

2017 Memorial Day Adress Bradley Gardens, Bridgewater, NJ

Honored guests, neighbors and friends, welcome to the Bridgewater Bradley Gardens Memorial Day ceremony. As always, I would like to thank and recognize the efforts of the American Legion, the parade committee, Public Works and the parade participants. Their dedication makes our ceremony possible.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to take a moment and honor anyone among us today who has lost a loved one in the line of duty to our Nation. It doesn't matter how much time has passed – no words of condolence can even begin to adequately console a survivor's grief. If you have lost someone, please make yourself known so that you can be acknowledged. Thank you. Each of us gathered here has a profound respect and appreciation for their contribution and sacrifice, and we are proud to honor them today.

Today – Memorial Day – is our nation's most solemn day of remembrance. Throughout America today, communities gather to pay tribute to those brave men and women who sacrificed their lives and their futures in service to our country.

This tradition was born when President Abraham Lincoln came to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, to help dedicate a new national cemetery to the brave soldiers who died in the battle that served as the turning point of the Civil War. Lincoln, in this ceremony, showed that he understood the importance of dedicating not only physical space for those fallen soldiers, but also space in the minds and hearts of all Americans. In a portion of his now immortal address honoring those fallen heroes, Lincoln stated, "It is for us the living, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they nobly advanced." Our remembrance of fallen soldiers' dedication, their ideal and the magnitude of their sacrifice brings us together today.

Lincoln's sentiment was echoed by Lt. Colonel Ira Joe Davis, U.S. Army, in a 1995 speech to the American Legion when he remarked of the soldiers who have given the ultimate sacrifice, "it is impossible for us to do anything, or say anything, that can add to the honor that they so nobly earned. Rather, it is our solemn responsibility to remember them, and to give grateful thanks that when their nation called, they answered with their lives."

As we gather to pay tribute to all of our fallen heroes, our attention often turns to those individuals who have displayed the most courageous acts of heroism and bravery in US Military history. The highest military decoration in the United States armed services, the Congressional Medal of Honor, recognizes valor and bravery in action "above and beyond the call of duty." Of the 3,400 recipients of the distinction, 94 have been given to individuals from NJ. Of those 94 there is

none more famous than Somerset County's hero John Basilone, who sacrificed his life to protect his brother soldiers.

Those individuals have been recognized as exemplary. We thank them, and also recognize that each and every man and woman who enters into service to our Nation is a hero. As long as we continue to gather as neighbors and friends, their service will be honored and remembered.

In our turbulent times of geopolitical unrest, the world can seem more dangerous than ever. We must be ready to meet every challenge to our shared values of freedom, liberty, and prosperity. And so we are honored by, and grateful for, those who continue to answer our Nation's call. We are grateful for those men and women, sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, neighbors and community members, who risk and dedicate their lives in service of our Country.

War occurs when our better angels desert us. War must remain an act of last resort. No one should want war. General Douglas MacArthur famously said, "The soldier above all others prays for peace, for it is the soldier who must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war." For all soldiers fortunate enough to have returned safely from their time of service, we not only thank them, we are trusted to support them as they transition back to civil service.

As we depart today let us each take a moment to share our reflections with a friend or relative so that all may know the great respect we hold for those who have sacrificed themselves for our country. Through our continued remembrance, we – as Lincoln at Gettysburg exhorted us to do – ensure that they did not die in vain. They gave their future so we may live ours. It is only fitting that we should spend today reflecting on their service and sacrifice, and live in gratitude each and every day for the precious gift they have given us.

May God bless and keep our fallen. Let us also renew our spirit and make an effort to help in any way we can with providing the care and support for our brave veterans and active military members. May God bless and protect those who currently serve in our Nation's military, and may they be granted 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 2017. May God Bless Bridgewater and May God Bless America. Thank you.

Mayor Dan Hayes
Memorial Day 2017