

LINCOLN'S WORDS

As citizens begin their summer at poolside and backyard grills this Memorial Day, they need to put the “memorial” back in Memorial Day by pausing to honor the sacrifices that make our freedom possible. No words are adequate to console those who have lost a loved one serving our nation, but we can pause as individuals, families and a Nation to offer our thoughts and prayers. We not only remember the sacrifices of our veterans, we think of the mother who hears the sound of her child's 21-gun salute. We grieve for the husband or wife who receives a folded flag. We grieve for a young son or daughter who only knows Dad from a photograph. And as we share that grief, we also honor those among us; true heroes who place Nation above self and give their all for all of us.

President Abraham Lincoln spoke for us all in his letter to a mother who lost five sons during the Civil War.

Dear Madam, I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that our heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

How can words suffice in honoring our fallen veterans? We honor them by remembering – remembering that they loved America, so offered to serve far from its shores. They revered freedom, so sacrificed their own that we may be free. They defended our individual rights, yet yielded their individuality to do so. But most of all, they valued life, yet bravely readied themselves to die in service to our country.

The brave men and women we honor today selflessly gave of themselves to defend a way of life that we so cherish -- the rights of all people to determine our own futures, free of oppression and fear. It is because of these everyday heroes that we celebrate Memorial Day, commemorating the selflessness and sacrifice of those upon whose very lives rests the foundation of freedom. Memorial Day, one of our nation's oldest and most significant holidays, recalls the glory and sacrifice of all who have set their personal aspirations aside for the preservation of our society.

In times such as these, it is important for every American to reflect on what it truly means to live in freedom. We owe all of our veterans, past and present, a debt of gratitude for the sacrifices they have made in the defense of liberty. It is our duty to keep the memory of our fallen veterans alive. May we never forget those who fought for our freedom, and may we celebrate the lives of those who have truly made America the land of the free and the home of the brave.

We need to put “memorial” back in Memorial Day. As this special day approaches, let us reflect on the freedoms we all enjoy for which many have died. To the families in of our fallen heroes who gave their hearts to this country, I say thank you. We owe you and your loved ones our heartfelt gratitude and more. On this Memorial Day, we join fellow Americans in a national day of remembrance in honor of America’s fallen. One Nation, One Day—let us never forget.

On this day, our hearts go out to the spouses and loved ones of those who have given all they can give in service to our nation. We share their sorrow, but we cannot know their grief. What we can do – and must do as a nation – is remember those who have fallen. Remember what they did; why they did it; and appreciate what that sacrifice means to us. It means freedom. It means security. It means strength, and the motivation to stay strong in freedom’s cause. To do any less – to not remember – would defile the hopes and dreams of those we honor today.