

Friends and neighbors from Weston and our surrounding communities, honored guests including our First Selectwoman Nina Daniel, Selectman Chris Spaulding [**OTHER HONORED GUESTS**] and particularly our Grand Marshall, Roy Spies, on behalf of the men and women of the Weston Volunteer Fire Department and Emergency Medical Services, it is my privilege to welcome you as we join together today.

One of the tough things about giving this speech is Memorial Day is not Veteran's Day. Veteran's Day honors those who served in our country's armed forces whereas Memorial Day commemorates those who died. I believe this is an important distinction and the purpose of our gathering today.

Memorial Day speeches, certainly those I've given, focus on America's fallen heroes; those who died in combat, gave their lives for fellow brothers-in-arms, or engaged in extraordinary acts of bravery and heroism. We do right to honor their memory with Medals of Honor, silver and bronze stars, 21-gun salutes and all the solemn pageantry we reserve for such heroes. We swell with pride as such men and women represent the best of America.

But there are other soldiers. Those who fought next to comrades killed in action; those who witnessed unspeakable carnage; those for whom no outstanding commendation was given; those for whom there are no parades.

We teach our soldiers to fight, to carry guns, to prepare physically for the battlefield. But do we prepare them mentally for what they will see, for what they will be asked to do? Do we teach them how to return "home"?

Marine Corp veteran Sam Siatta wrote in his battlefield diary: “I hope my family recognizes me when I get back. and I hope they understand I’ve changed... My mind cannot be healed from the horrors of war. I hope they understand.”

While the symbols and pageantry of those killed in combat make front-page news, this is the real and darker side to war that frequently remains the exclusive hell for returning veterans, their families and friends. These are the men and women at risk of taking their own lives because they cannot see it any other way.

“22 Kill.” What is 22Kill? 22Kill is a nonprofit organization started by veterans working to raise awareness about mental health, including suicide among combat veterans. Our Department’s Deputy Chief brought this organization to my attention when he challenged me earlier this year to do 22 push-ups every day. Why 22? Because based upon the most recent VA data, it’s estimated that 22 returning veterans take their own lives every day.

It’s time, as a country, to bring this issue to greater light. When soldiers come home from war, they are in OUR hands and we as a nation owe them better.

So what can we do? First and foremost, become more aware of this issue.

- Read Sam Siatta’s story, “The Fighter,” a 2017 Pulitzer Prize winning article by NY Times journalist C.J. Cheevers. It’s an eye-opening, personal account of the often overlooked realities of combat, PTSD, and the tangles of a legal system that has no easy answers.
- Consider volunteering to give a veteran a ride to the local VA for treatment. Disabled American Veterans, [dav.org](http://dav.org), coordinates and provides transportation to veterans unable to drive.

- Donate frequent flier miles through [fisherhouse.org](http://fisherhouse.org), an organization that helps fly families to the hospitals and medical facilities of wounded veterans.
- Send money to [puppiesbehindbars.com](http://puppiesbehindbars.com), a program where prisoners train companion dogs for veterans with PTSD.
- Do 22 pushups
- Just get involved!

Hopefully, next year when we gather together on Memorial Day our efforts will have helped save a life or make a difference in the life of a returning hero.

May god bless the United States and all those who sacrifice on our behalf.