Good morning

Distinguished guests, Ms. Olivia Thompson, Essex Fells veterans, Neighbors and Friends, welcome to our Memorial Day Remembrance at Essex Fells Borough Hall.

Today is a day of mourning. Today is a day of mourning.

Today is not a day for celebration like July 4th. Of Independence Day, John Adams wrote that it:

will be the most memorable Epocha, in the History of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated, by succeeding Generations, as the great anniversary Festival. It ought to be commemorated, as the Day of Deliverance by solemn Acts of Devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade, with Shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time forward forever more.

Yet, today is a day of mourning.

Today is not a day of giving thanks to all those who have served our country in times of war and in times of peace. Of Veterans Day, President John F. Kennedy said, “A nation reveals itself not only by the men it produces, but also by the men it honors, the men it remembers.”

Yet, today is a day of mourning.

Three years after the end of the Civil War in 1868, the head of an organization of Union Veterans – the Grand Army of the Republic – established Decoration Day as a time for the nation to decorate the graves of the war dead with flowers. The end of May was chosen because it was recognized that flowers would be in bloom all over the country. The first large observance was held that year in Arlington National Cemetery, where members of the Grand Army of the Republic, widows, and orphans made their way through the cemetery, strewing flowers on both Union and Confederate graves, reciting prayers, singing hymns, and placing American flags at each grave.
It was not until after World War One that Decoration Day was expanded to honor all those who have died in all American Wars. In 1971, by an act of Congress, Decoration Day became Memorial Day and declared a national holiday. It is so extremely important to understand that today, we remember those American soldiers, airmen, marines, and sailors, approximately 1.1 million, who died terrible deaths on battlefields, in the air, and on the seas. Those 1.1 million Americans died in the cause of freedom and in the protection of our country and of our liberties which we enjoy this very day. Because of what they gave to us and to our nation’s future generations, and for the magnitude of their sacrifice, it is very incumbent upon us all to honor the fallen, to remember them, to “earn it.” They did not die in vain.

Of Memorial Day, President Ronald Reagan wrote:

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\text{Words are even more feeble on this Memorial Day, for the sight before us is that of a strong and good nation that stands in silence and remembers those who were loved and who, in return, loved their countrymen enough to die for them.}
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Or as similarly stated in John 15, Verse 13 – \textit{Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.}

I returned from the Cape yesterday, but while I was there I saw a statue of a WWI doughboy and it’s plaque read, “In the hour of need, they made the supreme gift of themselves, going to meet toil, privation, suffering and death with steady courage. Those who returned and those who fell have given this and future generations … the example of noble achievement and willing sacrifice.” “Noble achievement and willing sacrifice.”

Memorial Day is, in many ways, America’s wake for its fallen service men and women. It is an extremely solemn day, neither of celebration, nor thanksgiving. It is a heartfelt day full of tragic loss, of the pain of pondering what could have been, of widows, widowers, orphans, loved ones, and families being forced to endure the unendurable as they try to come to terms with the loved and loss of those murdered by our nation’s nemeses as we brought about their rightful destruction. It should not be a day for politicians or pomp, but instead it should be a day of reflection and reverence. Look into the eyes of a soldier’s widow or attend a military funeral and then try to tell me differently.
This marks my 14th Memorial Day address, and of all those I have given, one of the ones I am most proud of was the one I gave two years ago called “The Letter,” specifically referring to the letter that is sent to the families of the fallen which begins with the words, “It is with deep regret that I inform you of the death of your son… of your husband…” Please be mindful today that Memorial Day is not only a day to mourn those who were killed in defending our nation, but also a day of compassion for those who loved and lost. The family members of the fallen still suffer this very day and its never going to end.

Memorial Day is supposed to remind Americans of what others have sacrificed for them – but sometimes, I think no one is paying attention. How I hate the 21st century. Challenge yourselves and challenge your friends this day to show your respect to our service men and women by going on line and making a contribution to wonderful organizations like “Homes for Our Troops,” “Wounded Warrior Project,” “Disabled American Veterans Charitable Service Trust,” “Thanks USA,” the USO, or one that takes care of the fallen service members’ families, like “Gold Star” or “Fisher House Foundation.” I thank each and every one of you for being here with me today at this remembrance. Your presence restores my faith in that you understand that THIS matters; that THIS is important.

A grateful Borough reveres her fallen soldiers, sailors and airmen; a grateful Borough shall always remember them.

David James Stanley  
United States Maritime Service  
Lost at Sea – Second World War  
June 1, 1943

Nathaniel Austin Hanau, Jr.  
United States Army Air Corps  
Died in Action – Second World War  
June 1, 1944

Commander John Kremer, Jr.  
United States Naval Reserve  
Died in Action – Second World War  
December 30, 1944

Second Lieutenant Robert H. Crum, Jr.
United States Army
Died in Action – Republic of Vietnam
May 22, 1966

First Lieutenant William Brent Bell
Ranger 75th Infantry - Airborne
Died in Action – Republic of Vietnam
March 27, 1969

Today is the day we mourn the loss of these “Fells boys” who tragically died fighting for our nation, fighting for us, and fighting for our children and our children’s children. It is rightfully a day of sorrow.

I can think of no greater tribute to our five fallen soldiers, sailors, and airmen than to once again call forward our Borough’s veterans and to thank them and let them know how proud we are of them for their sacrifice, courage and devotion to our country. Their service to our county back then, and their presence here today, reminds us that duty, honor and country are very real ideals held sacred in Essex Fells. Their being here is ever so meaningful – for it allows us all to feel a stronger connection to their comrades in arms: David, Austin, John, Robbie, and Brent. Please hold your applause and appreciation until the last soldier joins the ranks with his comrades as each comes forward and identifies himself, his branch and years of service.

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Ladies and Gentlemen, I am proud and honored to present to you, the men of Essex Fells who have honorable and proudly served their country. These are our veterans, these are our heroes, they comprised “the tip of the spear,” and these wonderful Americans will forever have our deepest and sincere thanks and appreciation.

Each year at this ceremony, I read a letter that is considered one of the most beautifully ever composed. It was written to a Mrs. Bixby in Boston:

Dear Madam:
I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjunct General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must
be any word of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic that they died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

A. Lincoln

Like Mrs. Bixby, Essex Fells lost five sons on the field of battle: Robert H. Crum, Jr., John Kremer, Jr., David James Stanley, William Brent Bell, and Nathaniel Austin Hanau, Jr. Each died gloriously and are laid upon the altar of freedom. Each displayed great courage, love of country, and steadfast dedication. They made the supreme sacrifice for us, for our Borough, and for our country. Nothing can compensate the families of these brave men for the tragic loss they suffered; but please know that they have the eternal thanks, gratitude, respect, and admiration of all of the citizens of Essex Fells.

Never let a day go by that, as we pass Borough Hall, we do not divert our eyes for a moment to look at this blessed plot, this hallowed ground, and remember those whose names lie here with due reverence. And as you walk by the tablets and read their names, know that you look at the names of our Borough’s revered heroes. They went to war and answered our nation’s call to liberate and not to conquer. Remember that when they got up that morning, they did not plan to die that day, so allow them dignity in death. You tread lightly there.

This is a day of mourning;
This is a day of remembrance;
This is a day of reverence; and
This is a day that belongs to them.

God bless you all, God bless Essex Fells, and God bless these United States.