

Mayor's Memorial Day Speech 2026

Good morning, everyone.

Thank you all for joining us this morning to honor the brave men and women who gave their lives in service of our nation.

Due to the weather, we cancelled today's march. While we are disappointed that we are not proceeding outdoors as planned, it is important that we still come together to recognize the true meaning of Memorial Day.

Memorial Day is not about parades and ceremonies alone – it's about remembrance. It's about honoring the generations of men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice to protect the freedoms we enjoy every day.

Rain may have changed our plans, but it does not diminish our gratitude or our commitment to remember our fallen heroes.

Memorial Day brings our community together in a special way. We gather with neighbors, families, veterans, first responders, children waving flags, and friends we may only see at events like this. There is something meaningful about that because this day reminds us that freedom is never an individual gift. It is something carried and protected on the shoulders of people who put their lives at risk defending our country and freedoms.

Across New Jersey and throughout our nation, families are spending time together, attending parades, and welcoming the unofficial start of summer.

The men and women that died in service of our nation came from towns just like ours. They sat in classrooms, worked local jobs, played on neighborhood fields, and dreamed about the future.

When their nation called, they answered -- with courage, duty, and sacrifice.

Some left home never knowing if they would return. Some never did.

Walter G. Kellmann lived on Stelfox Street back in 1941 when he entered the service at just 21 years old.

Nicholas G. Muller also hailed from Demarest and was lost at sea, with his last known location in the English Channel. He was declared dead on June 9, 1944, in Normandy only three days after the D-Day invasion began.

Charles J. Merritts, Private First Class, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, was killed in action (KIA) at Ardennes during the Battle of the Bulge on January 9, 1945. Charles' nephew Gerry and Gerry's wife Jenny live in Demarest and we honor them as a Demarest Gold Star Family.

We honor the memories of Charles J. Merritts, Nicholas G. Muller and Walter G. Kellerman for their courageous service and ultimate sacrifice.

Because of them, and the hundreds of thousands of men and women like them, we enjoy freedoms that many around the world can only hope for: the freedom to speak openly, worship freely, vote, raise our families in peace, and live under the protection of democracy and law.

In a small town, remembrance is personal. We know the names on our memorials. We know the families who still carry loss. Today, we especially honor Gold Star families, like the Merritts

family, whose sacrifice continues long after the battlefield falls silent.

To our veterans and active-duty service members here today: thank you. While Memorial Day specifically honors those we lost, we are grateful for all who have worn the uniform and stood ready to defend this nation.

As we leave here today, please carry forward not only gratitude, but our responsibility to preserve the freedoms won at such a personal and national heavy cost.

***WE CAN NEVER REPAY THE DEBT OWED OR EXPRESS
OUR GRATITUDE TO WALTER, NICHOLAS and
CHARLES AND THE MORE THAN 407,000 SERVICE
MEMBERS THAT DIED WITH THEM DURING WORLD
WAR II AND TO ALL OF THE OTHER BRAVE SOULS
WHO DIED AT DIFFERENT TIMES IN DIFFERENT WARS,
CONFLICTS AND HOSTILITIES. MAY THEIR SOULS
REST IN PEACE FOR ALL ETERNITY!***

Let us never forget those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country.

So, please stand, if you are able, remove your hats and join me for a minute of silence to honor our fallen heroes. Thank you.

I would like to thank our Borough Administrator, Deputy Clerk, and Borough staff, the Demarest Council, Jason and the DPW crew, our Demarest Police Department, our Volunteer Fire Department, our Volunteer Ambulance Corp., the Garden Club, our marchers, volunteers and to all of you who have joined us today.

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

Thank you.

Brian K. Bernstein
Demarest Mayor