

Congressman Wally Herger

"Memorial Day a Time to Remember, Honor Our Fallen Heroes" (May 26, 2008)

Good morning. Thank you for the invitation to join you today. It's an honor to celebrate Memorial Day with all of you gathered here. I would like to thank the Gridley-Biggs Cemetery District, the Military Veterans Court of Honor Committee, and all those responsible for making this event possible. America's veterans have sacrificed greatly to preserve, protect, and defend the rights and privileges cherished by citizens of the United States.

As we observe Memorial Day, let's step back and reflect on the service that millions of Americans have given our nation to make and keep us free. Throughout American history, more than 35 million American military personnel left their families to serve their country during wartime. We are gathered here today to honor those who, as Abraham Lincoln said in his Gettysburg Address, "Gave the last full measure of devotion" in all our wars throughout our history. Our great nation would never been founded, nor our freedoms preserved, without the courage and tenacity of men and women throughout our history who died fighting for an ideal – a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

America's embrace of freedom has transformed our nation and many others around the world. It made it impossible for the bondage of slavery in our land to continue any longer. It rose against the evil of fascism and the unspeakable brutality of the Holocaust. It stood face to face against the curse of communism. In each of these great confrontations, freedom prevailed. Untold millions across the globe – people from different cultures, languages, and religions— have benefited from the advance of freedom. This Memorial Day, we are reminded again that none of these great victories for humanity would have been possible but for the brave and selfless Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of this preeminent American ideal.

Today, our nation is fighting an enemy that pledges allegiance not to a flag, but to a violent ideology. Like previous conflicts, success in the war against radical jihadists will require military superiority. But it will also require strong support for allied governments that stand against terrorism and promote moderation and peace. Our nation's post World War II efforts to stabilize Europe and the Pacific were in our national security interests. Likewise, I believe history will record that our current missions in Afghanistan and Iraq bolstered our security by developing strategic alliances in critical parts of the world.

The governments of these nations are far from perfect. But they stand in sharp contrast to the brutal regimes that came before them. These governments are not harboring terrorists. They are fighting them. They are not dictatorships. They are democracies. And they are not anti-American zealots. They are American allies.

The path from liberation to stability in Afghanistan and Iraq has been frustratingly difficult at times. But I believe it is possible for these nations to achieve peace and stability. In Afghanistan, the government is mostly stable and reconstruction is moving forward, but security is volatile in some parts of the country. Our nation has begun to devote more resources to this NATO-led mission to improve security. We have also stepped up targeted operations against terrorist leaders in lawless areas of Pakistan who are plotting new attacks and working to destabilize Afghanistan.

In Iraq, there has been remarkable progress over the past year in improving security and getting Iraqis of diverse backgrounds to work together and peacefully resolve differences through the political process. Significant challenges remain, but the transformation we've seen in Iraq give me increased optimism that stability and security are possible.

Like conflicts before, the men and women of our armed forces are playing an invaluable role in strengthening our security. They have served courageously and with unmatched skill. And they have made great sacrifices that our nation must never forget. We honor the fallen, we commit to caring for the wounded, and we pledge to support our military families in every way possible.

Our honor of fallen heroes must not be limited to one day, because we live from the fruit of their sacrifices each and every day. All of our veterans, living and deceased, deserve the respect, admiration, and gratitude of the citizens of the United States. Let us never forget their sacrifice.

It's been an honor to be here today and to have had the opportunity to recognize America's heroes for their sacrifice and dedication to our great nation. God bless America, our veterans, and the members of our Armed Forces currently serving in the Global War on Terror.