

## 7/04/2006 Gray County Veterans Memorial Dedication

Dedication for the Gray County Veterans Memorial

July 4, 2006

Let me begin by saying how humbled I am to be here for this special observance. I join you to dedicate this memorial, which will forever stand as a monument to the veterans from Gray County who sacrificed so much in service to their nation.

Today, we also celebrate our country's Independence Day. 230 years ago on this day, in 1776, the Declaration of Independence was adopted by the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. With this document, our founders set forth the ideals that have guided our country to this day: equality, opportunity, justice, rule of law, government of the people and for the people, and the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. On this anniversary of U.S. independence, we think to ourselves how blessed we are to be Americans. But as we count these blessings, we also recognize that our freedoms did not come free. Military men and women from each generation have fought to defend them.

So it is fitting we come together on July 4th to honor generations of Gray County veterans who have answered our country's call - the names of nearly two thousand of whom are inscribed on these black granite panels, dating back to the Civil War. I express my appreciation and esteem for veterans and also for those who contributed time and money to see that the soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines of Gray County are remembered this day and each day hereafter.

To the veterans of Gray County and each of their families, let me express thanks. Because of their service and their family's sacrifice we live in the strongest, freest, greatest nation in the history of the world. We live with the blessing of freedom they fought, suffered and died for. We are the benefactors of their courage, their commitment to duty, and their deaths. Let us forever be grateful.

Today's dedication and recognition are particularly important because our nation is at war. As we gather here to honor those who served, a new generation of soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines are halfway around the world. Our thoughts and prayers are with these men and women as they fight to keep our world safe and free. They fight, like the veterans of our past wars, for the cause of freedom and the promise of peace.

Our country has had many wars in its history. It is remarkable that from the revolutionary war to today, we have been blessed by men and women willing to sacrifice God's precious gift of life. However, we know that the cause for which they gave their lives is worthy. Freedom is worth death, for without freedom, life loses its meaning. Love of liberty exceeds love of life. We are thankful that individuals of each generation have been willing to serve America, and that they would risk everything to allow their children and grandchildren the opportunity to live in freedom. Their actions provide us with the meaning of this dedication ceremony far better than any comments a Congressman could make.

There is concern these days about the absence of heroes. If people have no heroes, it is because we are looking for heroes in the wrong places. We look on the baseball diamonds and the basketball courts and on the stages of Hollywood and in sold out amphitheatres of rock music concerts. Those we honor this morning, they are our heroes. And when we thought heroes might be a thing of the past, God continues to provide us with more.

To often, Washington, D.C. needs a reminder of what is important - that it is not polls, partisan politics or the next election. Sometimes in Washington, the important things in life are too easily forgotten. When I need a reminder of what is really important, I'll take a walk - from the nation's Capitol building to the Lincoln Memorial. Between these two points I will pass the Washington Monument, the Vietnam Wall, the Korean War Memorial and now the WWII Memorial. These memorials and monuments to our country's great leaders and to its everyday citizen soldiers put everything in proper perspective.

Our system of government, our way of life, our liberties are so important that men and women are willing to die to defend and preserve them. This memorial, just like the memorials in our nation's capital, honors those citizens who recognized duty to defend our country.

Today, as we gather to dedicate this memorial to pay tribute to our military men and women, I ask that we also think about the memorial's importance in instilling awareness in all citizens of the contributions of veterans. The traits we learn from veterans - courage, honor, duty, sacrifice, patriotism, heroism - are characteristics that make us better citizens. Their everyday acts inspire us to reach beyond our limits. Their losses remind us to live a life worthy of their sacrifice. And through their service on our behalf, we remember the obligations we owe. These are important lessons only a veteran can teach us.

Each year, as the percentage of our population who has worn a uniform declines, fewer and fewer individuals and families have a personal connection with the military. This Veterans Memorial will help fulfill a responsibility to ensure that others, including future generations, appreciate the sacrifices made by those serving our country and never forget them. This memorial will continue to teach the members of this community to be better citizens.

Those who served in our country's past wars gave us not freedom, but the opportunity for freedom. The battle to preserve the blessings bestowed on us by our forefathers must be fought by every generation each day. We have said goodbye to many Kansans during the last year - active military, reservists and members of the National Guard. Once again our fathers, mothers, daughters and sons have answered the call to duty. Once again we have our heroes. It is appropriate for us to ask God to watch over these heroes and bring each of them safely home.

By the building and dedication of the Gray County Veterans Memorial, this community honors those who fought and continue to fight to keep our world safe and free. We thank God for giving us the gift of life, and also for the gift of heroes. May God continue to bless our veterans and the country they serve.