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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

By State Representative Ron Crimm

Memorial Day serves as a symbol of honor and a reminder of bountiful freedoms

Hearing a trumpet ring out the tune of Taps, Americans will pause in a moment of reverent silence, knowing that a hero has paid the ultimate price to ensure our protection and freedom. Yet, many of our citizens view Memorial Day as a long weekend devoted to shopping, family get-togethers, fireworks, trips to the beach, and the unofficial beginning of summer. Just as the sound of Taps stirs our emotions, this day should be dedicated to remembering the countless men and women who came before us and valiantly laid their lives on the line for our nation. Even today, legions of our citizens place their personal lives on hold and leave their families behind so they may travel to foreign lands in order to defend the promise of America.

The words of our native son, Abraham Lincoln, following the battle of Gettysburg, direct us "to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us - that from these honored dead we may take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion - that we here highly resolve 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."

We are fortunate to freely enjoy the fruits of their labor. Yet just as we are the beneficiaries of their service, we are also the trustees of their legacy. We must bear the awesome responsibility of ensuring that the millions of Americans who died on the altar of battle did not give their lives in vain.

Numerous monuments have been erected to honor those who have given their lives, but our avenues to honor those men and women should not end there. We must also ensure that the meaning of these monuments is not relegated to granite and steel. As citizens of both our Commonwealth and our nation, we should be vigilant in protecting the foundation of liberty, in teaching the noble qualities set forth by our forefathers, and in setting aside personal interests to advance the cause of freedom.

Our 30th president, Calvin Coolidge, once said, "The nation which forgets its defenders will itself be forgotten." Echoing the sentiments of this statement, I ask you to join me in remembering the true meaning of Memorial Day by weaving this remembrance into your routine on May 30. Your gesture could include visiting cemeteries and memorials, or by taking part in the national moment of remembrance at 3:00 p.m.

Another tradition is to fly the flag of the United States at half-staff from dawn until noon. The National Memorial Day Concert takes place on the west lawn of the United States Capitol. Music is performed, and respect is paid to the men and women who died in while in service to our country.

Regardless of how you chose to observe this day, we should all take a moment to savor the feeling of pride that comes with knowing that you are an American and in knowing that, as Americans, we are all part of something bigger and better than we are individually.

As we join together with family and friends this holiday, take a moment to remember not only those who have served to defend our freedom and tranquility, but those who are currently doing so. Their sacrifice is unimaginable, but their service is undeniable.

As many of you know my wife is from Gettysburg. I cannot tell you the hours we have walked on the battle fields all around town. One thing I can't forget is on Memorial Day the grade school children form on the south ridge of the cemetery, and following the playing of taps they come up over the hill, hundreds of them, tossing flowers on the graves of the fallen soldiers. I think Ike was the last present to speak on Memorial Day. Up until that time every president had come to Gettysburg. I invite any of you who find your travels taking you to south central PA to include a few days on Big and Little Roundtop, in the orchard and take in the history you are standing on.

Have a safe and blessed Memorial Day.