



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Column: On 9/11, We Have Not Forgotten and We Will Never Forget

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On a sunny September 6, I watched my first grandchild – my granddaughter, Bristol – get on the bus for her first day of Kindergarten.

I was thinking about that moment as I reflect on 9/11. Because on September 11, 2001, I was driving my own young kids to school, who were just around Bristol's age.

I was thinking about how the world changed for us and for our kids. And how 9/11 shaped the world my granddaughter, and my two grandsons, are growing up in now.

We all remember it. A bright, beautiful and sunny morning 23 years ago. We remember where we were when news of the attack broke through our television screens and radios. Social media, of course, was not yet widely used.

When I heard the radio reports in my car, I remember looking up at the sky – a picture perfect day. I thought, this can't be happening. But the images I later saw on television confirmed it.

A staggering 3,000 innocent American lives taken. Thousands more injured.

And to this day, many of the brave first responders who rushed into the burning buildings continue to deal with life-altering health conditions.

Too many have died as a result. All have suffered.

Two days after that first day of school, I spoke at the Patriot Day service at Bible Baptist Church in Williamson.

It was probably because I was in a church, that I thought about Father Mychal Judge, the New York City Fire Department chaplain who was the first identified casualty of the September 11 attacks.

Father Mychal was tending to victims in the North Tower when he was hit by a downpour of debris as the South Tower collapsed. I'm sure we all remember that image of the rescue workers carrying his body from the rubble.

In a news story on the 20th anniversary of 9/11, one of his friends, Father Dominic Monti, said that it was still a very difficult picture to see. Then he said, "It's death, but it's death that came out of love, out of service."

Service. A simple yet profound word.

We honor the service of our firefighters, law enforcement, EMS, all the rescue workers of 9/11. The service of the men and women of our Armed Forces. We give thanks to those who answered the call to respond that day, and to those who answered the call to serve in the months and years that followed.

9/11 inspired a new generation of service in our nation. Think about all those who decided, just days after 9/11, to join the military, volunteer with their local fire department, donate their money to support victims' families, give their time to support a nonprofit.

One way we can continue to honor those who lost their lives is by showing our appreciation and respect for those who have taken a vow to serve us today. These men and women, including our first responders and members of our nation's military, continue to put their lives on the line for us. So that we may live safe and free.

We can all show our respect and appreciation for them. In our neighborhoods and communities, in the halls of government, in our churches, in our classrooms, and at our dinner tables.

We Will Never Forget has become the anthem of 9/11.

Etched in our memory is the image of the rescue workers hanging the American flag and the banner that read, "We Will Never Forget." The photo taken of this moment would become one of the most iconic images in U.S. history.

And we will never forget. Just as we will never cower to those who attack our country and attempt to strip away our freedom.

We are strong. We are resilient. We are the United States of America. We are proud Americans.

To all of you who serve our community, please know you have my unwavering support and gratitude. I will never forget your sacrifice, your bravery, your commitment to serve others. Indeed, that is life's highest calling.

To be a proud American is to never forget. I am proud to be an American.

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