

REMARKS BY VICE PRESIDENT JOSEPH BIDEN AT DEDICATION OF FLIGHT 93 MEMORIAL

September 10, 2011

Ladies and gentlemen, my fellow Americans, I'm honored to be standing here today, standing with two former Presidents.

President Clinton, as he said, the passengers on Flight 93 knew that our common humanity is what united us most. Well, Mr. President, the same can be said of you. You spent your time as President, and the years since, deeply committed to embracing and strengthening our common humanity. (Applause.) And, Mr. President, we all thank you for what you've done and what you continue to do.

Let me also recognize a man responsible for bringing our country together at a time when it could have been torn apart, for making it clear that America could not be brought to her knees, and helping us stand tall and strike back—President George W. Bush. (Applause.) In the darkest hour of our generation, your voice and leadership, Mr. President, helped us find our way. And for that, you deserve our gratitude for a long, long time. (Applause.)

And I say now to the families that are gathered here today, I know what it's like to receive that call out of the blue, like a bolt out of the blue. And I know this is a bittersweet moment for you. And I want to tell you, you have a lot more courage than I had. You have a lot more courage just by being here today, because I know, and many others know, how hard it is to relive these moments, because it brings everything back in stark, stark relief and stark detail.

But I also know, like your loved ones, what you probably don't know, that you are literally an inspiration to the thousands of people across this country who right now are feeling the loss of an intense tragedy that they're suffering. They know, looking at you, watching you on television today, that there's hope to be found after tragedy, that there's rebirth in the face of death. You, in a sense, are as courageous as your family members were. And we owe you all for being here today, just the act of being here. (Applause.)

We're here today to remember and honor 40 men and women who gave their lives so others could live theirs—decent, honorable women and men who never imagined 10 years ago tomorrow that when they said goodbye to their

children, when they kissed their loved ones goodbye and walked through that door, that they were doing it for the very last time.

They didn't know the horror that awaited them, but they confronted unimaginable fear and terror with a courage that has been summoned only by the truest and the rarest of American heroes—40 names etched on each of those panels on the wall, the Wall of Names. But, more than that, their names are going to be, as President Bush said, etched forever into American history. They join an incredibly elite list of women and men, and a long history filled with ordinary Americans doing extraordinary things—men and women of undaunted courage, uncommon resolve, and a stubborn perseverance in the face of unfathomable challenge.

We teach our children that these are qualities ingrained into our national character as Americans. And I believe they are. They animate our national identity. And I believe they will continue to define America, because of the example of the men and women who we pay tribute today, the passengers and the crew of Flight 93.

None of them asked for what happened. They didn't go on that plane—they didn't board that plane to fight a war. But when they heard the news, when they found out what happened in New York, they knew that they were going through, it was something more than a hijacking. They knew it was the opening shot in a new war.

And so, they acted. They acted as citizen patriots have acted since the beginning of our country. They stood up and they stood their ground. They thought, like Captain Parker said at Lexington, and I quote him, "If they mean to have a war, let it begin here."

As many times as I recall, and all of you who are not family members like me, have recalled this incident time and again over the last 10 years, I never fail to be astonished, literally astonished by the courage they demonstrated.

And so, we stand where it began. We think of them. We think of our nation. We think of our history and we think of the future. And we think of it, because of them, with a confidence knowing that ordinary citizens will continue to stare down fear, overwhelm evil, and bring forth hope from what seems to be none. And although it will continue to amaze us and inspire us when it happens, it should not surprise us. For that heroism is who we are. And that courage lies deepest and beats loudest in the heart of this nation.

We know that these 40 men and women were more than ordinary Americans to all of you sitting in front of me. They were more than passengers and crews. They were already heroes. They were already heroes to you.

They were the father that tucked you in bed at night. They were the wife who knew your fears before you even expressed them. They were the brother who lifted you up. They were the daughter who made you laugh. They were the son who made you proud. They are irreplaceable. I know that. We know that.

And we know, and I know, that no memorial—no words, no acts—can fill the void that they left in your hearts. My prayer for you is that 10 years later, their memory is able to bring a smile to your lips before it brings a tear to your eye. And I hope you take comfort in knowing that a grateful nation understands that your loved ones gave their lives in pursuit of the noblest of earthly goals: defending their country, defending their families, sacrificing their lives so we could live ours. Those of us who were in Washington that day, without knowing it for sure at the time, now know we owe them an overwhelming special, personal debt of gratitude.

The collective spirit of your mother, your father, your brother, your husband, your wife, your sister, your best friend—that spirit lives on not only in you, but in your country. It lives on in the Cross of Steel made from the World Trade Center beams, placed on a Pentagon-shaped platform that rests proudly outside the Shanksville Volunteer Fire Department. (Applause.) That Cross of Steel is an enduring symbol of the steel and the spine of this region, and the spine of this country.

And it definitely lives on in a new generation of warriors—the 9/11 Generation, inspired by what happened here, 2.8 million young Americans since 9/11, that 9/11 generation, have joined the United States Armed Forces—thousands giving their lives and tens of thousands being wounded to finish the war that began right here.

Maya Angelou wrote, and I quote, “History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived. However, if faced with courage, need not be lived again.”

Ladies and gentlemen—we are not here to unlive history. We are here to honor those whose courage made history and is going to inspire generations of Americans to come.

So, I say to you, even as we struggle with this tragedy, even as we grapple with the profound loss and devastating grief, we can look up at the heavens and think of these heroes and know, know with certitude that there is not a single, solitary tragedy that America cannot overcome. There is not a single moment of hardship that cannot be transformed into one of national strength. The seeds of doubt, planted by those who wish to harm us, will instead grow into flowering meadows like this one where we stand in today, for they cannot defeat the American spirit. We know this with certainty. We know it with certainty, because it's the history of the journey of this country at every stage of our history. (Applause.)

As President Clinton knows, my mother used to say, "Courage lies in every heart." And she would go on to say, "And the expectation is that, Joey, one day it will be summoned." "Courage lies in every heart, and one day it will be summoned." On September 11, 2001, at 9:57 a.m., it was summoned and 40 incredible men and women answered the call. They gave their lives and, in doing so, gave this country a new life.

We owe them. We owe you a debt we can never repay. Thank you all. Thank you, family members. And may God bless you. And may God protect our troops.

Source: White House Press Office

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/10/remarks-vice-president-joseph-biden-dedication-flight-93-memorial>