

REMARKS BY PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA AT "A CONCERT FOR HOPE"

September 11, 2011

Kennedy Center

The Bible tells us—"weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

Ten years ago, America confronted one of our darkest nights. Mighty towers crumbled. Black smoke billowed up from the Pentagon. Airplane wreckage smoldered on a Pennsylvania field. Friends and neighbors, sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters -- they were taken from us with a heartbreaking swiftness and cruelty. And on September 12, 2001, we awoke to a world in which evil was closer at hand, and uncertainty clouded our future.

In the decade since, much has changed for Americans. We've known war and recession, passionate debates and political divides. We can never get back the lives that were lost on that day or the Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice in the wars that followed.

And yet today, it is worth remembering what has not changed. Our character as a nation has not changed. Our faith -- in God and in each other -- that has not changed. Our belief in America, born of a timeless ideal that men and women should govern themselves; that all people are created equal, and deserve the same freedom to determine their own destiny -- that belief, through tests and trials, has only been strengthened.

These past 10 years have shown that America does not give in to fear. The rescue workers who rushed to the scene, the firefighters who charged up the stairs, the passengers who stormed the cockpit--these patriots defined the very nature of courage. Over the years we've also seen a more quiet form of heroism--in the ladder company that lost so many men and still suits up and saves lives every day, the businesses that have been rebuilt from nothing, the burn victim who has bounced back, the families who press on.

Last spring, I received a letter from a woman named Suzanne Swaine. She had lost her husband and brother in the Twin Towers, and said that she had been robbed of, “so many would-be proud moments where a father watches their child graduate, or tend a goal in a lacrosse game, or succeed academically.” But her daughters are in college, the other doing well in high school. “It has been 10 years of raising these girls on my own,” Suzanne wrote. “I could not be prouder of their strength and resilience.” That spirit typifies our American family. And the hopeful future for those girls is the ultimate rebuke to the hateful killers who took the life of their father.

These past 10 years have shown America’s resolve to defend its citizens, and our way of life. Diplomats serve in far off posts, and intelligence professionals work tirelessly without recognition. Two million Americans have gone to war since 9/11. They have demonstrated that those who do us harm cannot hide from the reach of justice, anywhere in the world. America has been defended not by conscripts, but by citizens who choose to serve -- young people who signed up straight out of high school, guardsmen and reservists, workers and business-people, immigrants and fourth-generation soldiers. They are men and women who left behind lives of comfort for two, three, four, five tours of duty. Too many will never come home. Those that do carry dark memories from distant places and the legacy of fallen friends.

The sacrifices of these men and women, and of our military families, reminds us that the wages of war are great; that while service to our nation is full of glory, war itself is never glorious. Our troops have been to lands unknown to many Americans a decade ago -- to Kandahar and Kabul; to Mosul and Basra. But our strength is not measured in our ability to stay in these places; it comes from our commitment to leave those lands to free people and sovereign states, and our desire to move from a decade of war to a future of peace.

These 10 years have shown that we hold fast to our freedoms. Yes, we’re more vigilant against those who threaten us, and there are inconveniences that come with our common defense. Debates -- about war and peace, about security and civil liberties -- have often been fierce these last 10 years. But it is precisely the rigor of these debates, and our ability to resolve them in a way that honors our values and our democracy, that is the measure of our strength. Meanwhile, our open markets still provide innovators the chance to create and succeed, our citizens are still free to speak their minds, and our souls are enriched in churches and temples, our synagogues and our mosques.

These past 10 years underscores the bonds between all Americans. We have not succumbed to suspicion, nor have we succumbed to mistrust. After 9/11, to his great credit, President Bush made clear what we reaffirm today: The United States will never wage war against Islam or any other religion. Immigrants come here from all parts of the globe. And in the biggest cities and the smallest towns, in schools and workplaces, you still see people of every conceivable race and religion and ethnicity -- all of them pledging allegiance to the flag, all of them reaching for the same American dream -- e pluribus unum, out of many, we are one.

These past 10 years tell a story of our resilience. The Pentagon is repaired, and filled with patriots working in common purpose. Shanksville is the scene of friendships forged between residents of that town, and families who lost loved ones there. New York—New York remains the most vibrant of capitals of arts and industry and fashion and commerce. Where the World Trade Center once stood, the sun glistens off a new tower that reaches towards the sky.

Our people still work in skyscrapers. Our stadiums are still filled with fans, and our parks full of children playing ball. Our airports hum with travel, and our buses and subways take millions where they need to go. And families sit down to Sunday dinner, and students prepare for school. This land pulses with the optimism of those who set out for distant shores, and the courage of those who died for human freedom.

Decades from now, Americans will visit the memorials to those who were lost on 9/11. They'll run their fingers over the places where the names of those we loved are carved into marble and stone, and they may wonder at the lives that they led. And standing before the white headstones in Arlington, and in peaceful cemeteries and small-town squares in every corner of the country, they will pay respects to those lost in Iraq and Afghanistan. They'll see the names of the fallen on bridges and statues, at gardens and schools.

And they will know that nothing can break the will of a truly United States of America. They will remember that we've overcome slavery and Civil War; we've overcome bread lines and fascism and recession and riots, and communism and, yes, terrorism. They will be reminded that we are not perfect, but our democracy is durable, and that democracy -- reflecting, as it does, the imperfections of man -- also give us the opportunity to perfect our union. That is what we honor on days of national commemoration -- those aspects of the American experience that are enduring, and the determination to move forward as one people.

More than monuments, that will be the legacy of 9/11 -- a legacy of firefighters

who walked into fire and soldiers who signed up to serve; of workers who raised new towers, and citizens who faced down their private fears. Most of all, of children who realized the dreams of their parents. It will be said that we kept the faith; that we took a painful blow, and we emerged stronger than before.

“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”

With a just God as our guide, let us honor those who have been lost, let us rededicate ourselves to the ideals that define our nation, and let us look to the future with hearts full of hope.

May God bless the memory of those we lost, and may God bless the United States of America.

Source: White House Press Office

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/11/remarks-president-concert-hope>