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Hawthorne, NJ - Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ9) delivered the following remarks during a Memorial Day ceremony in the Borough of Hawthorne. Rothman also addressed East Rutherford residents during their Memorial Day ceremony.

"Thank you mayor, members of the clergy, members of the council, distinguished dais guests, our grand marshals, ladies and gentleman. It is a privilege to be here in Hawthorne, my newest town that I have the privilege of representing as your Congressman.

"The question is why gather again this year as we have been and our forbearers for 135 years since 1868. Why once a year do we come to honor the dead? Well the answer is because it is necessary. There is a cliché that I know you have all heard many, many times, but it doesn't take away from the fact that this cliché is so absolutely true: Freedom is not free. And who delivers us our freedom? Well we have our Constitution and our Bill of Rights, but those who enforce it, those who defend our nation, are the men and women in our armed forces.

"And while there will be other occasions in the course of the year, including Veteran's Day, to honor everyone who served -- those who came back in one piece or not, physically or emotionally scarred as most, certainly many who came back -- today is Memorial Day, when we honor the dead -- those who have fallen in battle. Is it still necessary today we used to ask, to fight wars, to prepare an Army and a Navy and an Air Force and Marines, and special operators like our Ranger guest speaker. The answer is unfortunately yes. The world is still a very dangerous and hostile place. There are still men who would take lands that are not theirs. There are still men who would subjugate and conquer an entire people out of a pure lust for power and control. And there are still people in the world today, unfortunately as we know so well, who would kill literally tens of thousands if not millions of Americans due to their hatred and intolerance if we allow them.

"Fortunately, throughout our history and today, we have men and women who are willing to put their lives on the line and sacrifice their lives so that we can continue to live in the freest, greatest society that has ever existed. Today is the day we honor their memory and not just that. We wonder about what their lives might have been like if they survived battle, or not even have gone to put themselves in harms way, or what would the lives have been like of their loved ones who never saw them return. We owe it to the fallen to remember them and to honor them. We owe to their families to never forget their sacrifice. And of course we owe it to the men and women still in the field around the world, protecting us at this very moment to give them every ounce of training, equipment, supply, moral support, and every kind of support that they need to do their jobs and to return home safely.

"We have a unique country that some people fear, not because of our economic power or wealth, but because of ideas that terrorizes the terrorists and horrify the dictators: We believe in the worth of each individual -- of each individual having an inalienable right to liberty, justice, and the pursuit of happiness. And we believe this for each of our citizens, no matter how grand or small, rich or poor. We know that we are all the same in God's eyes and under our system of equal justice for all under the rule of law. And yes, that terrorizes the terrorists and horrifies the dictators. So, we must continue to remain vigilant to protect ourselves from them.

"Thank God for all those who gave their lives. We must remember those who they left behind and take care of them. And on another occasion we can talk about our obligation to our veterans who should be our first priority in government, not the last. Today I want to thank you and all our dignitaries for coming out -- for remembering the cost of freedom, and honoring those who paid that price. And may we always remember. Thank you."

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