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NEWS RELEASE

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The Right Way to Celebrate Memorial Day **by Senator Larry Craig**

This year, Memorial Day falls on May 28th. As this holiday approaches, I've been thinking about holidays in general, and all the special traditions attached to the celebration of them. The question came to my mind: How should Americans celebrate this special holiday? To many people, there is no traditional way to celebrate Memorial Day, because the meaning and significance of the day have been lost.

Compare this with other holidays. For Thanksgiving, most people gather together with family and enjoy a traditional Thanksgiving meal. Christmas, even though it's a religious holiday to celebrate the birth of Jesus, is observed by Christians and non-Christians alike, often with decorations, a tree and presents. Independence Day usually means a parade and fireworks – at the very least – to honor the day the United States declared independence from Great Britain.

Sadly, the traditions of Memorial Day have been forgotten by too many. Instead, for some, this day means great sales at a favorite store. For others, it means the first camping trip of the season, or a great chance to get outside and have a barbecue in the back yard. While there is nothing wrong with these pursuits, and I participate in some myself, they ought to be secondary to the most important observation of the day.

The most important part of Memorial Day is to remember and pay our respects to those who have died in the service of our great nation. You might take an hour to visit a local cemetery, if you can, and place a flag or flowers by the grave of a war veteran. If you have war veterans in your family or neighborhood, don't just thank them for their service – take the time to ask them what it was like to serve, or what they remember the most about it. They may be reluctant to share, as heroes often are, but they will appreciate your interest and gratitude.

At the very least, I'd encourage you to fly Old Glory for the day. If you are uncertain about proper flag etiquette, you can visit the American Legion's website at www.legion.org for tips and answers to questions about honoring the flag by displaying it properly.

I don't mean to suggest that Memorial Day must only be a solemn occasion. But as you celebrate this special holiday, please take the extra time to honor, in Abraham Lincoln's words, those who gave their lives so "government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

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What would you do to defend your way of life? Would you be willing to step forward to defend your neighbors' lives? How about people you don't even know, even if they are your fellow Americans?

We all love life dearly. Some loved life so dearly that they were willing to lay down their own, so that your life, and that of this great country, may continue. However you decide to spend Memorial Day this year, I hope you will pause to remember the heroes who are the reason for this day. Happy Memorial Day.

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