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Week Ending Friday, May 31, 1996

The President's Radio Address

May 25, 1996

Good morning. This weekend all across our country we gather to observe Memorial Day. Over this weekend we honor Americans from all our wars who died while defending our Nation. These brave men and women gave their tomorrows so that we might live in freedom. We must vow to uphold the ideals they died for and make our country great, an America free and strong, a force for peace and progress, a land of tolerance and opportunity for all.

Many of you will come together as families and friends to place a wreath on a grave, to proudly march in a parade, to tell tales of service and sacrifice that are so much the story of our Nation. From the Revolutionary War to the Civil War, from the World Wars to Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, and the other conflicts in our history, all remind us that all of our people have given a lot in the military to protect the land we love.

Now we have the responsibility to build a future worthy of their sacrifice. We must make sure that America enters the 21st century as the greatest force on Earth for peace and freedom. Today, the men and women of America's Armed Forces are the best trained, best equipped, best prepared in the world, and I am determined to keep them that way. This is the surest guarantee of our security and freedom.

Whether safeguarding the border between North and South Korea, rescuing Americans in Liberia, helping the people of Bosnia to uphold the peace they chose, all around the world our troops stand sentry on liberty's front lines. Today we salute our men and women in uniform and the families who support them. We are proud of them and grateful for their service.

Our troops are the backbone of the American leadership that is the source of strength at home and our success around the world. Whether preventing conflict in the Persian Gulf, reducing the nuclear threat as we have done in North Korea, working with other nations to fight common dangers like terrorism, drug trafficking, and organized crime, strengthening our alliances in Asia and Europe, or isolating rogue nations like Libya and Iraq, steady, strong American leadership is making our people safer and the world more secure.

We also must uphold our Nation's leadership in the powerful global movement for democracy and peace. Today, more than ever and more than any other nation, America can help to push aside obstacles and point the way to peace. From the Middle East to Northern Ireland, from Haiti to Bosnia, we are helping millions of people embrace a future of hope.

If we continue to make good on their trust, we can build an even brighter future for our own people and for the world. We owe many debts to those who gave all they had to defend America's security and values around the world. But we know that to truly fulfill our debts, we must build the American dream here at home, too.

Our troops deserve an America with strong families, safe streets, good schools, clean air and water. Even as we balance our budget, my administration is working to keep our solemn commitment to America's veterans by improving the health care they receive, protecting the benefits they've earned, and making sure they have a fair shot at decent jobs and good homes.

Our commitment to our veterans must be the same as our commitment to all Americans, to give them the chance to make the most of their own lives. Generations of service men and women have fought and died for a common ideal, an America that offers opportunity for all, demands responsibility from all, that comes together as a community around the values we share.

On this Memorial Day, let us honor their sacrifice. Let us resolve to keep our America the strongest nation in the world and the world's strongest force for peace and freedom. And let us each do our part to keep the American dream alive.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.

Remarks at a Memorial Day Ceremony in Arlington, Virginia

May 27, 1996

Thank you. General Foley, Chaplain O'Keefe——

[*At this point, a car alarm sounded.*]

——that's a new form of honors there. [*Laughter*] Secretary Brown, Deputy Secretary White, General Ralston, the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Let me say a special word of thanks to Mr. Jack Metzler for all the work he has done on this magnificent cemetery and for the work that he and others have done to get the amphitheater ready again this year for a reopening. It is an extraordinarily beautiful place of honor for those who have served in our Armed Forces.

To all the members of the Armed Forces who are here, to the distinguished leaders of our veterans organizations, to all of you who are veterans and your families, my fellow Americans: We come together this morning, as we do every year, to honor those who gave their lives so that future generations of Americans might live in freedom. All across our wonderful country, in crowded cities and country towns, America bows its head today in thanks to our fallen heroes. With flags at half-mast, with flowers on a grave, with colorful parades, with quiet prayers, we take this time to remember their achievements and renew our commitment to their ideals.

Here on this peaceful hillside, the silent rows of headstones tell tales of service and sacrifice that are so much the story of our Nation. Here lies the spirit that has guided our country for more than 200 years now, nurses and drummer boys, scouts and engineers, warriors and peacemakers, joined by a shared devotion to defend our Nation, protect our freedom, keep America strong and proud.

As we honor the brave sacrifices in battle that grace our Nation's history, let us also remember to honor those who served in times of peace, who preserve the peace, protect our interests, and project our values. Though they are the best trained, best equipped military in the world, they, too, face their share of dangers.

Less than 3 weeks ago, two Marine Corps helicopters collided at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Fourteen fine young Americans were killed, one from the Army, one from the Navy, 12 from the Marine Corps. We have lost more than 200 of our service men and women in training accidents or in the course of regular duty since last Memorial Day. And though we work hard on safety, the work they do defending us has inherent dangers, and about that many Americans in uniform give their lives for our freedom every single year.

These sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers—they are American heroes, too, and we are all in their debt. On this special day, we pay our respects to all who gave their lives for America. We know our country is strong and great today because of them. We know to honor their truly extraordinary sacrifice, we must all resolve to keep the United States the world's leading force for peace and security, for prosperity and freedom. And we know that now, as ever, the burden of doing this job weighs heavily upon our men and women in uniform.

All around the world, from Korea to the Central African Republic, from the shores of Liberia to the skies over Iraq, our troops are standing watch on liberty's front lines. Their strength and skill gave the people of Haiti a chance to reclaim their democracy and their dreams. They stopped the slaughter of innocents in Bosnia and now are giving people exhausted by war the chance to create a lasting peace there for themselves; to restore stability to Europe and, in so doing, to make the future more secure for all the rest of us as well.

On this Memorial Day, let us draw inspiration from the spirit that surrounds us, to give those who still defend our freedom and security in the military today the support they