**MEMORIAL DAY SPEECH**

**FOR**

**DAVID NIST**

Ladies and gentlemen, friends, family and distinguished guests, it is an honor and a privilege to gather with all of you here to commemorate the observance of Memorial Day 2016. In a world that finds us becoming increasingly frenetic, preoccupied, distracted, and “other-focused,” it is more necessary than ever that we take the time to pause, realign, and remember the events, contributors, and circumstances that fought and sacrificed so much so that we may have our comforts, conveniences, and freedoms. Memorial Day is one of those times, and while we eagerly anticipate the “official” start of the summer season, this day means so much more than backyard gatherings. We all stand to learn about life, commitment, valor and commemoration through the remembrance of those who fought for the gifts and blessings we have today.

To paraphrase Father Dennis Edward O’Brian of the USMC,, “ it is the soldier, not the reporter, who has given us freedom of the press. It is the soldier, not the poet, who has given us freedom of speech. It is the soldier, not the organizer, who has given us freedom to gather and demonstrate. It is the soldier who salutes the flag and who serves beneath the flag, and whose coffin is draped by the flag….”

How many of us have wondered, “What is the history and meaning of Memorial Day?” Here’s a brief explanation. This holiday, originally known as Decoration Day, has its earliest roots at the end of the Civil War and was initiated as a response to find the means to honor those who died in service to the United States, inspired by the battles fought in the middle of the nineteenth century. History teaches us that General John Logan was the first to proclaim the day be celebrated on the 30th of May, 1868 and his original intention was to “lay flowers on the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion, and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village, and hamlet churchyard in the land.” Although celebrations continued as the years progressed, it wasn't until Congress passed the National Holiday Act of 1971 that the last Monday in May was set aside as the official date of remembrance. Today it is observed by just about every state.

Tradition also teaches us that the protocol for honoring the flag is to raise it briskly on the flagpole and then slowly and solemnly lower the flag to half staff, the position that memorializes the millions of men and women who have died in service to our country. (**The flag should also be raised to full staff at noon but I don't know if you want to add that as I don't know what time you will be speaking. It is up to you should you want to add this.**) As we observe these traditions, let us think of all of those that are no longer with us. It is through their courage, tenacity, and sense of duty that we are here today.

During World War II, the citizens of the United States were tasked to step up to defend our freedom in unprecedented numbers. The bravery and dedication they demonstrated earned them the nickname, “The Greatest Generation.” In a poem by Sam Miller written in 1942, we get a glimpse into that time:

“Whenever I see a soldier boy

No matter where it be

I give him salutation

For he means so much to me.

He's not the boy we used to know

In store or desk or plow

He's a defender of our faith

He’s in the service now.

He keeps old glory flying

On land and air and sea

He lives to make our homes secure

He dies to keep us free.”

The population of the men and women included in the military strength of the United States numbers in the millions across all branches. In 2015 in the Army alone it was estimated that over one million people were in service. As the poem reminds us, these people are our friends and family. They comprise our community and whether they are or were at “store or desk or plow,” each one is to be honored and thanked. As a proud American and a concerned and involved citizen, I believe it is important to commemorate the past, know the history, and build on it for strong, productive and involved communities of the present and future. I also think it is vital to acknowledge and honor our friends, children, neighbors, and fellow citizens, no matter who they are or where they serve, that are currently in the armed services.

Throughout history there has always been the struggle between forces. Each side has its beliefs and convictions and although good, sincere people always intend for and work diligently for diplomacy and harmony, those conditions can be elusive and tenuous at best. Our country has become great because we stand on the shoulders of the brave men and women that have preceded us and every generation goes forth with insight and enlightenment on what it means to to them to be an American. As the world evolves, so does the need to address new ways of defending this great country, but one thing remains constant and that is the strength of our people and the dedication to our country.

As we all go forward today, to our families, friends, and festivities, let us hold a place in our hearts and memories for those who have fought so that we can celebrate. And while we may not know exactly who those people were, we know this: they were someone’s son or daughter, friend or aunt, brother, husband, father. Every single person that has had the courage to wear a military uniform and represent the United States has earned our respect and gratitude. And every single person currently serving deserves to be celebrated and sincerely thanked as well. I honestly don't know where we would be without the brave souls who have served in the past, or where we would be without **you** (**Turn to the military personnel who are present,, look at them and thank them**). On behalf of this community of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, please accept our most sincere gratitude for all you do in service to our country.

May this commemoration of Memorial Day bring renewed enlightenment, pride, and respect to each one of us, and may we continue to honor and defend our great country!!!

Thank you all!