

Sen. Susan M. Collins
Memorial Day Floor Statement
Delivered on May 20, 2020

Throughout America, we set aside Memorial Day to honor those who gave their all for all of us. But this Memorial Day will be very different from those we have celebrated in the past as we honored our veterans. This Memorial Day, there will be no big parades, no formal ceremonies at state veteran cemeteries. In Bangor, Maine, where I live, each year there is a fabulous Memorial Day Parade in which veterans from all conflicts and all eras march down Main Street, often with walking sticks that were provided by one of Maine's greatest veterans, Galen Cole, who passed away recently—a World War II Veteran who made a pledge that he would always honor our Veterans. But despite the absence of big parades and big celebrations and fireworks this year, we should still take the time to honor those who have worn the uniform of our country.

From America's founding to our time, the men and women of our armed forces have written the history of our freedom. From generation to generation, they add new and inspiring chapters of valor, devotion to duty, and sacrifice.

As we honor the fallen, we also honor those who served and returned home, and those who serve today, joined together as we grieve for their fallen comrades. We also thank the families – the husbands and wives, the sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers – who endure the grief that is part of freedom's price.

It is significant that a day dedicated to the deepest of human emotions – grief, remembrance and gratitude – began not by decree from any high authority, but in the hearts of everyday people. As the Civil War ravaged the countryside and took on an ever greater and more ghastly toll, widows and grieving mothers on both sides of the conflict began placing wildflowers on the graves of the soldiers, regardless of uniform, who fell in their fields and forests. From those humble beginnings, we have remained true to Memorial Day's original spirit.

Memorial Day is a national observance, yet it remains deeply personal for each of us. For me, it brings back a cherished memory from my early childhood. My father was a World War II Veteran, who was wounded twice in the Battle of the Bulge. He taught me to honor our veterans and our flag. And each year, as I was growing up, he would take me to the Memorial Day Parade in our hometown of Caribou, Maine. He would perch me high on his shoulders, and there, from the best vantage point, I could see our veterans march by and our flag go by.

Memorial Day is all about remembrance. It is also about our resolve to uphold the values that inspire the sacrifice we honor today. This was best articulated in what many regard as the first, and finest, Memorial Day speech. It was not given on a warm May morning, but on a chilly November afternoon in a place called Gettysburg. These

are the words of President Abraham Lincoln: “That from these honored dead, we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion.”

May those who have fallen rest in peace, may we always remember them this Memorial Day, and forever, and may God Bless the United States of America.

###