

2026 Memorial Day Remembrance Speech

by Jack Balch, Mayor of Pleasanton, CA

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Memorial Day asks something important of us.

It asks us to pause.

To reflect.

To stop long enough to think about the lives behind the flags, the uniforms, and the names etched into stone.

Young men and women who gave up birthdays, futures, families, and dreams... not because they hated the people across from them, but because they loved the people beside them.

I firmly believe that the freedoms we enjoy today were not preserved by people who thought exactly alike.

They were preserved by people who believed this country, imperfect as she is, was worth sacrificing for together.

People from different backgrounds. Different beliefs. Different politics. Different faiths.

Yet when the moment called for service, they stood shoulder to shoulder as Americans.

And I think there is something profoundly important in that lesson for us today.

We live in a time when it sometimes feels easier to talk past one another than to truly listen. Easier to divide than connect. Easier to assume the worst instead of seeking understanding.

But the men and women we honor today fought for something bigger than that.

They fought for the idea that a free people could govern themselves. That democracy, though messy and imperfect, is still worth protecting. And that our differences do not diminish our shared humanity.

And if they were willing to lay down their lives for that belief, then surely we can find ways to speak to one another with greater decency, humility, and compassion.

Surely we can choose community over contempt.

Today's remembrance is not only about honoring sacrifice from the past. It is about accepting responsibility in the present.

The freedoms we enjoy came at an enormous cost.

And it is now our responsibility to continue building communities where people care for one another... where disagreement does not become hatred... and where service to others still matters.

Memorial Day can also remind us that courage comes in many forms.

We see it in the men and women who served our country in times of war, but also in the quieter choices we make every day – listening when it would be easier not to, extending grace when anger feels easier, and continuing to believe in a better tomorrow, even during difficult times.

Here in Pleasanton, we are fortunate to be part of a community that continues to honor service and sacrifice. From Pioneer Cemetery to ceremonies like this one, we carry forward the sacred responsibility of remembering those who never made it home.

And as we gather with family and friends this weekend, let us remember the empty seats across America.

Let us remember the families who received folded flags instead of homecomings.

Let us remember not only how these heroes died, but what they lived for.

They lived for one another. For freedom. For liberty. For the pursuit of happiness. And for the enduring belief that together, we can continue building a more perfect union.

May we honor them not only with words today, but through the way we treat one another tomorrow.

May we live so that, in our own way, we are aPLUS.... to our community, our country, and the lives of those around us.

May we show the courage to extend a handshake rather than a hurtful word.

May God bless our fallen heroes, our veterans, their families, and the United States of America.

Thank you.