

First, let me thank the homeowner's association for inviting us to hold this ceremony again this year. It is an honor to be asked to do this.

Every year on June 14th we celebrate Flag Day. This day observes the adoption of the "Stars and Stripes" as the official flag of the United States on June 14th 1777.

On this day, Americans are reminded about the history of their beloved national symbol, which they see as a symbol of the freedom they enjoy every day.

Unfortunately, many people do not know the true meanings behind our Flag. They see the flag, but do not pause to consider the sacrifices that have been made that allow it to fly.

The American flag is a symbol of freedom, liberty and human rights. It is a symbol of our home and all that we believe in. It is a symbol men and women rally behind, whether on our shores or foreign shores. Some people hold the flag as something sacred, others have a moderate reverence for it.

Ever since 1777, men and women have fought and died defending our flag and our nation. These men and women were willing to step forward. They believed in the meaning of the flag and what it stood for. They realized that not everyone would agree. As a philosopher once said, "I do not agree with what you have to say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it."

Today, we should ask the question "What does the Flag represent?" It might be easier to say what it doesn't represent. It doesn't represent our armed forces, nor does it represent any race, gender, or religion. Instead, our Flag represents the ideals embodied in our Declaration of Independence and our Constitution. It represents the ideals that founded our country. Our flag represents each and every person in the United States of America.

The second sentence of the Declaration of Independence says: " We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Men and women fought for our freedom during the Revolutionary War.

The First Amendment to the Constitution makes clear that all people have a fundamental right to practice the religion of their choosing. It also gives us the freedom of speech, a free press, and the right to protest the actions of the government.

Our flag represents all of those ideas. Throughout our history, millions of men and women have fought in our Armed Forces to protect our Flag and our freedoms. But so to have many who did not serve in the military. Look back at our history. We started a revolution with the Boston Tea Party composed not of military forces, but individual citizens. Look back at the Women's' Suffrage movement which gained equality and the right to vote for women. Look back to the Civil Rights Movement that strived to make all people in this country equal regardless of race.

Our flag represents our Nation. We are a nation of shared ideals, no matter what your background. As Abraham Lincoln said in his Gettysburg address: "that these dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Today, we come together to honor and pay tribute to our Flag. It is the living symbol of our Nation. It has inspired the writing of our National Anthem by Francis Scott Key in 1814 as he saw the American Flag still flying over Fort McHenry during the War of 1812. It inspired Francis Bellamy to write "The Pledge of Allegiance" in 1892. It has inspired

many men and women to join the Armed Forces to defend our country. And it has inspired many ordinary citizens to become involved and advocate for full and equal justice for all.

So today, let all of us honor our Flag. Let all of us commit to insuring that our beliefs in freedom, justice, and humanity continue to survive and grow. Our Flag and our Nation has been a guiding light around the world and has given hope to many in other nations. Let our Flag and our Nation continue to exemplify the values of liberty and justice for all.

Since 1777, our flag has flown over the "land of the free and the home of the brave". It is the duty of all of us to help insure that our Flag, our Nation, and our values continue to grow stronger.

Every day when you see the flag, remember that it does not stand for any specific section or group of people. It stands for all of us.

Thank you, and God Bless the United States of America