



THE AMERICAN LEGION  
*Veterans Strengthening America*

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

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**Suggested Speech  
For September 11, 2021  
Twentieth Observance**

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A new generation has arrived. The infants, toddlers and young children of 9/11 are now adults. Some have lost parents on that day. Others lost siblings and friends.

Some have served in the military or became first responders as a tribute to those who were lost.

Much like those who came of age as bombs were dropped at Pearl Harbor, the 9/11 Generation did not seek to grow up during war. Evil came to America and Americans responded.

Twenty years for many is a long time, but the feelings that most Americans experienced on that Tuesday morning in September are still remembered by those old enough to have understood the significance of four airlines piercing through the heart of our homeland.

Shock. Sorrow. Anger.

Strong emotions that would quickly turn to resolve. This was a criminal act and the terrorists behind it must pay.

On September 20, 2001, President George W. Bush told the American people, “Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda but it does not end there.”

Seventeen days later, the United States and its allies launched Operation Enduring Freedom to take down terrorists and topple the regime in Afghanistan, which enabled them.

In 2011, al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden would meet his fate in Pakistan courtesy of the Navy SEALs. Many of his cohorts, those most responsible for 9/11, would be killed on battlefields or detained at Guantanamo Bay.

The American Legion was a strong supporter of the Global War on Terrorism and remains a staunch advocate for its fighters and family members of those who served.

However, the nation’s largest veterans organization is also aware of the enormous toll that 20 years of war and open-ended Authorizations for the Use of Military Force have had on servicemembers and their families.

Ending “Forever Wars,” does not mean ending America’s love and admiration for those who fought them or remembering the heroes and victims of 9/11.

It means preventing future terrorist attacks by correcting the most important failure cited by the official 9/11 Commission. The failure of “Imagination.”

Never again should Americans under-estimate the depravity of militant terrorist organizations. Never again should we allow transportation and other infrastructures be so easily exploited by those who wish us harm. And never again should other nations question whether such an attack on this country would be met with an overwhelming response.

In a Pennsylvania battlefield, just 90 miles from where so many Americans were murdered on 9/11, President Lincoln once said, “The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.”

Just like Gettysburg, the field in Shanksville is hallowed ground. It is where Flight 93 was brought down to earth not by terrorists but by those bravely resisting their evil intent. Its ground became sacred shortly after Todd Beamer's immortal words, "Let's Roll," became the abbreviated Gettysburg Address for the War on Terrorism.

Nine-eleven ushered in a new level of patriotism. Sales of American Flags spiked, as the Stars & Stripes were displayed on vehicles, outside of homes and businesses everywhere. Many Americans still wear flag lapel pins. Funds were created to assist first responders and the children of those who lost their lives. The American Legion would soon establish its Legacy Scholarship Fund, to provide educational opportunities for children of military members who died or were seriously disabled while serving in the Global War on Terrorism.

Debra Burlingame, an American patriot whose brother was killed in the attack on the Pentagon, wrote eloquently in The American Legion Magazine:

Quote-- “The flag spoke for us when we were bereft of words. It was our comfort and our rallying cry: ‘America! America! God shed His grace on thee.’ And so we put them everywhere: on office buildings and storefronts, on cars and kids’ bikes. The flag was sewn anew onto the uniforms of Major League Baseball players and emergency room nurses. It greeted us and lifted our spirits when we needed it most, appearing in improbable places, like a highway overpass. That faded, dirty flag on I-95 pierces my heart. Where have all the flags of September 11<sup>th</sup> gone?” –Unquote.

It is up to us to answer that question. We see our flag and patriotism make their traditional comebacks on Memorial Day, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and Veterans Day. We experience brief moments of unity following horrific terrorist attacks such as what occurred at the Boston Marathon or the Pulse nightclub. We have been inspired by the service of health care workers, volunteers and first responders throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet those moments seem to be overshadowed by violence in our communities, vitriolic politics and a questioning of America's role as a beacon of hope and freedom.

What occurred on 9/11 was indeed tragic but the legacy of those lost on that day need not be so. The nearly 3,000 men, women and children who died that day were targeted for being American.

Richard Santos was the national commander of The American Legion on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Shortly after the attacks, he penned a message that still resonates two decades later.

“America continues to heal and it is our responsibility as veterans to tend to the wounds,” he wrote. “Some will panic about the future; we must reassure them. Some will weep over a lost family member or friend; we must hold their hands. Some will be angry; we must temper their rage.” – Unquote.

That ladies and gentlemen is a legacy that we can all create for those lost on 9/11. Healing, reassurance and comfort. These qualities run counter to the inhumanity exhibited by a small group of terrorists that day. Combine these traits with a steadfast commitment to prepare and prevent future attacks, and we will truly be honoring all who were lost.



We must never forget.

God Bless the brave souls of 9/11 and God Bless  
America!

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