

Avonworth Community Memorial Day Speech

Rep. Arvind Venkat

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Honored veterans and members of our military, distinguished leaders of the Avonworth community, ladies and gentleman, it is truly a privilege to speak with you this morning as we observe Memorial Day.

When Mr. Maruschock contacted me about addressing you at this event, I was surprised and humbled. As someone who neither has served in the military nor comes from a family with a tradition of military service, my experiences with Memorial Day are from a distance – in awe of those who President Lincoln said gave “the last full measure of devotion”, yet without the visceral connection from being a veteran, in active duty, or being a family member who similarly sacrificed.

But the uniting factor for me with our honored dead is love of country, especially as an immigrant whose parents came here for a better life like so many others in our history and where I now stand as our representative in the same assembly where William Penn founded our Commonwealth as a welcoming place for all of good will and in the state where the Declaration of Independence and US Constitution were signed, giving expression to our American ideals.

I would like to think that those we remember and honor today would both be surprised and not surprised at all by my having this responsibility as that too is the story of our country – of change and common purpose.

Despite all of our individual and quite different origin stories, we all can connect to the common aspiration that made our country what President Reagan called “The Shining City on the Hill.” Throughout our history, men and women from all walks of life have served and died for our nation. It is humbling for all of us here today to contemplate that sacrifice, knowing that we enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness because of the foundation they helped to build and renew over nearly 250 years.

Those we honor today sacrificed their lives for millions of people they would never meet, who now enjoy the results of their sacrifice. They embodied the commitment to the American experiment and our creed that all of us are created equal and endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights.

None of this was easy. Our history is replete with examples where we have not met our ideals. But for me, true patriotism is embodied by those who struggled to work, as Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, to bend the arc of the universe towards justice in order to fulfill our American ideals. And those we remember on Memorial Day similarly struggled and ultimately died defending the nation, not because it was perfect, but because in its foundation on a universally accessible creed, America represented what President Lincoln called “the last best hope of earth.”

So where does that leave us today? I am humble enough to borrow President Lincoln’s words that our community “will little note, nor long remember” what I say here, but we can never forget what those we honor did here and on many foreign fields. Despite common present-day

cries of division or even dissolution of the bonds that bind our country, I draw solace that on Memorial Day, we remember those who saw our common purpose, who regardless of origin died so that the nation might live, who understood that we who inherit the results of their sacrifice must live up to our ideals and resolve that true patriotism is not blind to our faults, but strives to build the more perfect union of which our founders spoke.

We will continue to debate and disagree, but the patriotism that we commemorate today and has sustained our nation over centuries is not challenged by a lack of unanimity. Rather, true patriotism strives towards fulfilling our ideals knowing that to get there, we will face conflict and at times fall short. But our creed demands a constant striving, and the heroes we commemorate this Memorial Day deserve nothing less. Let us resolve that their memory will be in our hearts and that their example will renew our love of country by moving us forward through all challenges and conflicts so that future generations say we continued to build a better community, Commonwealth, and nation, worthy of the sacrifices of our honored dead. Thank you, and may God bless America and protect our troops.