

**Senator Ken Salazar
Memorial Day Remarks
Monday, May 29, 2006
Fort Logan National Cemetery**

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Associated Veterans of Colorado – Ken Melcher and Warren Tellgren – and the staff of the Fort Logan National Cemetery – Tricia Blocher, O’Neal Hughes -- for putting on this wonderful annual Memorial Day Program.

I also offer special thanks to the Ladies Auxiliaries here today representing various veteran service organizations. Your sustained contributions and support are vital to your organizations’ success.

And thanks to the Littleton Community Band for your musical contributions today.

Introduction

It is humbling and awe inspiring to be in this place on this day, and to be reminded of the price of our freedoms.

It should give us immeasurable pride to know that those who lie here represent all of America. Rich and poor – urban and rural – immigrant and native born – they are all among the dead we honor today. Ordinary people who performed extraordinary deeds.

There is an inscription at Arlington National Cemetery, dedicated to the fallen, that reads:

“Not for fame or reward, not for place or rank, not lured by ambition or goaded by necessity, but in simple obedience to duty as they understood it, these suffered all, sacrificed all, dared all – and died.”

More than one million Americans have died for our country since 1775. Today we stop to reflect on their courage, their histories, and the continued sacrifices of the brave men and women who are, as we speak, in harm’s way around the world.

Memorial Day – A History

I will not attempt to detail an exhaustive historic timeline of this solemn day of remembrance. However, we should remember what this day was meant to be from the beginning.

From its start as a way of remembering the Civil War dead, to its evolution as Decoration Day and recognition of all war dead and those serving, Memorial Day was meant to salute the sacrifice and service of our military members. It is a remembrance of the fallen, and of the esteem in which they held the values of life and liberty, of duty and honor, of others before self.

We must remember this if we are to reconnect with who we are as a nation and a people; if we are to reconnect with the realization of how much we owe to so many veterans, living and dead, that allows us to live out those ideals.

In short, we must highlight and celebrate the memorial in Memorial Day in order to make it a true day of remembrance. That should be the true meaning of this

special day. Some recommended activities that aid us in that reflection include:

- Visiting cemeteries and memorials;
- Placing flags and flowers at the graves of the fallen;
- Flying the U.S. Flag, and the POW/MIA flag also;
- Participating in the “National Moment of Remembrance at 3:00 p.m. this afternoon;
- Pledge to aid survivors of our fallen dead, and to aid the disabled veteran.

Too many among us have no sense of our history as a nation or truly understand the place our military holds in writing that history.

Many of our countrymen and women lack experience or connection to our military services. A Gallup Poll revealed that only 28% of Americans know the meaning of Memorial Day. Most view it as the first three day holiday of the summer vacation season.

Older veterans from WWII and Korea are dying at a rate of more than 1500 a day, leaving fewer and fewer left to tell their stories of courage and sacrifice.

Others from Vietnam simply choose not to talk about their service, even to this day.

I consider myself fortunate to have had a father that was immensely proud of his membership in the fraternity of veterans. And he made sure that I knew what Memorial Day meant. He shared stories of my uncle Leandro, who served with him in World War II, and who died in Europe. He was so proud of his service that before he died a few years ago, he told us he wished to be buried in his World War II uniform.

The current global war on terrorism and its reliance on greater deployment of our citizen-warriors of the National Guard and Reserve is bringing the meaning of service and sacrifice closer to more Americans. It is causing more of us on a daily basis to understand and reconnect with the values of our nation.

I recently returned from Iraq and Afghanistan. This was my second trip to Iraq in a year. I am immensely proud of our men and women in uniform and their service to our Nation.

As I reflect on our national security challenges today, we as a Nation need to understand that violence and terror in our world:

First, the enemy is real, and we must understand that extremists around the world want to attack and kill Americans here at home and abroad. I am told that in Iraq \$1,000 is paid for taking the life of an American. And we know that the hate that killed over 3,000 Americans is still fueling plots and plans to attack again.

Second, the enemy we fight can only be beat with a global response. America cannot do it alone. We must re-embrace the legacy of the greatest generation and recognize that in their name, we will beat back the terrorists and the violence with our allies around the world.

Memorial Day – A Promise

So as we confront the challenges of our day, it is important for us to remember, to reconnect with the history of this day. That reconnection can provide strength and reassurance through these difficult times.

Your presence here today is important. It is a statement that you are not forgetting the sacrifices of our warriors. Your presence reasserts your demand that they not be forgotten.

It is so important that those of us who understand the importance of our history act to help reconnect others to that history.

And as we pay homage, honor and respect to those that died, we also cannot forget the tens of millions that survived; some are among us here today. We thank you for your service.

Let us also pause and give thanks and remembrance to those that stand on the front lines against the guerrilla warfare of today. Theirs is a unique challenge; one we must and will win.

And to the surviving spouses, children and family members we acknowledge your faithful support and contributions.

Together they carry a legacy of freedom that we are obligated to remember and strengthen for future generations.

We are a nation endowed with many blessings and privileges. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt once said,

“Those who have long enjoyed such privileges as we enjoy forget in time that men have died to win them.”

Let us not forget.

May God continue to bless our heroes and the United States of America.