

**Flag Day – West Barnstable
June 14, 2021
Remarks by Fire Chief Joe Maruca**

Welcome and Happy Flag Day.

Today we gather to celebrate the American Flag and more important, we celebrate what our Flag stands for.

I suspect that the American Flag stands for something slightly different for each of us. We've all lived different lives and had different experiences as Americans.

Contrary to myth, there is no one American Dream or single American Experience – there are today about 332 million different American Dreams and experiences.

And, the American Dream changes for each of us as we travel through life. We have different goals and aspirations at different stages of our life. I know my dream today is very different from my dream of 20 or 40 years ago. I've had to change paths and give up on some dreams, and in doing so, I adopted new or revised dreams.

It is the fact that we as Americans can have and can accomplish our dreams, yes, with a lot of compromises, forks in the road and revisions, that makes American an extraordinary place to live. The ability to accomplish your dreams in the way that we Americans can and do is not shared by all countries and all peoples around the world. That's not to say we are the only place where the vast majority of people are free to dream and accomplish their dreams – I dare suggest that Canadians, the English, the Swiss, the Japanese, and a lot of other countries share a similar freedom as we have – but, theirs is clearly different based upon their histories and cultures.

At the same time, we should think of the millions or billions of people who live in places like China, Russia, and Argentina who don't have a chance to fulfill their dreams the way we do.

Not everyone achieves their American Dream. Sometimes we forget how fortunate some of us are compared to other Americans. People plan and dream and things go wrong. Illness, deaths, economic downturns, crime, and any number of personal disasters sidetrack the dreams of many Americans. Right now, today, as we stand here, there are homeless people in West Barnstable living out of their

cars and in the woods -- Cape Cod neighbors struggling to achieve their American Dream.

Our challenge is, and always has been, to figure out ways to help those who have experienced a serious barrier to their dream, a new path to success. Every generation has widened the acceptance and support of others. Every generation has made an incremental step towards making America better and making the dream come true for more and more us.

America has been called an Exceptional Nation – you’ve probably all heard the term “American Exceptionalism”. It is concept that is somewhat under assault in our nation today. People point out that our nation once stood for slavery and the terrible treatment of Native Americans. People point to continuing racism and the economic disparity that exists in our country today. Other’s push back, denying our faults and claiming those who point out our faults are somehow unpatriotic or anti-American.

But, I say America is exceptional and flawed all at the same time, and that’s what makes us great. That’s what we celebrate today; we are a people and culture that

can accept and admit its flaws, and look to being even better in the future. That we can move past the past, and with more than a little heated debate, we get better every time we confront an issue.

It's not easy.....we fight, we argue, we stumble, we've made some colossal missteps, but ultimately we've always keep moving ahead and finding a way to succeed. The very fact that Americans are free to argue and find fault with ourselves and our country is critical to our exceptionalism. This is what makes us stand out most from all the other countries in the world --- even among the other free countries; we carry this to an extreme. Without critical thinking and debate you can't achieve greatness.

So when you look at the flag today, and every other day, remember that it stands for your right to think and say what you believe, and the right of everybody else to think and say what they believe, even if it gets a little loud and raucous. It is our ability to shout at each other, without coming blows that makes us an exceptional people.

Thank you.