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MAYOR EMANUEL AND DCASE ANNOUNCE FORMER DEFENSE SECRETARY LEON PANETTA AS THE GRAND MARSHAL FOR CHICAGO'S MEMORIAL DAY PARADE AND WREATH LAYING
Ceremony to Kick-off at Daley Plaza on Saturday, May 25

Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events are proud to announce that Leon Panetta, former Secretary of Defense and Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, will lead this year's Memorial Day Parade as its Grand Marshal and participate in the Wreath Laying Ceremony preceding the parade on Saturday, May 25. The Wreath Laying Ceremony will begin at 11 a.m. at the Eternal Flame on Daley Plaza (Dearborn and Washington Streets). The parade will step off at noon and proceed south on State Street from Lake Street to Van Buren Street.

"Chicago is proud to welcome one of our country's finest statesmen, Leon Panetta, to serve as the Grand Marshal of our Memorial Day Parade," said Mayor Rahm Emanuel. "As Director of the CIA and Secretary of Defense, Leon not only worked to protect our freedoms from threats overseas, he expanded our freedoms at home, ending 'Don't Ask Don't Tell,' and allowing women to serve in combat roles. It was a privilege to work with him and it will be an honor to have him with us in Chicago on Memorial Day."

Co-founder of the Panetta Institute for Public Policy, Leon E. Panetta has a long and distinguished public service career beginning as a First Lieutenant in the U.S. Army to serving as a Congressman from California. He has also served two Presidents as Director of the Office of Management and Budget and Chief of Staff to President Bill Clinton and most recently as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and Secretary of Defense for President Barack Obama.

The City of Chicago will honor our fallen heroes at its annual Wreath Laying Ceremony and Memorial Day Parade with special recognition of the Illinois Gold Star families. The Chicago parade is considered one of the largest Memorial Day parades in the nation. Participants in the parade include area high school marching bands, drum and bugle corps as well as many veterans' groups, 6,000 JROTC cadets and the military.

Bronze Star Medal recipient LCDR James P. Gennari of the United States Navy will also be acknowledged at the ceremony and parade for his heroic life-saving action at the risk of his own life while serving in Afghanistan as a Trauma Critical Care Nurse. In January 2012, LCDR Gennari distinguished himself by selflessly remaining with a severely injured Marine, impaled in the thigh by an unexploded rocket-propelled grenade. LCDR Gennari stayed with the Marine until the weapon was removed and the Marine was stabilized.

Additionally, as this is the 150th anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, the City of Chicago will commemorate the occasion with a special reading of the speech at the Wreath Laying Ceremony. The day's events will also include an observance of the 60th anniversary of the end of the Korean conflict.

Memorial Day has a rich history. It began shortly after the Civil War ended when General John Logan proclaimed that the 30th day of May be designated for the purpose of decorating the graves of soldiers who died; the day was called Decoration Day. It was first observed on May 30, 1868. The modern day event is similar, but the original idea has been expanded and now honors all fallen soldiers.

The Chicago Memorial Day Parade is presented by the City of Chicago. For more information, please call the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events at 312.744.3316 or visit cityofchicago.org/dcase.

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