

Honored guests, neighbors and friends, welcome to the Bridgewater Bradley Gardens Memorial Day ceremony. It has been a beautiful weekend and it is a beautiful day. I want to thank each of you for joining us this morning and most of all I would like to thank the American Legion for once again providing our community such a fitting venue to deliver on our promise, our promise to never forget, our promise to always remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice, those who gave their lives to secure the our nation's freedom, the freedom we enjoy every day. Today is one of the most solemn days of remembrance of any of our nation's holidays. We gather today to pay tribute to those brave men and women and reflect upon the enormity of their sacrifice.

Our nation was birthed in conflict. While most of us remember learning about the famed "shot heard round the world" that launched the revolutionary war, I do not recollect reflecting in grade school upon the militia who fired the shot, nor the militia who fell, their lives cut short, their families placed in mourning because they valued freedom above all else. Men and women, patriots all, have been fighting and falling ever since, securing our freedom and protecting us from harm.

How fortunate we are to live in a nation where liberty is celebrated and freedom forms the apex of our values. How fortunate we are to live in a nation that for more than a hundred years has been and remains today a leader among the world's nations and an undeterred and untiring champion for the oppressed. Time and again, we have demonstrated our resolve to protect our nation, aid our allies and pursue our foes with a commitment backed by our most precious treasure, our people. How fortunate we are to live in a nation where there has always been men and women who understood our nation's need and with honor answered the call of duty.

A declaration from the Disabled Veterans Organization says "There is no doubt that our veterans have paved the way for our military's reputation as the finest fighting force in the world – both in strength

and in character. That's why it's important – in fact imperative – that we remember them always.” How true those words ring, when we see the men and women of our armed forces in conflicts throughout the world and realize they truly are the most elite military on the planet. How fortunate we are to live in this nation.

Since March 19th, 2003, our nation has engaged in 5 active operations in the Middle East resulting in 6,852 fatalities and over 52,330 wounded. Among those killed were 124 fellow New Jerseyans from cities such as Paterson and Newark, and towns like Milltown, Spotswood, Neshanic Station and from Somerville home of Staff Sergeant Andrew Lobosco. Each has a story. Each is a life interrupted. Each is equally important to remember and honor.

In 2009, I had the pleasure of speaking with members of the 2nd Battalion, 7th forces group (airborne) who served alongside Staff Sergeant Lobosco. I believe if Andrew was here today, he would say He's no hero. He was just doing his job. For that matter, I am sure I have never heard a veteran or service member ever call him or herself a hero. I'm sure we all beg to differ.

But if I could speak with Andrew today, what could I possibly say to him or our many other heroes that would convey how truly grateful I am, we are, that they had the courage to do what so many others could not or would not? It is our job, our duty to care for the families of those left behind and to hold up the memories and the honor of those who never left the battlefields.

On behalf of Bridgewater's 44,000 residents I give my thanks and respect to the families of those who have given their lives for our freedom, and appreciate the sacrifice that is theirs as well as their loved ones. Do we have any families here today who have a loved one serving in the military? (Thank you, we appreciate the sacrifices your family is making.)

The commitment we share in supporting the men and women who comprise our military remains steadfast and true. This past

November we established a dedicated location in the Municipal Building for the Chair of Honor. The Chair of Honor represents a lasting reminder of all the men and women, who died in battle, are missing in action or being held as prisoners of war. If you have not already, I invite you to the Municipal Building lobby to see this very moving and worthy tribute to the servicemen and women who have not returned to their loved ones. And, bring your children. We must involve our children. It is essential we take the time to visit and discuss with them the significance of the many military monuments in our town, area, state and nation. They will value what you value. They will honor those you honor.

Today, as we enjoy our day, let us each take a moment to share our reflections with a friend or relative so that all may know the great respect we share for those who have died to protect our freedom. Let us place in conversation our gratitude for their service, their sacrifice, and the precious gift they have given to us with their lives.

As a nation, we made a promise to honor our fallen. And, we must keep that promise. We keep our promise when we strengthen the programs and services that our injured and ill veterans rely on. We keep our promise when we ensure they and their caregivers are properly supported. We keep our promise by fighting for our veterans when they can't fight for themselves.

I thank you for your attention and the opportunity to share my thoughts with you. I pray that God may bless and grant peace to our fallen, our veterans and active military. Let us also renew our national spirit. May God bless and protect those who actively serve in our nation's military, and may God grant them safe return home to their friends and loved ones.

I hope you enjoy your picnics and time with family and friends as we start the summer of 2015. Have a safe summer and May God Bless America. Thank you.

Mayor Dan Hayes
Memorial Day 2015