

**Remarks at a Memorial Day Ceremony in Arlington, Virginia**  
*May 30, 2022*

Thank you.

They lie here in glory and honor—in quiet rows in Arlington, in cemeteries in Europe that I visited and many of you have, in graves across our country, in towns large and small—America's beloved daughters and sons who dared all, risked all, and gave all to preserve and defend an idea unlike any other in human history: the idea of the United States of America.

And today, as a nation, we undertake a sacred ritual: to reflect and to remember. Because if we forget the lives that each of those silent markers represent—mothers, fathers, siblings, spouses, children—if we forget what they sacrificed, what they made so that our Nation might endure strong, free, and united, then we forget who we are—who we are.

Ladies and gentlemen, our First Lady and the love of my life, Jill; Vice President Harris and the Second Gentleman; Secretary Austin; General Milley; the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Cabinet members; Gold Star families, most importantly; and survivors: Today we renew our sacred vow—it's a simple vow, to remember. To remember.

Memorial Day is always a day where pain and pride are mixed together. We all know it, sitting here. Jill and I know it. Today is the day our son died. And, folks, for those who have lost a loved one in the service of our country, if your loved one is missing or unaccounted for, I know the ceremonies reopen that black hole in the center of your chest that just pulls you in, suffocates you.

As I said, 7 years ago today, our son, Major Beau Biden, took his last breath at Walter Reed. A major in the Delaware Army National Guard, he insisted on deploying to Iraq with his unit for a year when he was attorney general. He came home a decorated soldier, a Bronze Star, Legion of Merit, and Delaware's Conspicuous Service Cross.

He didn't die in the line of duty. He came home from Iraq with cancer. It was a horrific cancer that stole us from him, stole—and him from us. But still, it always feels to me on Memorial Day—I see him, not as he was the last time I held his hand, but the day I pinned his bars on him as a second lieutenant. I see him with me down at the Delaware Memorial Bridge hugging all the Gold Star families.

Days like this bring back, before your eyes, their smile and their laugh. And the last conversation you had, each of you know it. The hurt can be overwhelming. But for so many of you, as is with Jill and me, the hurt is wrapped around the knowledge that your loved one was part of something bigger, bigger than any of us.

They chose a life of purpose. It sounds corny, like a Memorial Day speech, but I mean it from the bottom of my heart. They chose a life of purpose. They had a mission. And above all, they believed in duty; they believed in honor; they believed in their country.

And still today, we are free because they were brave. We live by the light of the flame of liberty that they kept burning. And so a part of them is still with us no matter how long ago we lost them. And as hard as it is for many to believe, especially those whose loss is still raw, I promise you the day will come when the memory of your loved one, your patriot, will bring a smile to your lip before it brings a tear to your eye. That's when you know you're going to make it.

Today, America's—American servicemembers stand watch around the world and, as many of you know, at—often at great personal risk. And this Memorial Day, we know the memory is still painful of all the fallen who lost their lives during the last two decades in combat. Each of them leaving behind a family, a community. Hearts broken by their absence, and lives that will never be the same. We see in the hundreds of graves here in Section 60, at Arlington, a reminder that there's nothing low-risk or low-cost about war for the women and men who fight it.

Seven thousand and fifty-four American military members gave their lives over 20 years of our Iraq and Afghan conflicts. Untold others died of injuries and illness connected to their service and these wars. And the enduring grief borne by the survivors is a cost of war that we'll carry as a nation forever. And so, to every Gold Star family, to every survivor and family member and caregiver: This grateful nation owes you as well as that person you lost. And we can never repay the sacrifice, but we will never stop trying. We'll never fail in our duty to remember: With their lives, they bought our freedom.

And so, with our lives, we must always live up to their example—putting service before self; caring for our neighbors as ourselves; working fervently to bring our Union just that much closer to fulfilling the founding creed, as the Secretary said, that all men and women are created equal.

I've often said that, as a nation, we have many obligations. But the only one that is truly sacred—the only truly sacred obligation we have—is to prepare and equip those women and men we send into harm's way, and care for them and their families when they return home and when they don't. This is an obligation that unites Americans and brings us together—to make sure the women and men who are willing to lay down their lives for us get the very best from us in return.

I want to acknowledge that we're making progress in key areas like the comprehensive, bipartisan legislation that is advancing in Congress that will deliver health care services and benefits to veterans and their survivors impacted by toxic exposures. We don't know how many Americans and servicemembers may have died because of what they were exposed to on the battlefield.

The toxic smoke from burn pits near where they were based, burn pits that incinerated the wastes of war, medical and hazardous material, jet fuel, and so much more. But we have a duty to do right by them. And I am determined to make sure that our brave service families and members that served alongside them do not wait decades for the care and benefits that they deserve. And that's why—that's why—we're working so hard to find out what the facts are. Where we can still save lives, we have to act.

All of us also have a duty to renew our commitment to the foundational values of our Nation, in their honor, for those are the values that have inspired generation after generation to service. On Friday, I spoke at the graduation and commissioning of—ceremony of the U.S. Naval Academy. I had an opportunity to do that before as well. It was a remarkable experience again, an honor, looking out at those young men and women—newly commissioned officers—embarking on a life of service.

They hold before them the example of the heroes who have gone before them—many of your family members—heroes who have answered duty's call at Lexington and Concord, Antietam and Gettysburg, Belleau Woods and the Battle of the Bulge, in Korea and Vietnam and Afghanistan, Iraq, and so many other places around the world—so many of whom never returned home, including the legacy of all those held prisoners of war or who are still missing in action.

To be here today, soon after that joyful celebration at the Academy, is a bracing reminder of all that we ask of our servicemembers and their families—for it's on the strong shoulders and noble spirits of our servicemembers that our freedom is built, our democracy sustained.

And in this moment, when a war of aggression is once more being waged by Russia to snuff out the freedom, the democracy, the very culture and identity of neighboring Ukraine, we so—we see so clearly all that's at stake.

Freedom has never been free. Democracy has always required champions. And, today, in the perennial struggle for democracy and freedom, Ukraine and its people are on the frontlines fighting to save their nation. But their fight is part of a larger fight that unites all people. It is a fight that so many of the patriots, whose eternal rest is here in these hallowed grounds, were part of.

A battle between democracy and autocracy, between liberty and repression, between appetites and ambition of a few who forever seek to dominate the lives and liberties of many. A battle for essential democratic principles—the rule of law, free and fair elections, freedom to speak and write and to assemble, freedom to worship as one chooses, freedom of the press—principles that are essential for a free society.

You've heard this a lot. You've heard this a lot over the years, but we're now realizing how real it is around the world in so many countries as I speak. These are the foundations of our great experiment, but they are never guaranteed, even here in America. Every generation has to defeat democracy's mortal foes. And into every generation, heroes are born, willing to shed their blood for that which they and we hold dear.

Ladies and gentlemen, today we remember, and we reaffirm: Freedom is worth the sacrifice. Democracy is not perfect; it's never been good—perfect. But it's worth fighting for; if necessary, worth dying for. It's more than just our form of government, it is part of the very soul of America. The soul of America.

Our democracy is our greatest gift as a nation, made holy by those we've lost along the way. Our democracy is how we undertake the constant work of perfecting the Union; and we have not perfected it, but we've never stopped trying; of opening the doors wider of opportunity and prosperity and justice for people everywhere.

Our democracy is how we endure through every challenge, overcome every obstacle we faced through the last 246 years of self-government, and how we've come back stronger than before. We must never walk away from that. We must never betray the lives laid down to make our Nation a beacon to the world, a citadel of liberty and justice for everybody.

This is the mission of our time. Our memorial to them must not be just a day when we pause and pray, it must be a daily commitment to act, to come together, to be worthy of the price that was paid.

May God bring comfort to all those who mourn, may God bless our Gold Star families and survivors, and please, God, protect our troops. God bless America and all of you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:54 p.m. in the Memorial Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery. In his remarks, he referred to Douglas C. Emhoff, husband of Vice President Kamala D. Harris; and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley, USA.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Memorial Day ceremony in Arlington, VA.

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*Names:* Austin, Lloyd J., III; Biden, Jill T.; Emhoff, Douglas C.; Harris, Kamala D.; Milley, Mark A.

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Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Civil rights : Freedom of press; Civil rights : Freedom of religion; Civil rights : Freedom of speech; Civil rights : Voting rights; Congress : Bipartisanship; Defense, Department of : Joint Chiefs of Staff; Defense, Department of : Secretary; Foreign policy, U.S. : Democratization; Holidays and special observances : Memorial Day; Russia : Ukraine, airstrikes and invasion; Ukraine : Russian airstrikes and invasion; Veterans : Benefits; Veterans : Health and medical care; Virginia : Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington; Virginia : President's visits; White House Office : Vice President.

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