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Americanism
Holidays
Memorial Day

FROM: National Public Relations Division, The American Legion, Indianapolis 6, Ind.

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* SUGGESTED MEMORIAL DAY ADDRESS *
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* FOR AMERICAN LEGION SPEAKERS *
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Memorial Day has become one of America's most significant holidays---a day when we hark back through the silent corridors of time and remember those who have gone to eternal rest and what they meant to America in life and in death.

Whether those whom we honor this day met their Maker on the field of battle in defense of their country and its freedoms, or in the quiet of the family circle, is of little moment. What is important to us is that each of those who sleep here is a part of America's past, and each in some manner has made his contribution to the whole cloth of our great American heritage which we cherish so dearly.

Yes, this is a most meaningful holiday---for The American Legion as we pay a special tribute to our departed comrades---and for all Americans who journey this day to the final resting places of loved ones and make those places beautiful once more with the fresh flowers of springtime.

Just as the pulse of nature quickens to the warming sun, so does the heart-beat of America quicken to the memory of other days and once familiar faces as we reach across time and space and touch hands for a moment of silent, spiritual communion with our heroic dead.

How appropriate it is then, that we observe Memorial Day in the spring of the year, the season that God selected for the reawakening of nature. What better time could there be for a reawakening of the spirit of America, and how could it better be accomplished than by recalling our past as a nation and those heroes and events that made America great and have kept her great?

We have heard it said many times that the present is merely a prelude to the future. By the same reasoning we may conclude that yesterday was the prelude to today. Those to whom we pay homage today, from the patriots of early American

history to our hero dead of three wars in this the twentieth century, have played their role in shaping the destiny of our beloved land. Because they dared to die, we live today and breathe the precious air of freedom.

From them we have inherited a sacred trust, for it was they who established and then preserved our freedom through self-sacrifice, personal valor, and an unswerving devotion to the causes which were dearer to them than life itself. To be worthy of our trust it is now for us, the living, to dedicate ourselves to the preservation of our liberties in our time and to pass these blessings on to generations of Americans yet unborn.

Only when our task here is done, and done as well as that of those who have gone before us, only when we have insured for our children the way of life that was handed down to us, can this generation of Americans say with finality that our honored dead have not died in vain.

All those things which they died to save, we live to maintain. When we recall the course of honor and devotion which they chose to travel, how can we do less than to choose as exacting a course for ourselves? From their sacred memory may we draw renewed inspiration to serve our native land to the very best of our ability and through all of our days.

We know the gravity of the threat to our freedoms today, and we know there are those who have doubts and fears concerning our ability to maintain our way of life in the face of today's challenges. To those who share this way of thinking, may we point out that all things are relative. The challenges which our forebears faced were as grave in their time as are those which now confront us. Had they not met their challenges with faith, courage and confidence in the ultimate victory of right over might, we would not be free today. We cannot minimize the threat which faces us, but, consider our own times in the light, of the past and we must come to the realization that no more could be asked of us as individual citizens than already has been given by them.

Let us examine, for a moment, portions of that first proclamation calling for the establishment of May 30 as Memorial Day, and which, in reality, set the theme of Memorial Day forever.

"We should guard their graves with sacred vigilance. All that the consecrated wealth and taste of the nation can add to their adornment and security is but a fitting tribute to the memory of our slain defenders.

"Let no wanton foot tread rudely on such hallowed grounds; let pleasant paths invite the coming and going of revered visitors and fond mourners; let no vandalism or avarice or neglect, or ravages of time testify to the present or to coming generations, that we have forgotten as a people.

"If other eyes grow dull and other hands slack and hearts grow cold in the solemn trust, ours shall keep it well as long as the light and warmth of life remains in us.

"Let us then gather around their sacred remains and garland the passionless mound above them with the choicest flowers of springtime; let us raise above them the dear old flag they saved from dishonor, let us in this solemn presence renew our pledge to aid and assist those whom they left among us as a sacred charge upon a nation's gratitude--the soldiers' and sailors' widow and orphan."

What more stirring admonition can be placed before the nation, how can we say more eloquently: "Lest we forget?"

We of The American Legion look upon our participation in Memorial Day services here and across the land, and in our military cemeteries overseas, neither as right nor duty, but rather as a sacred privilege. For we honor today not only those who served the nation from its earliest days, but our own comrades in arms who, in another day, were as much a part of our lives as are our families today.

This day the hearts of Legionnaires around the world are one with those who have stirred within them once again the memories of loved ones whom they shall see no more, but whose names are inscribed indelibly upon the nation's roll of honor.

For them, and for us, the special meaning of Memorial Day is crystal clear. We believe we can pay no higher tribute to our dead, nor render greater service to our nation, this day than to instill in others, who seemingly have no special reason for remembering, the true spirit of Memorial Day. This is, in truth, a day for all Americans.

We believe that every American who enjoys the fruits of citizenship in the land of the free cannot help but be a better citizen if he knows of the sacrifices that have been made that freedom might live.

Our young people, now preparing to assume the responsibilities of adult citizenship, will be better equipped for their task if they have an understanding of the cost of freedom.

We must help them to know and understand that freedom is the responsibility of every individual who would live under it and enjoy its benefits. That which is obtained cheaply, is esteemed lightly, and the cost of freedom, as we know it to be, makes it the most priceless of man's possessions.

It is our prayer this Memorial Day that no new wars will demand that other vibrant young lives must be sacrificed in the cause of freedom---but we cannot know the future.

All we can say with certainty is that we must be eternally vigilant. We must heed the lessons of yesterday as we labor today to build for tomorrow the kind of America we speak of in the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of our country: "One nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

May those who mourn this day take a measure of comfort from the words of Benjamin Harrison, who voiced these sentiments many years ago: "I have never been able to think of the day as one of mourning; I have never quite been able to feel that half-masted flags were appropriate on Decoration Day. I have rather felt that it should be at the peak, because those whose dying we commemorate rejoiced in seeing it where their valor placed it. We honor them in a joyous, thankful,

triumphant commemoration of what they did. The glory of their achievement has set them in an imperishable roll of honor."

May we who live now pay our finest tribute to our valiant dead as we reaffirm to them our promise that our nation's flag always shall be at the peak, and that the roll of honor which contains their names never shall be tarnished or forgotten.