

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

September 11, 2009

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT WREATH-LAYING CEREMONY
AT THE PENTAGON MEMORIAL

The Pentagon
Arlington, Virginia

9:34 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Secretary Gates, Admiral Mullen and members of the Armed Forces, fellow Americans, family and friends of those that we lost this day -- Michelle and I are deeply humbled to be with you.

Eight Septembers have come and gone. Nearly 3,000 days have passed -- almost one for each of those taken from us. But no turning of the seasons can diminish the pain and the loss of that day. No passage of time and no dark skies can ever dull the meaning of this moment.

So on this solemn day, at this sacred hour, once more we pause. Once more we pray -- as a nation and as a people; in city streets where our two towers were turned to ashes and dust; in a quiet field where a plane fell from the sky; and here, where a single stone of this building is still blackened by the fires.

We remember with reverence the lives we lost. We read their names. We press their photos to our hearts. And on this day that marks their death, we recall the beauty and meaning of their lives; men and women and children of every color and every creed, from across our nation and from more than 100 others. They were innocent. Harming no one, they went about their daily lives. Gone in a horrible instant, they now "dwell in the House of the Lord forever."

We honor all those who gave their lives so that others might live, and all the survivors who battled burns and wounds and helped each other rebuild their lives; men and women who gave life to that most simple of rules: I am my brother's keeper; I am my sister's keeper.

We pay tribute to the service of a new generation -- young Americans raised in a time of peace and plenty who saw their nation in its hour of need and said, "I choose to serve"; "I will do my part." And once more we grieve. For you and your families, no words can ease the ache of your heart. No deeds can fill the empty places in your homes. But on this day and all that follow, you may find solace in the memory of those you loved, and know that you have the unending support of the American people.

Scripture teaches us a hard truth. The mountains may fall and the earth may give way; the flesh and the heart may fail. But after all our suffering, God and grace will "restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast." So it is -- so it has been for these families. So it must be for our nation.

Let us renew our resolve against those who perpetrated this barbaric act and who plot against us still. In defense of our nation we will never waver; in pursuit of al Qaeda and its extremist allies, we will never falter.

Let us renew our commitment to all those who serve in our defense -- our courageous men and women in uniform and their families and all those who protect us here at home. Mindful that the work of protecting America is never finished, we will do everything in our power to keep America safe.

Let us renew the true spirit of that day. Not the human capacity for evil, but the human capacity for good. Not the desire to destroy, but the impulse to save, and to serve, and to build. On this first National Day of Service and Remembrance, we can summon once more that ordinary goodness of America -- to serve our communities, to strengthen our country, and to better our world.

Most of all, on a day when others sought to sap our confidence, let us renew our common purpose. Let us remember how we came together as one nation, as one people, as Americans, united not only in our grief, but in our resolve to stand with one another, to stand up for the country we all love.

This may be the greatest lesson of this day, the strongest rebuke to those who attacked us, the highest tribute to those taken from us -- that such sense of purpose need not be a fleeting moment. It can be a lasting virtue.

For through their own lives -- and through you, the loved ones that they left behind -- the men and women who lost their lives eight years ago today leave a legacy that still shines brightly in the darkness, and that calls on all of us to be strong and firm and united. That is our calling today and in all the Septembers still to come.

May God bless you and comfort you. And may God bless the United States of America. (Applause.)

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9:40 A.M.

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