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Memorial Day Ceremonies

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MEMORIAL DAY
GREENPORT - 1979

We are met today to honor those who gave their lives for their fellow Americans. In the words of Ecclesiastes: "Their bodies are buried in peace but their names live forevermore." It is fitting and proper that, on this Memorial Day, 1979, we should pause and reflect upon those who have made the supreme sacrifice and upon the reasons they did so. For this is not only a day of Memorial for our fallen heroes; it also is a day to report to them that the republic still stands and that they have not died in vain.

Our freedom has been purchased at great price - the lives of those whom we honor today. They have passed to us a sacred obligation - the obligation to assure the continuation of the self-government and individual freedoms guaranteed to us by the founding fathers of this nation in the United States Constitution. And we must be prepared, as they were, for ongoing sacrifice, eternal vigilance and constant readiness in the defense of liberty.

There ~~have~~ been too many battles, too many wars. Yet, in view of world realities, it would be foolhardy and reckless for this nation to fail to maintain a high degree of military strength. But military strength is only a defense against a foreign enemy. There is another enemy - ourselves.

A few years back, there was a well known cartoon character who made this memorable statement: "We have met the enemy and they is us." The statement is significant because many who have written about our unique experiment in self-government have contended that if our systems fails, it will fail from within. 03

And this can happen only if we fail to attend to our duties as citizens.

The duties of a citizen do not begin and end with the payment of taxes. The duties of a citizen include the duty to vote. The low voter turnout in this country is a national disgrace. The duties of a citizen include jury service. As a Judge, I can assure you that it is indeed a sorry spectacle when citizens try in every way possible to avoid this important aspect of self-government. The duties of a citizen include contact and communication with elected representatives. In fact, few Americans are able^{even} to identify their representatives on the local, state and federal levels. The duties I have described to you are also privileges - privileges unavailable to an overwhelming majority of the world's population. The people we honor today died to preserve these privileges for us.

There are those who say: "My one vote doesn't make a difference" or "they can get along without me." Who are they? They are all of us. We can't get along without everyone's participation. Every single person counts. Respect for the dignity of every person is part of our heritage. Active participation is essential and that one vote does count.

We are beset by many problems, but so were our forefathers. We must make judgments, individually and collectively, about many issues: the energy crisis, inflation, the environment, military preparedness, social welfare programs, education, atomic power, disarmament and equal opportunity. To make the proper judgments, we must study, discuss and vote on these matters. Our elected representatives must know how we feel about all

important local, state and national issues. In this way we can be certain that the solutions adopted will reflect the considered views of the majority.

I believe that the citizens of this nation are becoming more interested in their government and in the important issues of the day. They are asking more questions and demanding better answers. And this is all to the good, for the power of the nation does belong to the people. With citizen participation in government, the republic cannot fail; without that participation, the republic cannot succeed.

The American patriots whom we honor today gave their lives so that our nation, governed by its people, could survive. We now report to them that the republic still stands and that they have not died in vain, for the people ^{of this great nation} yet retain the power to govern themselves.