

MEMORIAL DAY REMARKS - 2017

Good morning. My name is Steve Kerrigan and I am the President of the Massachusetts Military Heroes Fund and it is my honor to welcome you to today's ceremony honoring our Commonwealth's fallen heroes and their families.

Before we begin, I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of our incredible Board of Directors (Tom Crohan, Christie Coombs, Maura Yanosick, Dave Guarino and Col. Tom Devine) to thank our tremendous team including Kathy King and our incomparable Executive Director, Diane Nealon and also to thank some individuals, organizations and supporters, without whom none of this would be possible:

OFFICES:

Office of Mayor Martin J. Walsh

Office of Governor Charlie Baker

Massachusetts National Guard

Boston Parks and Recreation Department

Boston Water and Sewer - water truck yesterday

Army Survivor Outreach Services

Massachusetts Department of Veteran Services
Boston Veterans Services
Lowell Veterans Center
Project 351, and
The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Foundation -
hosting our families for lunch

FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS:

John Hancock Financial

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Boston Scientific and

McMillan education

And for event and institutional support, we give special thanks to Michael P. Wasserman, Inc., Michael himself, Chris Farris and their entire team and to Melwood Global.

Finally, I would also like to thank the **Commonwealth Brass Quintet from the 215th Army Band.**

At this time, I would ask you to please rise for the presentation of the colors by the **54th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment Honor Guard** and remain standing for the singing of our National Anthem by **Oladunni Oladipo.**

Memorial Day, dedicated in 1868, was established to ensure that no generation would ever forget those who fell in battles fought, won and lost so that our Republic might remain free.

It is with that charge in mind that we established this annual Memorial Day Flag Garden - to remind people that each of the 37,251 flags that will stand here in tribute to our fallen represent a heartbeat silenced in service to our Commonwealth and our country.

Yesterday we were joined by over 600 volunteers who came from all across our Commonwealth, our nation and from around

the world, to help create this beautiful garden of flags to honor our heroes. Heroes that many of them never met. Heroes of different backgrounds, different genders, sexual orientations, different races and different religions.

No one asked where the Catholic section was or the Jewish or Protestant or Muslim section was. No one said “where do the flags for the straight sailors or the gay marines go”. It wasn’t suggested that those flags representing women soldiers or those for Dads or daughters be separated from the other flags. And no one asked how these service members gave their sacrifice or what price they and their families have paid for freedom we so richly cherish.

No one asked those things or said those things because no one cared about those things. This is a garden of flags dedicated and, in fact, consecrated to the memory of 37, 251 brave men and women.

They were soldiers, sailors, airmen and women, marines and Coast Guardsmen and women all who said “send me”. They said “I will wear the uniform of a nation built on the opportunity and diversity it offers those who live here and whose credo - out of many, one - when lived up to, makes our nation worthy of such an enormous sacrifice.”

In his order to establish Memorial Day, General John A. Logan admonished us to “Let no vandalism of avarice or neglect, no ravages of time, testify to the present or to the coming generations, that we have forgotten, as a people, the cost of a free and undivided Republic.”

Massachusetts has always stood tall and strong in defense of our freedoms and that undivided Republic Logan spoke of. We’ve always answered the call to service.

For centuries our citizens have volunteered and served and, in fact, this very Boston Common has been a gathering place for those preparing for and suffering through the ravages of war.

And so it is with that history, and our families' sacrifices, in mind that we gather here to honor those who came before us and to carry on that legacy connecting this land to the brave men and women of Massachusetts who fought and died for our freedom.

In keeping with our custom, these flags will remain in place until Monday evening at 6pm, as our gift to the people of the Commonwealth and to any and all families who have lost a loved one in service.

We at the Massachusetts Military Heroes Fund hope that this is a site of reflection and that it will offer our most recently bereaved families a measure of peace, tranquility and comfort knowing that we HAVE not and WILL not forget their loss and the sacrifices their hero made for all of us.

These flags represent lives lost, dreams unfulfilled but, to me, as importantly, they represent men and women who gave the last full measure of devotion for each of us, and for the United States

of America. Many of them we never had a chance to meet, but all of them we have a chance to honor.

Let us remember the fallen from our past and our all-too-painful present and let us plant our flag on Memorial Day to again stand for the ideals on which it was created.

Please join with me – on this day and all others – to help fulfill the pledge made so long ago that we “raise above them the dear old flag they saved from dishonor; let us in this solemn presence renew our pledges to aid and assist those whom they have left among us a sacred charge upon a nation’s gratitude.”

So let us do that today – and every day.

Thank you all very much for being here.