

Remarks at a Memorial Day Ceremony in Arlington, Virginia
May 25, 2026

Vice President James D. "J.D." Vance. Thank you all.

And, Mr. President, Mr. Secretary, Mr. Chairman, all of our honored guests, but especially our Gold Star families, I want to say just a few things today, because I believe that the most important lesson of Memorial Day is perhaps that all of us owe a debt: that we owe a debt to the people who went overseas and gave their lives that the United States might be prosperous and peaceful and free; that we owe a debt to the people who put on a uniform, knowing they might never come back, and indeed, today we pay tribute to those who never came back.

I think, like a lot of veterans, and we're joined by so many of you, sometimes Memorial Day is the most somber and the most sacred of the days on the American calendar. People will come up to our veterans and say things like, "Happy Memorial Day," or "May you have a blessed Memorial Day." And those of us who served know acutely that today is not for all veterans, as much as we love all of our veterans. Today is for those veterans who put on the uniform, who went overseas, and who never came home.

When I think about the debt that we owe them, I think about all the things that they gave, which can't be measured in dollars or in the things of this world, but are measured in things like weddings that they never got to attend, children that they never saw grow up, daughters and sons that they never got to hug and kiss again, loved ones, husbands, and wives. They traded every moment from the moment where they gave their lives, to the moment where they would ultimately meet their natural end. Every single one of those moments they gave up that the United States might be—remain the freest and best country in the entire world. What an amazing thing. What an amazing gift.

On this Memorial Day, I just ask two things of all of our fellow Americans. The first is that we be the very best version of ourselves in honor of those who gave everything that this Nation might be worthy. To all the husbands and fathers, that we be the best husbands and dads that we can. To all the mothers and wives, that they be the best moms and wives that they can. To the sons and daughters, that they be the very best version of themselves.

And that second, we always remember that every moment that we're able to enjoy with our loved ones, everything that gives our life and our Nation meaning and purpose was given to us often by total strangers who laid down their lives that this might be the best Nation in the history of the world.

And finally—[*applause*]. And finally, to our Gold Star families, I hope you know that I will never forget. I'll never forget your loved ones, that the good life that I have and that my family have is fundamentally because you paid a debt that I can never repay. I'll never forget their smiling faces. I'll never forget their skill and bravery in battle. I'll never forget that all the moments that I'm able to have with my family, they're not able to have with theirs.

And most of all, I know, from every American across every political persuasion, that we love you, we're grateful to you, we're proud of you, and we commit to make the United States of America the very best version of itself. And that is how we honor those who gave their lives to this country.

And without—[*applause*]. And without further ado, it is my great honor to introduce the 45th and 47th Commander in Chief of these United States, President Donald J. Trump.

Mr. President.

The President. Well, thank you very much, everybody. What a beautiful day, as it turns out. [Laughter] It's just perfect. We'd rather have this than the heat. It's just beautiful. It's always beautiful being here. My fifth time, and it never changes.

Vice President Vance, Secretary Hegseth, Chairman Caine, members of the Cabinet, members of the United States Armed Forces, veterans, and fellow citizens, today here at Arlington, a very special place, that hallowed—burial grounds and battlefields across the country and around the world, we unite in solemn observance.

With reverent hearts, we honor those who fell so that our Republic might stand, those who died so that our Nation could live, those who gave up their sacred light on Earth so that the sublime light of American freedom would shine forever and ever.

This Memorial Day, we salute them, we exalt them, and we thank them for all that we have and for all that they gave. They gave everything. God bless our fallen heroes.

We're joined today by some of those they left behind: our incredible Gold Star families. Incredible people. To every person here and across America who holds tight to the memory of a warrior taken from them, we will never ever forget the ones you loved.

Gold Star family members, please stand. Receive our thanks, please. Thank you.

Thank you very much. My honor.

Less than 6 weeks from now, our Nation will reach a historic milestone: 250 years of majestic American independence. It's something. But it's only right that first we remember the immense sacrifice that has been brought to us and this momentous anniversary year. That's what it is: It's a momentous year.

Before we hail the founding, we honor the fallen. Before we celebrate the triumph, we pay the tribute. Before we crown the victory, we count the cost. Today we are reminded that there could be no Fourth of July without America's Armed Forces, and there could be no Independence Day without Memorial Day. We owe our liberty, our self-government, the glories of our history, and our very Nation itself to the generations who paid for it with everything they had—the ultimate sacrifice. The first Americans to give their lives in battle fell on April of 1775, when eight patriots were cut down by Redcoats.

Those guns—they were shot on Lexington Green. They had answered the call to muster against a force five times their strength—they said, at the time, the greatest in the world—in defense of their cherished rights and their cherished liberty. As the British approached, the Massachusetts militiamen summoned destiny itself, saying: "If they mean to have a war, let it begin right here."

Caleb Harrington was 23 years old when he accompanied his father to the Green that day. Torn apart from each other in the chaos of combat, that American son died trying to fight his way back to his father. He wanted to get back to Dad.

Caleb's cousin Jonathan was struck down at age 31, shot within the sight of his home and his young wife and child, who awaited his return. Jonathan crawled bleeding back to them to die on his own doorstep for a final terrible, but beautiful farewell. His widow and orphan were perhaps the very first Gold Star family in a long unbroken chain that reaches up through the ages to us right here today.

When our Founding Fathers put the ideas of the Declaration of Independence to paper in Philadelphia, they signed and sealed an oath that had already been written in blood by patriots at Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill. Their sacrifice birthed the most incredible and exceptional

nation in all of history, and our Nation is doing better today than it's ever done before. *[Applause]* Right? That's right.

The cause of independence exploded from that part of the American soul that will not be tamed, that will never be conquered, that will rather face death than to live as slaves to the arbitrary will of another.

This is the unyielding spirit that has always set Americans apart and driven generations of American warriors into battle, their chests beating with a cry that says: "We will govern ourselves. We will control our destiny. We will bow to no one but the righteous God who made us and who gave us our rights and blessed this land of free and the bravest of the brave."

Ten days into the legendary Battle of the Bulge in World War II, Lieutenant Colonel Keith Ware led 11 men and a tank against entrenched German positions, the toughest positions anywhere in the world. Half the patrol, including Ware himself, were soon wounded, yet still he killed five enemy riflemen, demolished three German machinegun nests, forced a fourth to surrender, and captured the hill. For his heroism, he received the congressional Medal of Honor.

Unlike most drafted soldiers, Ware stayed in the Army and rose to the rank of general—a highly respected general. In Vietnam, as commander of the First Infantry, the "Big Red One," they called it——

Audience member. Yes! Woo! *[Laughter]*

The President. That's very nice. *[Laughter]*

——he led from the front. And in 1968, that's where he was shot down surveying enemy positions for the famous assault on Hill 222.

Known as "The Fighting General," he's buried here in Arlington. And with us is his grandson and namesake, Staff Sergeant Keith Ware, an Air Force veteran. Keith. Where are you, Keith? Where are you, Keith? Hi, Keith. *[Applause]*

[At this point, the President saluted SSgt Keith Ware, USAF.]

Thank you very much, Keith. Great honor.

We're also honored to be joined by a man who, like General Ware, is a veteran of the largest battle in U.S. Army history: the Battle of the Bulge. At 15, Harry Miller lied about his age to enlist, and was soon fighting to stop the SS Panzer divisions as part of the famed 740th Tank Battalion—the "Daredevils," they were called—of which he is among the last surviving members at 97 years old. Within 6 months after the battle, Harry's unit lost 42 comrades. He's remembering them today. Sergeant Miller, it is a true honor to have you with us. Sergeant Miller.

And he looks great. Thank you.

Many of the greatest men of that generation followed a long and epic path from World War II to Korea and to Vietnam. Major Charles Kelly was the father of aggressive "Dustoff" helicopter flying that made Army medical evacuation pilots among the most fearless in Vietnam. The greatest helicopter pilots they say that ever lived.

Like Sergeant Miller, Charles enlisted to serve in World War II at age 15. He was wounded at the Battle of Aachen and went on to fight in Korea. But flying helicopter ambulances in Vietnam is what etched his name into history.

"Since I have been here," he wrote in 1964, "we have evacuated 1,800 casualties, and in the last 3 months, we've flown 242 hours at night. No other unit can match this." And they flew the most dangerous routes probably in the history of warfare.

Two weeks later, under brutal enemy fire, Kelly refused to withdraw until he had loaded the wounded aboard. As he prepared for takeoff, an enemy bullet pierced his heart. Yet Charles Kelly's heroic lifesaving style lived on. His comrades and command passed on to Captain Patrick Henry Brady. And 4 years later, Brady piloted 3 damaged helicopters in turn to evacuate an incredible 51 wounded warriors under intense fire, fire like no one has seen up until that point.

For this, he received also the congressional Medal of Honor. General Brady is with us at 89 years old as we salute his fallen mentor, Charles Kelly. Thank you very much. Thank you for being here. Thank you very much.

Sergeant First Class Matthew McClintock enlisted in the Army in 2006 and became a very special Green Beret. In 2016, he found himself in an hours-long firefight with Afghan terrorists. When a comrade was severely wounded, Matthew wanted to find a landing zone for a medevac rescue—a very dangerous, horrible, horrible way to be flying. He was reminded on the dangers, but Matthew replied: "We have to save him. We have to do it."

Running out in the face of mortars and rocket-propelled grenades, he went to work, but was soon gravely wounded. He was hit from every possible angle. Matthew fell that day, but the soldier he gave his life to save survived and thrived, and Matthew was awarded the Silver Star.

We're deeply honored to be joined by Matthew's mother Joyce, his widow Allie, and his precious young son Declan, here to remember Matthew at his grave in Section 60, 10 years later. So, Joyce and Allie and Declan, we salute Sergeant Matthew McClintock as an American hero. Please. Thank you.

These are tremendous people. These are brave, brave people.

In two wars recently, we've lost a total of 13 servicemembers. In Venezuela, which was a complete and total victory, where we're working very closely with the Venezuela government right now—we took that over in 1 day. We lost no one. In Operation Epic Fury, we lost 13 wonderful souls—wonderful, special people.

These incredible men and women gave their lives to ensure that the world's number-one state sponsor of terror will never have a nuclear weapon. Oh, and they won't. They will never have a nuclear weapon. I'm sure you know that.

One of them was Major Ariana Savino Linse, and we're joined by her great family: Omayra, Darren, Zevin, and Wik [Vic; White House correction]. Stand up, please. Please. There he is. There he is. Thank you very much. Thank you, Vic. Thank you very much.

To all of you, Ariana's selfless gift will not be in vain. Our debt to you is everlasting, and it's always going to end in victory. We're having victories all over the place, more than we've had in many, many decades.

Scripture tells us, "Precious is [in] the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful servants."

Four hundred thousand souls rest on these grounds—these beautiful grounds. The sacred soil, which is first consecrated in the hours of America's greatest division to be eternal symbol and national unity. It cannot be by chance alone that the very first servicemember laid to rest here, in this place of supreme sacrifice, was a Union soldier by the name of Private Christman—Private William Henry Christman of Pennsylvania, who died—as 19 years old. He was a great young man, they say.

Beside him are more than 18,000 other young men named William, over 20,000 named John, over 13,000 named James, joined over time by Isaac, Elijah, Earls, Hanks, Helens, Juans, Margarets, Marias, Donalds—not too many—[laughter]—and others whose names tell the true story of American greatness. And greatness it is.

Here, beneath arching trees and white stones—so beautiful—these many are made one again, united forever as brothers- and sisters-in-arms and children of our Father's in Heaven. From coast to coast, from proud cities to humble towns, and from heartland fields, from every race and religion, they came because they could not bear the thought that the Nation they loved so much might ask for heroes and hear no answer. But they answered, and they answered very, very loudly.

At Ticonderoga and San Juan Hill, at Manila Bay and Midway, at Pointe du Hoc and Busan, the courage of the American warrior has forged a path through every sea and every place that's marked a trail to every corner on the Earth. In 250 years, America's heroes have saved more lives, freed more captives, accomplished more good, and spread more hope than any other people at any time in the history of the world. Whole nations know liberty today; entire generations know freedom; billions and billions of people have been delivered from poverty, tyranny, and oppression because of the sacrifices we honor this day.

That's why, from Brittany to Sicily, from Panama City to Saipan, from the Netherlands to North Africa to New Zealand, this whole planet is adorned with memorials to America's fallen and to America's greatness—to their courage carved in marble and engraved in the hearts of all of mankind. We will never forget you.

From 1776 to 2026, America has always stood as a great and moral cause. Our warriors are no mere mercenaries; they are guardian angels who stride across the battlefields of history and stand watch over the highest and most beautiful plains the human spirit has ever seen, holding the line between liberty and tyranny, between civilization and barbarism, between good and evil.

Wherever the American soldier walks, wherever he fights, wherever he fails, and wherever he falls, he does it for the destiny of a Nation like no other. There's never been anybody like you. And for the fate of freedom on this Earth, we salute you like nobody has ever been saluted before. That's right.

By their deaths, those who have gone before us in battle have redeemed the promise of our founding for each future generation. They have not just made the ultimate sacrifice, they have offered the ultimate proof that we Americans do indeed love liberty, we do cherish the self-government given to us by our forefathers, we do believe with all our souls in the mission that God has given to America, and we do intend, with all our strength and heart, to hold high the torch our heroes handed to us, and we will never ever let it fall.

Thank you very much. You are special, special people. We love you all. God bless the families of the fallen.

God bless the men and women who serve. And God bless the United States of America. Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 12:55 p.m. in the Memorial Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery. In his remarks, he referred to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. J. Daniel Caine, USAF; Omayra Linse, mother, Darren Linse, father, Zevin Linse, brother, and Vic Savino, husband, of Maj. Ariana Linse Savino, USAF, who was killed in the crash of a KC-135 Stratotanker aerial refueling aircraft in western Iraq on March 12. The transcript was released by the Office of Communications on May 26.

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