

Patriotism in America

by U.S. Rep. Ed Pastor

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Like a giant U.S. flag, patriotism is one of those words that Americans like to wrap themselves up in when we talk about our love for our country and its ideals. We hear the word whenever we pay tribute to veterans and when politicians campaign for office. While the word echoes through the halls of government every day, I wanted to take a closer look at the meaning of patriotism as we once again celebrate America's Independence Day.

Patriots are defined as people who love and zealously support our country. Patriotism is often measured by military service to our country, making America's military men and women some of our truest patriots. My office recently had the privilege of recognizing one of our veterans who fought in the Korean War. Mr. Raymond Savedra, 82, a Phoenix resident, was 22 years old when he was drafted into the Army and spent two years overseas. He also served five years in the Army Reserve, but never had been presented with the five military medals he earned for his service. My office presented the medals on June 17 in front of his family and friends. We are grateful for Mr. Savedra's service to our country and the patriotism he has shown by defending the ideals of our founding fathers.

In addition to those who serve or have served in our military, I believe those who are in public service, such as government employees, also are proud American patriots. Public service employees in low-wage jobs often work tirelessly and demonstrate true dedication to serving others and our country. As a former Maricopa County Supervisor and now as a member of Congress, I can personally say that I have seen thousands of dedicated Americans, at all levels of government, who have chosen to serve out of a love of our country and our American way of life.

I also like to think that most of my fellow Americans are patriots. While the word patriot has

been connected recently to political movements, the true meaning of the word should not hold political connotations. Patriotism doesn't belong to the right or the left. If our nation was being attacked on its own soil, wouldn't most of us fight to defend our country? If a levee was about to break and flood our Valley, wouldn't we all come together to fill sandbags and build dams to avoid the destruction of our neighborhoods? Our country expects and demands that we come to its aid in time of need, and I believe most Americans would do so. Not only do we help when required, but many times Americans volunteer their time and energy to help their neighbors and their communities. By serving each other, we serve our country patriotically.

To be patriotic is to love the ideals on which our country was founded. But patriotism also calls for constructive and civil criticism of our government when we see it failing our fellow Americans. It is through civil discourse where we as a country can decide together what works for America and which is the best course to be taken.

While there are many faces of patriotism, including total adherence to our government's policies, we cannot deny that constructive patriotism gives birth to political involvement and associated behaviors. When we care about our community and help lift one another, we are taking on a sense of responsibility for each other and working to improve our country and make it strong. We are pursuing our rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

But I should caution that our patriotism should not give us a sense of superiority as Americans. Our nation's sense of values and beliefs should never stop at our borders. As citizens of the world, our freedom does not free us of responsibility and respect for our fellow human beings. As a proud American patriot, I value the words in the Declaration of Independence that read "All men are created equal." All of us in America and the world are on this earth together and I believe we all share the same dreams and hopes for our families. Our patriotic emotions for our fatherland and its flag are shared by all mankind. Patriotism bonds us more than it divides us.

I hope you will take time to demonstrate your patriotism by recommitting yourself to improving our democracy.