



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Remembering the true meaning of Memorial Day

DAVID J. VALESKY May 26, 2009

For many people, Memorial Day symbolizes the official beginning of summer. Family and friends gather for picnics, parades and barbecues--the first outdoor events of the season.

However, I believe it is important that we remind ourselves of the true meaning of the holiday. Too often, the real message gets lost amidst the events and advertisements.

Memorial Day is a day of reflection, a day when we, as a nation, pause to remember those brave men and women who have given their lives in service to our great country. When flags are flown at half-staff in honor of the hundreds of thousands who died while defending the principles that make this nation unique and strong.

New York State has a special connection to Memorial Day. It was the first state to officially adopt the holiday in 1873, and in 1969, President Lyndon Johnson declared nearby Waterloo, N.Y. the official birthplace of Memorial Day.

Though the original traditions and celebrations of the past have been diluted over the years, it is in these times especially, when our sons and daughters, our fathers and mothers, and our sisters and brothers are halfway across the world, fighting to ensure our safety, that we must pause, reflect and show our deep gratitude for sacrifices made.

In the words of General John Logan, who originally pronounced the holiday in 1868:

“We should guard their graves with sacred vigilance. All that the consecrated wealth and taste of the nation can add to their adornment and security, is but a fitting tribute to the memory of her slain defenders. Let pleasant paths invite the coming and going of reverent visitors and fond mourners. Let no 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.”

This weekend, I will proudly march in several parades, alongside our veterans and those who serve our country every day. They serve as living ambassadors to the past, reminding us with each proud step, that we should not take for granted how lucky we all are to live in a country where our unalienable rights are held so sacred that thousands and thousands of Americans gave their lives to protect them.

And so, I wish you all a wonderful Memorial Day weekend, and encourage you take a few moments to think about the true meaning of the holiday, to visit the gravesite of a fallen soldier, to wear a poppy in their honor, or to carry the symbol of our freedom, the American flag.