

MEMORIAL DAY 2008

OP-ED

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On Memorial Day, we honor the men and women who have given their lives for our country.

They were our husbands or wives, mothers or fathers, sons or daughters. We deeply mourn their loss – both for the hole it has left in our lives, and for what could have been but will never be.

They fought to protect our nation and for the principles upon which our nation was founded. We are here today, a strong and free country, because of their sacrifice.

We should also recognize the sacrifice of the families that they have left behind. There is no way that our words can quiet their pain, no way that we can truly appreciate or compensate their loss.

Since our nation was founded, heroic Americans have given their lives for our country. In our current wars, more than 4,000 have died in Iraq and 500 in Afghanistan, and more than 26 New Hampshire men and women have lost their lives. Those soldiers and their families, as well as those from previous battles, are in my prayers every day. We must honor their memory by caring for their families. As President Abraham Lincoln said so eloquently after Gettysburg, we must "care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan..." Today, women serve in the Armed Forces, so there are now husbands left behind as well.

Many more have served our nation with great honor and have returned wounded. Men and women have suffered injuries that they have to live with for the rest of their lives. Our newest wounded veterans, coming from the 1.7 million Americans who have served in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have survived injuries that in earlier wars would have killed them. They will require ongoing care throughout their years. We must honor their sacrifice and those of our troops who fought in Vietnam,

Korea, and World War II by committing our resources to their care and to supporting their families.

When our men and women go to war, our lives are unchanged. The battle is a distant image. We go on with our lives, our careers, our personal relationships. We acknowledge that soldiers sacrifice, but we cannot see their pain, we cannot sense the danger, and we carry no scars.

Soldiers pledge never to leave a man behind on the battlefield. We should equal that pledge by promising never to leave a veteran or fallen soldier's family behind. Our country shows its gratitude and its indebtedness to fallen soldiers by giving their families the benefits they were promised and deserve. The soldier trusted our nation to watch over his or her family if they died and we must not let them down. We honor their memory by honoring our commitments to them.

This Memorial Day is especially meaningful because we are at war. Since last year New Hampshire has lost more of our treasured citizens. We grieve with their families. The news articles gave us a sense of what kind of human beings they were – the finest, most dedicated, most patriotic – the best we had to offer. They join the finest from other generations in cemeteries across the country. Let us bow our heads and remember to thank all of them.