

It was 30 years ago and the president was Ronald Reagan. The nation's commander-in-chief just signed Proclamation 5475, designating 1986 as the Year of the Flag.

"There is no greater, more beautiful and instantly recognizable symbol of our nation and its ideals, traditions and values than the flag of the United States," President Reagan said.

As we observe Flag Day in 2016, we should contemplate the ideals, traditions and values that President Reagan referenced.

America is a nation of ideals – dreams really, by our forefathers and foremothers on what this land could become. When Francis Scott Key described the new nation as the "Land of the free and the home of the brave," – he could not have ever imagined that this would also be a nation that would liberate so many others from tyranny. Automobiles, airplanes, computers and even telephones were not on our founders' radar screens – understandable because even radar screens didn't exist yet.

Our nation's founders could not have dreamed that the United States would someday send men to the moon and back.

Yet the remarkable technological and industrial success that has blessed this nation is only possible because we are a nation that has the freedom to dream.

The Flag of the United States not only symbolizes what our country is—but more importantly, what it could be.

While many immigrants were inspired by the great Lady in the Harbor that embodies Liberty, every one of us gets to see our Stars and Stripes displayed outside of homes, in front of businesses and in offices every day.

The traditions of the United States include helping our neighbors – whether they be part of our immediate community or members of the international community. From Korea to Kuwait, Americans have put their lives and limbs on the line to defend and protect those in need.

Our traditions are proudly demonstrated when we rise for the national anthem before a sporting event, celebrate Independence Day and cheer for marchers at a Veterans Day parade.

Our faith is often passed on by tradition. It is not uncommon for Americans to share the same religion as their grandparents. Whether someone is Christian, Jewish, Muslim or of another religion isn't nearly as important to us as having the freedom to *choose* our beliefs – another American tradition which is enshrined in our Constitution.

Another great tradition that we have in America is respecting our nation's colors. Until a misguided Supreme Court ruling in 1989, 48 states and the District of Columbia had laws against desecrating the Flag.

For more than two decades, the Citizen's Flag Alliance, a coalition of more than 140 organizations including The American Legion, has fought for the passage of a Constitutional Amendment that would restore the right of the U.S. Congress to protect Old Glory.

Polls show that most Americans favor such an amendment. It has passed the House six times but has fallen short of the supermajority that is required to pass the Senate.

Once again this important legislation sits in the House and Senate. The bills are House Joint Resolution 9 and Senate Joint Resolution 21. Please let your senators and representative know that if the Flag is good enough to cover the coffins of our Fallen military and law enforcement heroes, it is good enough to warrant protection.

Opponents of the Flag amendment tell us that flag desecration is rare. Yet smart phone videos and news accounts tell us otherwise.

There seems to be a barrage of outrageous political demonstrations on campuses which feature stomping, burning and tearing of this iconic symbol.

Those who disrespect our Flag could learn a lesson from 12-year-old Matthew Miller of Montgomery, Alabama. The son of an Army officer, young Matthew set a goal to respectfully retire 100 U.S. Flags as part of his Eagle Scout project. With the help of some Legionnaires and volunteer Firefighters, Matthew was able to retire 679 American Flags and 52 state of Alabama flags during a ceremony held in April.

"The American Flag serves our country just like a veteran does," Matthew said.

Matthew is absolutely right. It is precisely why business and activities stop aboard military bases during the hoisting and lowering of the national ensign every day.

There are many instances of Fallen Heroes who died clutching or protecting the Flag in battle.

The values embodied by our Flag are mirrored by The American Legion's commitment to "promote peace and good will on earth, to safeguard and transmit the posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy; to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness."

It is only fitting that this spring, National Commander Dale Barnett led a veterans awareness walk at Fort McHenry – the historical site where Key was inspired by the site of a war-tattered Star Spangled Banner.

By reminding the public that our nation must never forget the service and sacrifice made by its military veterans, the National Commander and the American Legion Family are honoring those who defended our Flag.

It represents the more than 44 million men and women who have served in this nation's wars from the Revolution to the War on Terrorism. It represents liberation from tyranny, slavery, fascism, terrorism and communism.

The United States Flag is the embodiment of our Constitution that proclaims our absolute commitment to defending the freedoms given to us by our Creator.

George Washington once said of the original Flag, "We take the stars from Heaven, the red from our mother country, separating it by white stripes, thus showing that we have separated from her, and the white strips shall go down to posterity representing liberty."

The American Flag is a visible reminder of the liberty for which the signers of the Declaration of Independence pledged their lives and fortunes in order to guarantee freedom for each and every American.

It symbolizes the best our nation has to offer such as firefighters running into burning buildings, police officers protecting our streets and first responders saving lives.

The Flag is a reminder that in America you are free to choose your livelihood, your neighborhood, your friends, your spouse and your religion.

America is a land of diverse backgrounds and opinions. Yet, few other symbols can get 50,000 people to stand as one at a major sporting event.

It inspires unity in America like no other symbol.

This unity is not coerced or mandated.

The respect and affection is given freely.

These are the values that President Reagan spoke of.

These are the values of The American Legion.

Thank you for being here.

God Bless America and God Bless our Flag.