

This Memorial Day weekend, many folks will go on trips with their families and friends, and there's been a great deal of discussion about tour destinations, possible activities, and worry over the effects of high gas prices on travelers' wallets. While I am hopeful that everyone will be able to enjoy a fun, relaxing Memorial Day weekend, we must keep in mind the true significance of this important occasion.

For many Americans, sacrifice and service are more than just ideas to be commemorated on certain holidays; they represent a very real way of life. And in many cases, these folks are not strangers. As I opened the paper on Wednesday, I saw that over two hundred National Guard soldiers from Fredericksburg will be deployed to Iraq next week, beginning an eight month separation from their families and friends. These soldiers will undoubtedly remain stoic during their exit ceremony and will assure their loved ones that they will return safe and sound when their job is finished. Once overseas, they will serve valiantly, showing the highest measure of dedication and commitment to duty as they protect our freedoms.

Our own duties to support our men and women in uniform vary across the United States. In Congress, we have a sacred, honor-bound responsibility to provide for our servicemen and women, ensuring that they have all the resources they need to succeed in their mission. This week, I was proud to support the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 (H.R. 1540), which authorizes programs and outlines policy for the Department of Defense. This legislation passed the House of Representatives by a 322-96 vote, and awaits action by the Senate. I was proud to vote for this legislation, ensuring that our all-volunteer force and their families have the resources and support they need and deserve. My respect for these servicemen and women was reinforced on Friday when I had the honor of attending the graduation and commissioning ceremonies at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis for the Class of 2011 as the Chairman of the Naval Academy Board of Visitors. It was an amazing event, and I wish the graduates Godspeed in their service to our country and to the Navy and Marine Corps team. I have no doubt they will accomplish great things.

Last week, I also had the privilege of speaking at the Frazier-Mason Annual Motorcycle Ride, which honors Sergeant Joshua James Frazier and Sergeant Nicholas Conan Mason. The collective service and sacrifice of those in the crowd was truly inspiring. I told these devoted patriots that I could not be more proud of our servicemen and women whose feats often go unrecognized. The recent operation resulting in the death of Osama bin Laden certainly raised the public profile of our armed forces and intelligence community, but we mustn't forget these dedicated individuals simply because the news stops covering them. Memorial Day is a time for us to honor the memories of those who've given the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our freedom, as well as an occasion to pay tribute to those warriors now serving downrange, their

wounded comrades still battling here at home, and their selfless family and friends whose sacrifices frequently go unnoticed.

So as you relax this Memorial Day weekend, I hope that you're surrounded by friends and family, and that you can combat the heat with a cool glass of lemonade. I hope that we will have beautiful weather and that you find something fun to do, regardless of where you are. More than anything, though, I hope that we all keep in mind our fellow citizens who aren't able to be with their families on this holiday weekend. These warriors are our husbands and wives, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, friends and strangers. They exemplify the highest degree of selflessness and devotion, and it is because of their sacrifices, and the sacrifices of so many before them, that we are able to enjoy the liberty that comes with being American. As Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, wrote in *The Hill* newspaper this week, "It is these efforts – not only on Memorial Day but every day – that truly make us a people worthy of their sacrifice." The men and women of our armed services – both past and present – deserve our utmost respect, and I thank each and every one of them, as well as their loved ones, for their service.