

# Memorial Day Address

Mayor Dan Hayes

Honored guests, neighbors and friends, welcome to the annual Bridgewater Bradley Gardens Memorial Day ceremony. Memorial Day is one of the most solemn days of remembrance among our nation's holidays. Today we pay tribute to those brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice, giving their lives to secure our nation's freedom. Freedom, the ideal we hold most dear. Freedom, the ideal upon which we founded our great nation,

As always, I would like to thank and recognize the efforts of the American Legion, the parade committee, our Public Works staff and all the parade participants. Your dedication and effort makes our annual ceremony special and possible.

As I begin my remarks, I would like to take a moment and recognize anyone among us today who has lost a loved one in the line of duty to our nation. If you have lost someone, please make yourself known so you can be acknowledged. (Thank you. I know it doesn't matter how much time has passed – no words of condolence can adequately console a survivor's grief. Still, each of us gathered here today has a profound respect and appreciation for their sacrifice, and proudly honor them today.)

Since our nation's inception, we have placed and kept Freedom as both our cornerstone and beacon, defining for us and for the world, both who we are and who we wish always to be. While we may be idealistic, we are not naïve. We understand the cost of Freedom is real, dear and often paid with agony, anguish and lives of fellow citizens and loved ones lost in war.

This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vietnam War. Over 58,000 US military, 1400 from New Jersey, were lost in a war fought during a period of political turbulence that often and unfortunately, overshadowed the sacrifice and commitment of those who served. Regardless of the controversy surrounding the war, no matter how inhospitable the terrain, no matter how unconventional the enemy, tactics and conditions, these brave men and women answered our nations call and fought valiantly.

Not too long ago, I had the opportunity to visit the Vietnam Wall traveling exhibit at North Branch Park. The wall is an 80% replica of the monument in Washington D.C. which serves to memorialize those who lost their lives in that terrible conflict. It was truly humbling to speak with some of our area veterans who served in the war about their

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experiences. And, I agree with General William Westmoreland, when he states, and I quote, "I do not believe the men who served in uniform in Vietnam have been given the credit they deserved. It was a difficult war against an unorthodox enemy."

These veterans, as well as veterans of prior and current wars, served honorably. They dealt with the savagery of war so that we and our loved ones could remain shielded from its horrors. Virtually every veteran I have had the honor to speak with humbly expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve and remembered with reverence their less fortunate comrades who did not return home.

Preserving the Freedom we enjoy requires, above all else, the acceptance of personal responsibility for its defense. Since 1776, our nation's individual commitment to answer when called to serve has been globally unparalleled, allowing the United States to become an unequalled world power. The commitment of our fellow citizens who serve directly is easily seen. And, while our presence here is a demonstration of our gratitude and commitment, we must constantly challenge ourselves to do more.

Today, we fight the war on terror in many different parts of the globe. Our soldiers face an unseen enemy. Their encounters are often violent with horrific consequences. The good news is that more and more of our war veterans survive their initial wounds. The bad news is that they often return home facing serious difficulties. Wounds that used to claim lives on the battlefield are instead being treated only to become a lasting part of life for so many who return home. The men and women who have sustained serious illness or injury as part of their military service are, right now, fighting their own fights and need our continued moral, legislative and financial support.

On behalf of Bridgewater's 44,000 residents I extend our thanks and respect to the families of those who have fallen in service to our nation. The commitment we share in supporting the men and women who comprise our military remains steadfast and true. We will continue to honor as hometown heroes those who never left the battlefields, and, as the nature of battle evolves, and our ability to save wounded soldiers increases, we must secure the resources needed to meet their needs.

As we depart today let us each take a moment to share our reflections with a friend or relative so that others may know the great respect we share for those who serve. Let's spend time today reflecting on their service and sacrifice. Let's live in gratitude each and every day for the

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precious gift they have given to us. And, let's challenge ourselves and each other to demonstrate our gratitude through dedicated and purposeful engagement in the democracy for which they gave their lives.

May God bless and keep close our fallen and our veterans. 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.

May you enjoy your picnics and time with family and friends as we start the summer of 2018 and May God Bless America. Thank you.

Mayor Dan Hayes  
Memorial Day 2018