

Speaker Ryan: Remarks at 151st Memorial Day Parade in Rochester, WI

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WASHINGTON—House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) today took part in a commemoration ceremony at the 151st Memorial Day Parade in Rochester, WI. Following are his remarks, as prepared for delivery:

What an honor to be here with all of you as this tradition enters another half-century.

All the time, you hear people bemoan the loss of traditions. But because all of you, this one endures. And it needs to.

Because it is a great tribute to the unbroken chain of sacrifice that brings us all here today.

150 years ago, it was the “Badger Boys” and the Iron Brigade, which fought in the great, bloody battles of the Civil War.

One of their leaders was Captain Edwin Brown, a lawyer from Fond du Lac.

In a letter to his wife, Captain Brown wrote, “I think my chances are as good to come back as anyone’s, and if I should see you again after doing my duty you would then be proud of your husband.”

Captain Brown died a soldier’s death at Antietam, but we know his wife was proud all the same. 75 years ago, it was Company A and the Janesville 99, many of whom perished so cruelly on the Bataan Death March.

One who survived was Sgt. Phil Parish, who went on to own a barber shop in Janesville.

He once said, “I trust that of those of us who survived, some share this thought with me: ‘True heroes never return.’”

And in our time, it is men and women who—after this nation’s darkest day—raised their hands and said ‘I’ll go.’

Many of us remember Private Evan Bixler of Racine.

He graduated from Park High School in 2003.

Evan had his heart set on joining the Army. But they wouldn’t take him because of scoliosis.

Then, after a dear friend gave his life in battle, Evan went back and worked with a recruiter to get a medical waiver.

He told his parents, “I don’t want to be 30 years old and have regrets.”

On Christmas Eve, 2006, he died as a result of indirect enemy fire in Iraq.

Private Bixler was 21.

When we lose someone close to us—a family member, a friend—we ask ourselves many questions.

We think about our own mortality. We think about whether we are taking care of our loved ones. But when we lose someone who serves—a soldier, a sailor, an airman, a Marine—the unspoken questions are staggering.

Are we capable of such sacrifice? Are we worthy of such sacrifice?

How can we better serve our community? How can we better serve one another?

And how will we make sure our children fully grasp the measure of devotion that was given to protect them?

And so just as the lives of our heroes had meaning, just as their service had meaning, so does their sacrifice.

So does their death.

And so does this day.

That is why we return here each year.

And it is why your children and my children will do the same.

We not only want to remember, we need to remember.

We go forward not in spite of the pain, but because of the pain.

For it has made this nation the greatest force for freedom the world has ever known.

God bless our fallen. God bless their families.

And God bless the United States of America.