

FLAG DAY SPEECH

Good morning ... and thank you for allowing me to be a part of this important gathering of veterans, citizens, elected officials and friends and family.

Today ... we gather to pay tribute to our flag. (PAUSE) The flag of the United States of America is embodied in symbolism. The stripes represent the 13 original colonies, and the stars represent the 50 individual states ... which are united under one union.

What else do we know about the flag ... ?

We know that many soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, coast guardsmen and other volunteer support personnel ... have paid the ultimate sacrifice to ensure that “old glory” would continue to fly in freedom ... (POINT) as it does now before us.

As a citizen of this great nation, I take great pride in what this flag represents. It embodies the fortitude, strength, spirit, and the rich history of our country.

As chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, I am further privileged to be in a position to pay my respects to this flag ... by spearheading legislation which has great benefit to those men and women who have served honorably ... to ensure that this flag will remain high on top of its perch ... representing the greatest nation on earth.

A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of accompanying Adjutant General Lynch to Pittsburgh to participate in the embarkation ceremony for our National Guard's 171st Air Refueling Wing. At this ceremony, I was honored to present this unit with a Pennsylvania State flag. The unit, naturally, already had a United States flag on hand with them ... to fly proudly in their future encampment in the eastern European theater.

This Commonwealth flag, which I presented, was given to them ... to serve as a symbol of the great state which they represent. But more importantly, the United States flag, which will fly above our State flag, will be there to signify that these 50 states remain united, under one government.

We, not unlike some eastern European states, take great pride in the state which we represent. But, some distinction can be made here! We never

lost sight of the fact that our state is only a component of the unified entity ... which we call ... The United States of America.

In terms of not losing sight of our flag's symbolic nature, we must take it upon ourselves to ensure that our future generations do not take for granted the heroic deeds ... the many hardships and personal sacrifices that were made by our military personnel on their behalf.

In doing this, the Legislature has recently passed Act 117 of 1998. This legislation made it illegal for planned housing communities, neighborhood associations, apartment complexes, etc. ... to prohibit the personal display of the United States flag by a resident of that community.

This law is the direct result of an actual incident in Montgomery County. A woman had displayed, in her window, the U.S. flag which had previously draped the coffin of a dear relative. The Neighborhood Association told her that she violated the Community's regulations on public displays of flags, banners and other unsightly items.

Now ... some say that this law should have never had to come about. Common sense should prevail in regard to the display of our national flag!

Well, this issue went before the courts, and caused the family much grief. Therefore, in the absence of the patriotic fervor that we here today all have instilled within us ... this new law will protect the patriotic ... (PAUSE) from those who have forgotten their past history.

In regard to protecting our National Flag from desecration ... by those individuals who also tend to forget their past history, (PAUSE) I ... like the American Legion and other veterans service organizations ... fully support an amendment to our United States Constitution on this matter.

As previously stated in my remarks, I made mention of legislation which the state had passed ... pertaining to protecting the right to display our National Flag in a descent and respectful manner. The Pennsylvania War Veterans Council and the State Veterans Commission fully supported this legislation. Therefore ... your support was very instrumental in the passage of this legislation.

Act 117 can be seen as another victory in battle ... (PAUSE) a compilation of battles which are all a significant part of the campaign to bring about a National Flag protection amendment. Your organization should be praised for your efforts in this campaign, and I would like to personally thank you for sincere dedication to our National Flag, and all that it stands for.

In the way of an update (PAUSE) on what is going on in Washington, regarding this Flag protection amendment, the bill is now before the Senate, and is still a few votes short. Therefore, your continued efforts on this matter are still greatly needed. Overall, this issue does indeed remain a hot topic in Congress.

Incidentally, some of you may have read a recent article in the Harrisburg Patriot News ... which was entitled "Fireproofing Old Glory". Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren, from California, brought forth a modest proposal to resolve the controversy surrounding this issue ... by requiring that all American Flags be made of flame-retardant materials. Thus ensuring that these flags would not burn !!!

Well, there is a lot to be said for finding "middle-ground" on an issue ... middle-ground which can bring both sides to the table in order to resolve

differences. I myself have experienced this many times in my capacity as a state legislator. But, I personally do not see this as a middle-ground approach. This provision, which I highly doubt would ever be considered, blatantly ignores the defiant intentions that these individuals have in this regard. It is a bandaid measure which does not address the important issue ... which is the issue of paying tribute to a National symbol of our Country's heritage, and the countless number of men and women who has served their country to preserve the freedoms and ideals which our Flag represents. This constitutional amendment will further instill that patriotic fervor which our country, like any other, needs in order to remain viable in the volatile world in which we live today.

Another important tool for preserving the sanctity of our National Flag is ... education.

In terms of educating our young, on the importance of honoring our national flag, a new piece of legislation is being introduced in the State legislature as I speak here today. This legislation will require that all schools perform the Pledge of Allegiance to our flag, or play the National anthem, at the beginning of each school day. I am a cosponsor of this legislation, and I will stand firm, shoulder-to-shoulder, with those who support this legislation, to ensure its passage.

Overall, we have become a very fast-paced society. That is to say that we, each and everyone of us, have many responsibilities and duties which keep our lives very busy. Therefore, in our hectic lives, we often can lose sight of the principles which have shaped our nation. As well, we may often lose sight, if only for a brief moment, of the importance of pledging allegiance to our national flag. Thus, it is through ceremonies such as this, that we can be reminded of our inherent duty to pledge allegiance to our flag, and remember those who have served under this flag on behalf of our citizenry.

On another note, as I wind down my remarks, I would be in remiss if I did not take this time to personally thank your organization's tremendous efforts in bringing the State Veterans Memorial, at Fort Indiantown Gap National Cemetery, into fruition. Your fundraising efforts and your effective correspondence with the State legislature, has made this 12 year plight a reality.

I, along with many other individuals here today, am looking forward to the dedication ceremony of this hallowed memorial. A memorial whose beauty can only be enhanced by one thing ... the presence of our

American Flag flying majestically in the forefront of this Memorial, and high above the graves of our beloved veterans.

In closing, I would like to thank everyone for their attendance here today. It is indeed always a pleasure to spend time with those individuals who epitomize the ideals that our nation was founded upon. For all of your past military service and your current services which benefit the veteran community, ... I would like to thank you.

Your presence here today speaks volumes in regard to your commitment to our Commonwealth, country ... and that great symbol of our nation ... which we all have come to know as "Old Glory." ... Thank you.

ROL/smg