providing financial assistance to help their children obtain higher education.

This is why The American Legion established The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund.

Across this great country, The American Legion is raising funds to ensure that college education will be a reality for these families.

We honor the living comrades of the fallen – the wounded, injured and ill members of our Armed Forces through programs like Operation Comfort Warriors, Heroes to Hometowns and through the work of American Legion service officers. Often times these veterans are surprised that so many want to help them. We don't do this because of any requirements. We do it because we want to. It is simply the right thing to do.

Memorial Day is not about picnics and parades – although, there is nothing wrong with enjoying and celebrating our American way of life. But Memorial Day is really about remembering those who made our way of life possible.

Army Sergeant Dennis Weichal (Why Kull) was one such man. Sergeant Weichal enlisted in the Rhode Island National Guard in 2001. He successfully completed a tour in Iraq in 2005 and was re-deployed to Afghanistan in 2012.

When a young Afghan boy was picking up shell casings in the middle of the road, Sgt. Weichal acted with what his friends say was characteristic instinct. He pushed the boy from the path of a moving armored vehicle and sacrificed his own life so the boy could live.

His friend, Staff Sergeant Ronald Corbett said, "He would have done it for anybody. That was the way he was. He would give you the shirt off his back if you needed it."

Three young children in Rhode Island sacrificed their father, so another young child in Afghanistan could live.

During the funeral, a National Guard chaplain read a letter written by Sergeant Weichal's son, Nicholas.

"I really, really miss you," Nicholas said. "I promise I will protect my sisters, Hope and Madison, like you told me to. You are my hero. I know you are in heaven watching over me. You are the brightest star."

You are our brightest star, too, Sergeant Weichal. And the sacrifice that you and your fellow Americans have made will not be forgotten!

May God bless them and may God bless you for
being here today.

Thank you.

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