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STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

Capitol Update

By Senator Howard Marklein

May 27, 2016

Focus On Our Nation's Legacy this Memorial Day

My father served in the Marine Corps before I was born. While we milked cows, he would tell me about the men he served with and his experiences in World War II. He would tell me stories of honor, heroism and camaraderie. He imparted in me a deep sense of patriotism and service.

At the time, I didn't realize how important these stories and lessons were. I didn't understand how much these ideas would form me into the man I am today. I am grateful for his service and for his willingness to teach me about the things that make our country great.

It is our duty to teach our children and grandchildren about heroism and sacrifice. Too often, we allow the true stories to be forgotten. We miss opportunities to share about the lives of the people who dedicate themselves to our freedom and protection. We allow the next celebrity to dominate their viewpoint, rather than highlighting the true heroes of our nation.

We have lost two heroes from the 17th Senate District within the last five years. Army Specialist Jakob Roelli from Darlington was killed in action on September 21, 2011 in Jawkari, Kandahar Province, Afghanistan. Army Staff Sergeant Jesse J. Grindey of Hazel Green was killed in action on March 12, 2012 in the Kandahar Province, Afghanistan.

I cannot fathom the loss felt by Jakob's and Jesse's families. I am certain that they take time every day to remember these men who made the ultimate sacrifice. Let us each take time this week to remember Jakob, Jesse and the many others who have given their life for the cause of freedom around the world, especially those of our Special Operations, FBI and CIA; the stories of heroism that can never be told.

Each Memorial Day we must recognize the loss of men and women who have fought for freedom. But we also have the opportunity, and duty, to focus on their legacy.

General Patton said, "It is foolish and wrong to spend so much time mourning the men who died. Rather, we should thank God that such men lived at all."

The first known observance of Memorial Day was on May 5, 1866, making this year the 150th Observance. In 1866, a shop owner in Waterloo, New York wanted a day when all businesses would close to honor the fallen soldiers who had lost their lives during the Civil War.

The regular observance of Memorial Day caught on throughout our nation as we take time to reflect and appreciate the sacrifices made to protect our freedom, secure our borders and strengthen our nation.

Regardless of our race, religion or political beliefs, we Americans continue to collectively defend freedom generation after generation, all over the world. We defend freedom because we know that democracy is a fragile thing.

President Ronald Reagan said, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from its extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same."

Memorial Day is the perfect day to remind every generation, young and old, about the price for our freedom. We must tell the stories of our veterans. We must show our respect. We must live as examples for future generations who will take our mantle of freedom and march forward.

They need to know where they come from. They need to know about the men and women who formed our nation and gave everything to give us the chance to be free.

It may be difficult to put our gratitude into words, but we also have actions. We can live our lives in a way that preserves and protects the values and freedoms for which our heroes fought and died. We must continue to fight for fundamental liberties that are guaranteed in our constitution, and for which our soldiers have defended.

It is up to us to preserve their memory and to make sure that future generations realize the important sacrifice that the fallen have made to preserve our way of life. We must focus on the legacy given to us while we remember the loss.

For more information and to connect with me, visit my website <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/17/marklein> and subscribe to my weekly E-Update by sending an email to Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov. Do not hesitate to call 800-978-8008 if you have input, ideas or need assistance with any state-related matters.

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