



THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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Mrs. Laura Bush Speaks at the National Press Club

Remarks by Mrs. Laura Bush At the National Press Club
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As delivered.

Thank you very much for the introduction and for the invitation to join you here at the National Press Club.

When I first considered your invitation, I thought I would talk about early childhood education - a subject of great importance to me.

In particular I wanted to discuss a summit on early childhood cognitive development we hosted this summer - in fact, that was the topic of a briefing I was planning to give on Capitol Hill the morning of September 11th.

That speech, of course, had to be postponed, but the importance of education remains the same. In the wake of those events, it is particularly important to pay attention to our children's needs - and to reassure them as we continue to teach and guide them.

We are learning as well.

In two months, we have seen the worst and the best of human nature. We have felt sadness and anger and fear, yet out of those emotions have risen courage and hope.

President Bush said we are a nation awakened to danger - but we are also a nation awakened to patriotism, and citizenship and service. None of us could have imagined the evil that was done to our country, yet we have learned that out of tragedy can come great good.

It seems that every generation has its own - day of infamy- that none would ever forget. For my parents' generation, that day was December 7, 1941, when our nation was shocked by the early morning attack on Pearl Harbor.

For my generation, the day was November 22, 1963 the day that President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on a street in downtown Dallas.

I was a senior at Robert E. Lee High School in Midland, Texas and was sitting in a classroom when we learned the President had been killed.

I remember feeling as if a blanket had been thrown over the school, suffocating all the usual sounds of scraping chairs and classroom chatter. People cried. The horror was so sudden and unimaginable.

I went home for lunch and remember my parents' sadness and like most American families, we spent the weekend watching television. I remember it as a terrible blow, almost too much to bear; a sudden reminder at a young age of how fragile life truly is.

Now we have experienced another one of those days in our national life ? a day so horrifying that it will be forever seared in the hearts and memories of all of us who witnessed it.

I was on my way to meet with Senator Ted Kennedy when a Secret Service agent told me that a plane had just hit the World Trade Center. We thought it was an accident at first, but as we approached Capitol Hill, the Secret Service said another plane had hit another tower.

We knew then that it was terrorism, and I remember thinking that nothing would ever be the same.

Senator Kennedy and his big dog Splash were waiting for me. Words can't describe the depth of feeling I had being with President Kennedy's brother as another tragedy broke our nation's heart.

Senator Judd Gregg joined us, and I felt as if we were going through the motions, pretending to be normal, when we all knew 'normal' would never again be what we knew it to be on September 10th.

We walked out to express our prayers and concern for the people of New York - and to tell the press that we were postponing our meeting on education. Senator Gregg insisted that we were merely postponing -- that we would reschedule -- because we would not let the terrorists prevail.

At that moment Larry McQuillan from U.S.A. Today, asked a question that was on the minds of many Americans.

He asked, "What do you say to children?"

What I said then, and what I have said in nearly every interview since, is that we need to reassure our children that they are safe in their homes and schools. We need to reassure them that many people love them and care for them, and that while there are some bad people in the world, there are many more good people.

We can turn off the television and spend time reading to our children. We can give them the gift of our time and attention.

As I have traveled the country, I have found that our children still need to be reassured. When I visit classrooms, children will sidle up to me and whisper, "What do you think about what happened?"

I'll say "I'm sad," and they'll nod and say they are sad too.

Our children are working through the same feelings many of us are - and they are doing so with remarkable resilience and wisdom.

We are reminded that little things - and little hands - can make a difference. Last month, I spent a day teaching at Birney Elementary School here in the District during Teach for America week. I never expected to be handed 169 envelopes containing donations from the students.

The money in those envelopes was intended for America's Fund for Afghan Children. The students knew the President had asked children to send a dollar to help pay for food and medicine for Afghan children.

The children at Birney Elementary might understand hunger. Of the 565 students who attend that school, all but 27 children are eligible for the free or reduced-cost lunch program. And yet they contributed \$173 dollars and .64 cents to the Children's Fund.

A couple of children in South Pasadena, California, organized a lemonade and cookie sale to raise money for the children of Afghanistan. Seven-year-old Libby and nine-year-old Cole dished out lemonade for .25 cents, along with chocolate chip cookies, brownies and Rice Krispie treats.

Passers-by responded eagerly and generously. One woman left a \$20 dollar bill and didn't want her change. Others didn't take any lemonade ? they just stopped to drop off a few dollars.

A few hours later, when the lemonade and treats were mostly gone, Libby and Cole and their friends totaled up the proceeds ? they counted three times to make sure they were right: They'd raised \$85 dollars and .75 cents.

They sent the money along with a letter to President Bush. They each signed it, and Cole had the last word: From Cole Rainey, Libby Rainey, and friends Sophie Mainsky and Laura Selig Your citizens.

These stories show the great citizenship and patriotism apparent everywhere in our country.

We've also seen it in the singing of God Bless America at so many events, and in the displays of flags on homes, store windows, car antennas, and people's jacket lapels.

I'll never forget a moment during the Pentagon memorial service. The choir was singing the Battle Hymn of the Republic, and the next thing you know we all were singing along. Then, suddenly, a woman in a turquoise dress, way in the back of the huge crowd, stood up and began swaying and waving her flag in the air.

Then, we were all on our feet, waving thousands of American flags, united and not ashamed when our eyes filled with tears and our hearts swelled with pride in our great country.

I knew there was a renewed spirit of love for America in the places most directly affected by the attacks.

Yet exactly one week after the attack we were driving through the streets of Chicago and on almost every house and nearly every building, I saw a proud display of the American flag.

We are a kinder nation today. People seem to take more time to ask about each other. I notice more people hugging their friends and even reaching out to touch people they barely know. We are opening our doors to our neighbors and our hearts to strangers.

Just outside of Washington, women from a local Jewish congregation volunteered to shop for Muslim women who are afraid to go out on their own for fear of harassment. In New York families opened their homes to their evacuated neighbors.

We stand patiently in lines in airports, glad that the slow pace means careful inspection. We are saying thank you to the national guardsmen who have left their families to stand duty at airport checkpoints.

We seem to have a new appreciation for those who serve, whether as police officers and firefighters, soldiers, teachers, or elected officials. For the first time in three decades, a majority of Americans said they trust the government to "do what is right."

The cynicism and distrust with which people viewed government is replaced with a spirit of appreciation and respect for public servants, and that is healthy for our democracy. Police officers and firefighters have become America's celebrities.

We have witnessed the love and sacrifice of teachers, who fought their own fears to keep children calm and safe. In Manhattan, some teachers took students home with them until they could find their parents. In others parts of the country, teachers had to locate travelling parents.

As our teachers comforted our children, some Americans realized that our teachers need comforting, too.

In New York, I met a teacher at Public School 41 who told me about a parent who had given her a gift certificate for a massage as a way of showing appreciation for her.

As a former public school teacher, I can say with certainty that teachers in your media markets would love that idea to catch on.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to America's teachers. Their jobs are already difficult; and their extra

effort -- far above and beyond what is asked of them - says much about their devotion to our children.

Because schools already play an important role in our lives and communities, we recognize and appreciate them more than ever.

In Florida, the Superintendent of Schools (Dan Galtz) said a student told him, 'thank you for keeping school open. I know everything will be OK because I'm coming to school today.'

People are enlisting to serve in our military. Katherine Dwyer grew up in a big family in Bethesda, Maryland. She studied studio art in college, and went to work at an art gallery. But after September 11, after she and her Mom watched the unfolding horror on television, she decided to enlist in the Army.

She said, "I thought to myself, now's the time. I've got to get ready. Our country needs people like myself, people my age willing to step up and serve, because it's needed right now."

And the attacks have caused all of us to reassess our priorities and our values. Rather than fearing death, we are embracing life -- life that is now seen as more precious, more meaningful than it seemed before that tragic fall day.

A reporter at the White House told one of our staff members he had raked leaves with his children over the weekend and it was so wonderful to do something normal.

Robert Moore, a fiscal officer for the Ohio Department of Development, says he and his wife Nancy are spending more time with their boys. "It's made us more aware of how precious life is," said Mr. Moore. "We're reassessing what we consider important."

A third of all Americans say they are spending more time with their families. Almost half are calling friends and family more. College students are phoning home and looking forward to coming home. A freshman at Boston College told one reporter she couldn't wait for Thanksgiving, just to sit around the table with her family.

In the aftermath of the attacks, forty percent of Americans say they praying more, and a quarter say they are spending more time in houses of worship.

The Sunday after the attacks, we attended church at Camp David. We were so glad to see members of the congregation -- the 70 or so people, mostly young couple with children, who attend regular services there.

On September 11, one of the rumors that was reported as a fact was that Camp David had also been attacked. For over an hour I believed that it had been hit, and I was so sad for the people there - people we worship with almost every weekend.

The young chaplain is a graduate of the Perkins School of Theology at my alma mater, Southern Methodist University, and he has a quiet and strong and sincere faith.

He based his sermon that weekend on the Psalm outlined in the lectionary for that September Sunday, Psalm 27: "Your face, Lord, do I seek I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

And that of course, is what has happened. We are seeing goodness throughout our land. As I witness the kindness that you report on across the country, I get a sense of a new America.

Before September 11th, people seemed to spend a lot of time complaining about what was wrong with their towns or their states or their country.

I am no exception. When my daughters were in elementary school, you won't believe this, but I (a former public school teacher!) actually called my mother to complain about one of the girls' teachers.

I was upset because she'd sent them home with a note saying they were disorganized, when I thought it was

really the teacher who was disorganized.

My mother thought for a moment and said, "Have you gone up to the school to help the teacher?" And of course, I had to tell her no.

Let that be a lesson to you: You're never too old to get taken to school by your mother.

We have been living in an age of self-absorption and self-indulgence. But the amazing thing is, that in one day it all stopped. And we started to rethink things. We began to think not about what is wrong, but what is right with our towns and our states and this country.

Larry McQuillan's question got me thinking about how I could be a part of America's response to our children. Now I'd like to get you to think about how you can use the medium of the news to harness this great national energy.

There's nothing like the power of the media, and I was reminded of that fact when one of my best friends called me the other day.

She used to tell me that she was glad she wasn't in my shoes ? but the other day she said that, for the first time, she saw me on the news and felt an actual pang of jealousy. She realized - and reminded me - that I had the great opportunity to reach a large audience and help them. While she, in comparison, didn't know how she could help.

Helping others does make us feel good.

We've raised record amounts of money and given enormous support to national organizations like the Red Cross and the Salvation Army. We heard accounts about how fast the news had to change in New York with regard to requests for supplies. People responded to the news so rapidly and so overwhelmingly that constant updates had to be issued to stop or redirect the flood of responses.

You have a real opportunity to make sure that, as time passes, Americans are still informed about ways they can exercise their compassion.

You have a real opportunity to highlight the needs in your communities so people know what they can specifically do to make life better where they live.

Many things have changed since September 11. We are sadder and less innocent, more determined and prepared, wiser and in many ways better: more patriotic, more united, more compassionate.

And many important things haven't changed at all: our faith, our love of family and friends - the freedoms and ideals that this country stands for - the freedoms that we now must defend.

Through this experience, we are relearning our own values - and the world is seeing the very foundation of America. In Pennsylvania, an article quoted a four-year-old girl who could not understand why terrorists would hate a whole nation of people they don't even know.

Her innocent question, "Why don't we just tell them our names."

The people who died on September 11 all had names and lives and people who loved them. We value each of those lives, and we show it?for some that value shines through faith.

During the World Trade Center survivors' memorial service at Ground Zero, Rabbi Joseph Potasnik shared a story with the mourners.

He said that a few hours earlier he'd received a phone call from a woman who was going to give birth very soon. She said she wanted to name her child after a WTC victim who didn't have a child.

Before she hung up, she made a promise to the Rabbi. She said, "I promise that I will try to have more children because I know there are so many more names."

That's one of the major differences between our country and the people we fight against. We believe every person matters, that every individual is valuable and has a right to life, and liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

If we were to set aside one day for each victim, to honor and remember them, it would take us 13 to 14 years to complete our tribute. Or, to put it another way, a child born on September 11th would be entering high school by the time we were through with our days of remembrance.

This nation was born in a spirit of optimism and courage. That's the spirit that beckoned so many immigrants, yearning for a fresh start, willing to take risks for the hope of a better life for themselves and their families.

That spirit of optimism and courage still beckons people across the world who want to come here, and that spirit of optimism and courage must guide us now.

We are a different country than we were on September 10th - in ways the terrorists could not have imagined or intended. We'll go back to our routines as we always do, but we will do so with a stronger sense of life and liberty.

Americans are willing to fight and die for our freedoms, but more importantly, we are willing to live for them. We will move on with our lives, but we will not forget the images and events -- the photos and front pages -- of the past two months. They are etched in our minds forever.

Some witnessed the moving images, others captured them?but we all feel the power and the potential of this still-unfolding drama.

I have learned these things from my visits with people throughout the heartland: We've all been watching the news. I've seen people helping strangers; I've seen strangers becoming heroes; I've seen this country at its best. Americans are proud and we care about others. That's what I see in the news, and that's what I see in America.

Thank you all for having me.

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