



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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### **Making Memorial Day Count**

Another Memorial Day weekend has passed us by, and I was fortunate enough to be included at some of the many parades and ceremonies that paid tribute to the men and women who died serving in our armed forces. Thankfully, I think most of us agree that honoring those who served, living and deceased, is a good and necessary thing. But I also recognize that there are those for whom the meaning of the day has been lost; who see it

more as the start of summer than anything else.

Maybe the day's true meaning hasn't been given enough emphasis, or maybe some have no personal experience with a veteran. It could just be that the hot dogs, barbecues and beaches become too great a distraction. Whatever the reason, it is important that we understand that in honoring our veterans, we honor the principles for which they served, fought, and sacrificed – the principles that make our country truly great and provide us the security in which we live.

I thought I'd share two stories from the beginning and end of the weekend, bookends of a sort, that might help us better appreciate the day.

On the Thursday leading into the weekend, I was asked by the Notre Dame School in New Hyde Park to take part in a send-off for a local hero, Commander Matthew Nolty of the US Naval Reserves, who is a member of that parish. Commander Nolty is leaving for what will be a year-long tour in Afghanistan. I met his wonderful wife and three children who will wait patiently for him and who remain, no doubt, in the good hands of a parish community that clearly loves and cares for them. While there, I got to thinking about the sacrifice this man so willingly makes, time and again. He leaves all the comforts of home, and the love and security of family but does so without publicly batting an eye, driven by a desire to secure a better life for us as well as people living in a much poorer part of the world. His family and friends accept this and they must sacrifice as well, even his little ones. Yet, everyone there seemed so grateful that it occurred to me that we could all benefit on a personal level from knowing someone like Commander Nolty.

On Monday night, a friend told me about a couple whose dad was in a VA nursing home. They had spent Sunday with him at the facility's annual barbecue and were struck by the fact that none of the other vets, no matter how old or infirm, would accept even the slightest

assistance from them! They seemed to share a fierce determination to remain as independent as possible. Notable among these aging warriors was a lone, young man who had returned from Iraq with severe disability sustained from head traumas. His mother, who was there every day with him, explained that doctors held little hope for recovery but that her son remained steadfast. They were moved by his determination and then his ensuing delight in achieving even the simplest tasks. She observed, "Sometimes people just need to see that. It lifts you up."

I share these two stories with you to bring a point home without window dressing: there are people who have forfeited not only their quality of life, but also life itself so that we might enjoy ours more fully. It's hard to imagine, but in reality our country and world would most certainly be very different places had they not. But we benefit another way as well. Just knowing them and seeing their personal sacrifice makes us better people. It reinforces our commitment to the principles for which they served and sacrificed.

So, as we kick off our summers please remember that we owe much to those who've served in our armed forces and that the best way to honor them is to truly esteem our veterans – a simple "thank you", an acknowledgment of how grateful we are for their service.

But for their sacrifice, what a different world we would live in ...