

**The
American
Legion**



For God and country

Suggested Speech

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Flag Day 2018

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Flag Day is only one reason that June 14th is special in America. For it is also a day that we honor those who hold special reverence for our national symbol – so much so, that these special Americans all pledged to die for that Flag if called upon.

Fittingly, June 14th also happens to be the birthday of the United States Army. Our soldiers – like all veterans of the United States military – understand that the Flag of our country is not a mere piece of cloth but the embodiment of freedom, hope and opportunity.

World War I veteran Alvin Mansfield Owsley served as national commander of The American Legion from 1922 to 1923. His reverence for our Flag and National Anthem resonates as well today as it did nearly a century ago.

“The band is playing the national anthem – “The Star Spangled Banner!” Commander Owsley said. “They have let loose Old Glory yonder. Stand up – and others will stand with you. This tribute to the Flag is offered to the country in appeal to all men and women of all races, colors and tongues, that they may come to understand that our Flag is the symbol of liberty, and learn to love it.” -- unquote.

And we do love our Flag. That is why we are here today. It is why so many American Legion Family members wear American Flag pins.

The late journalist Tim Russert reflected on what the pin meant to him during a 2004 interview with The American Legion Magazine.

In the broadcast following the September 11th attacks, the Meet the Press host and son of a World War II veteran raised the ire of The Washington Post because he dared to wear a flag lapel pin on the air, as he mercilessly grilled a Taliban spokesman.

“Yes, I am a journalist, but first I am an American citizen,” Russert later said to the magazine.

If you think about it, we are all something. We are all journalists or teachers or police officers or construction workers or office workers or practice another occupation. But first and foremost, we should consider ourselves Americans.

Our Flag not only symbolizes our freedom, it represents who we are. The only reason we get to choose to be journalists, teachers, police officers, office workers or anything else is because we live in a country that gives us these marvelous opportunities.

That is why The American Legion and the majority of Americans do not consider it right to desecrate old Glory.

Some call it “free speech” but it’s probably more accurate to call it a hate crime against America.

Fortunately Senator Steve Daines and Representative Steve Womack have introduced bills that would give Congress the constitutional authority to protect Old Glory from desecration.

Retired Army Major General Patrick H. Brady earned the Medal of Honor for his heroism in Vietnam. He once said to The American Legion, quote -“Many Americans have raised their right hand and sworn an oath to protect and defend the Constitution from all enemies, both foreign and domestic. We believe that all Americans who put their right hand over their heart and recite the Pledge of Allegiance take that same oath. Both the oath and the pledge are taken in the presence of Old Glory to emphasize that our Flag is the symbol of our Constitution. We believe that we the people must exercise our right to rule by ensuring that the Court’s decision on flag-burning is not irrevocably fixed.”-unquote.

And that decision – a 5-4 narrow majority in the 1989 Supreme Court case, *Texas v. Johnson* – invalidated flag protection laws that existed in 48 states and the District of Columbia. It is up to Congress to remind the Court that the flag belongs to “We, the People” and the people want it protected.

Gatherings such as this are important, but we should always remember that it is much easier to fight for our Flag in the halls of Congress than it is in the halls of Montezuma and other places where Americans have actually bled for Old Glory.

One man who bled for the Flag was Sgt. William Carney of the 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry. Immortalized in the film “Glory,” Carney fought valiantly at Fort Wagner, South Carolina. When the color sergeant went down, Sgt. Carney grabbed the Flag, led the way to the parapet and planted the colors. When the troops fell back, he again carried the Flag through fierce fire and was wounded four times. He became the first black recipient of the Medal of Honor, and it was given for his defense of the Flag.

Even though America was far from perfect, especially to a 19th century black man like Sgt. Carney, Carney and thousands of others knew that America and its Flag were worth fighting for.

The Flag does not represent perfection. It represents freedom, hope and opportunity. Today our troops continue to serve in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, hoping to make those countries better places.

When our brave troops make the supreme sacrifice, it is only fitting that their remains be covered with the Flag for which they fought when they are repatriated and given their final honors.

Last year, President Trump spoke to military members and their families stationed in Europe. He shared his thoughts about our nation's Flag. "The glorious American Flag represents the blood of patriots spilled in defense of freedom," he told the troops. "It represents the courage that burns in American hearts. It represents the unity that binds us all together as one. And it represents the freedoms bestowed on us by Almighty God. You are the warriors of freedom. You are the protectors of that great American Flag." – unquote.

Ladies and gentlemen, I submit to you, that we should all be protectors of that great American Flag. Not just on Flag day – but EVERYDAY.

Long may she fly!

**Thank you for being here. God Bless America
and God Bless our Flag.**

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