

**Rep. Tom Tangretti
Flag Day Remarks to Daughters/Sons of
the American Revolution
June 15, 2002**

Good afternoon, and thank you very much for providing me with the privilege of speaking to you today in honor of Flag Day.

It is particularly fitting for me to be speaking to you about Flag Day and what our flag stands for, since I know that there is no group of people in the nation who love their country more, or who are more dedicated to preserving its cherished institutions and ideals, and the flag that represents those institutions and ideals, than yourselves.

The Daughters of the American Revolution and the Sons of the American Revolution have shown all of us – and continue to show all of us – that being a good citizen is not enough; that it is the responsibility of all of us to help others become good citizens.

In the past 120 years, millions of naturalized immigrants to the United States, and indeed, millions of native-born residents of the United States, have become better, more informed and more conscientious citizens because of your educational outreach efforts, and because of your example.

I believe your groups understand and appreciate more than most others the sacrifices that our men and women in and out of uniform have given over the years to preserve our Flag and all that it stands for.

Flag Day is a day for rededicating and reinforcing our national faith.

There is a story of a young Civil War soldier who carried the flag forward in advance of the troops who were attacking across open ground amid a hail of bullets and cannon fire.

After several hundred yards, he looked back and realized that his fierce charge had carried him well ahead of his regiment's line, and he

found himself pinned down alone by enemy fire.

"Bring the Colors back to the line," officers shouted forward to him.

"No," the young soldier shouted, "bring the line up to the Colors."

Inspired by his example, the line was indeed brought to the colors.

In this way, all of us need to be reminded today to bring our lives up to the Colors.

More than anything else, it is the Flag that motivates each and every one of us to rise above our lesser motives and strive to measure up to the standard it and the people who have died defending it represent.

The Flag inspires us to reach for more than what others expect of us, and to bring out the very best in ourselves.

Flag Day is the day set apart each year for the citizens of this nation to reaffirm our faith in what the American Flag stands for, and our loyalty to the nation which it has represented for more than two centuries.

In that long stretch of time, the Flag has been a visible challenge to oppression and tyranny wherever they have existed, in all corners of the globe.

In that long stretch of time, monarchies, dictatorships, principalities and empires have crumbled and disappeared, all while this government has grown stronger and more majestic.

It has survived the horror of major wars, as well as lesser attacks, both outside and within its borders.

It has survived the ups and downs of economic triumph and tragedy, boom and depression.

Perhaps no object to which we as a nation render reverence, except perhaps God Himself, inspires loftier rhetoric or more poetical utterances than the Flag.

The eloquence of Daniel Webster, the poetry of Oliver Wendell Holmes and the lyrics of Francis Scott Key have all been woven into beautiful images celebrating the meaning and majesty of the Flag.

It is not important to dwell upon the origin of our Flag.

Instead, it is more appropriate to dwell on what it represents – something that we as a nation hold dearer than life itself – freedom.

In itself, as beautiful as it is, the Flag – each individual one – is but a piece of cloth.

But what it represents and brings to our attention are principles that should be near and dear to every one of us.

It is a symbol of our national unity; but more.

**It is a symbol of those things for which the
Founding Fathers fought and bled, yet more.**

**It is a symbol of the eternal principles of fair
and just government embedded in the
Declaration of Independence and
Constitution, yet more.**

**As long as it waves in the breeze, it reminds
us that we are free men and women, with as
Jefferson put it, the inalienable rights of life,
liberty and happiness.**

**It reminds us that neither the greatest
majority nor the strongest might may take
these rights away from us – they are ours by
natural right; they come to us from the
Heavenly Father.**

**It also reminds us that this freedom and
these rights are a precious thing to be
vigorously guarded and defended.**

It has been said that society is a great and silent compact between the living, the dead and the unborn.

The Flag is visible evidence of this compact.

It ties the generations together – it gives continuity to our civilization.

No one can look at the Flag or the United States without thinking of the dead – Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln – and the legacies they left us – the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Gettysburg Address.

No one can look at the Flag of the United States and fail to see the living – nearly 300 million of us enjoying the freedom that flag represents and struggling to preserve it.

And no one can look at the Flag of the United States and not see the unborn – our children and our children's children carrying the hopes, dreams and promises guaranteed by

that flag down through the most distant and remotest generation.

As long as the Flag flies and its colors do not fade that compact between the living, dead and unborn will endure.

The Flag casts its blessing on every newborn baby, it gives meaning and significance to youth and middle age, and the faith that it will continue to wave over a free and just nation makes it easier for Americans to die.

As Daniel Webster said:

"When my eyes shall be turned to behold, for the last time, the sun in heaven, let their last feeble and lingering glance behold the glorious ensign of the Republic, now known and honored throughout the earth, still full high advanced, its arms and trophies streaming in all their original luster, not a stripe erased or polluted, nor a single star obscured."

No one can write the history of the Flag.

All we can hope to do is tell a little bit of its story up until now.

The rest belongs to the future, and to pens other than ours.

One of the events in the ancient Olympic games of the ancient Greeks was symbolic of the link between the living, the dead and the unborn.

It was a race in which a runner bore a flaming torch, which he passed on to his successor at the end of each mile.

Each runner dropped out of the race in his turn, but the flame kept going forward.

So it is with our Flag and the nation it represents.

We are the runners today.

Only we can carry the torch from those who went before us to those who will come after us.

It is because of this need to carry the torch forward that President Wilson dedicated June 14 as Flag Day in 1915.

The Flag is many things.

It is a mark of identification for ships at sea and armies on the field.

It is a means of communication.

It is a mirror, reflecting the dreams and ideals of each person who displays it.

It is history.

It is a mark of great pride in the past.

It is a mark of great anticipation for the future.

It is a memory at the end of life of all that life has been.

It is a ribbon of honor for those who have served well in wartime and in peacetime.

It is a warning not to detour from the road which brought us to this point – a road that has led this country and its people to a level of peace and prosperity never before closely approached under any other banner.

Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, in an opinion he wrote for the court upholding the right of a state legislature to require public school students to salute the flag, effectively explained the important place our Flag holds in our society:

"We live by symbols," he wrote.

"The Flag is the symbol of our national unity, transcending all internal differences, however large, within the framework of the Constitution.

"The Flag is the symbol of the nation's power, the emblem of freedom in its truest, best sense – it signifies government resting on the consent of the governed.; liberty regulated by law; the protection of the weak against the strong; security against the exercise of arbitrary power; and absolute safety for free institutions against foreign aggression."

Justice Frankfurter was right.

Our Flag is not a flag of conquest, of imperialism or of plunder.

It is a Flag of liberation, justice and peace.

It is our Flag, and it continues to play a full and vital role in our struggle for peace, justice, liberty and freedom for all people.

Thank you for honor our Flag^{ING} and for your continued efforts to make others understand how important it is for them to honor and respect our Flag.

And thank you very much for giving me the opportunity today to express my feelings and thoughts about our Flag and the great nation it represents.

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