

September 11, 2023
Middlesex & Dunellen 9/11 Memorial Ceremony
Mayor Jason F. Cilento

Good Evening. It is an honor to join you this evening as we reflect and remember the events which occurred on and after September 11, 2001.

Most of us can remember exactly where we were that Tuesday morning, twenty-two years ago. We can remember where we were, who we were with, and how we felt as the news broke that the United States was under attack by terrorists. Our lives changed when 4 commercial airliners were hijacked and used to strike targets in New York City and Washington DC. The same day, countless lives were saved when passengers of United Airlines Flight 93 sacrificed themselves and thwarted an additional planned attack on the U.S. Capitol in the skies above Western Pennsylvania.

Some of us witnessed the events unfold on a screen in our living rooms, some were glued to the radio listening in disbelief, some like myself were in a classroom not knowing much about what was going on outside other than peers being picked up by the hour by parents, and some witnessed these horrific acts with their very own eyes.

Even today, those memories are as clear as a memory from yesterday. We all felt the weight of grief together that day; connected by a shared wound. But the events following the attacks shaped us as a nation and showed the world America's character. Exemplified by all the brave Americans who lost their lives that day, our country came together in New York, in DC, Pennsylvania, and in every single community across the United States.

Still picking up the pieces, our nation plunged into a war against terror that would last years. As soldiers fought, first responders battled health conditions and mental health challenges.

While 2,974 people lost their lives on September 11, 4,343 survivors and first responders died in the years after due to related illnesses (World Trade Center Health Program). By 2019, the number of United States troops who died fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan surpassed 7,000 (Watson Institute at Brown University). It's those lives taken and those families deprived of memories, who we remember today.

The way we came together as a nation after September 11 is what defines us as Americans. Intertwined and strengthened by our diversity, we pushed through the devastating loss to clean up, rebuild, and restructure countless national and state systems. While families paved a path forward without their loved ones, communities rebuilt one step at a time. When faced with immeasurable loss, we came to the table with immeasurable courage.

September 11, or 'Patriot Day', serves as a testament and rebirth of our Nation's destiny. A destiny enveloped by unity and a realization: *E Pluribus Unum – Out of many, one.*

It is my hope as we move forward together, that we showcase our true character, that we look at one another as fellow Americans and see that the American Dream is still alive—that the fight for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness never fades—even in the darkest of hours. May we never take for granted our country—even during peaceful times—and May we strive to defend it always. All Americans take part in the protection of such freedoms: be it by those who serve in the armed forces, local emergency services, or civilians participating in the democratic process our great nation entitles.

May we always recognize that every day is a cherished gift. Dunellen resident Lydia Estelle Bravo, and so many individuals who lost their lives on and after September 11, 2001, were unable to return home for another day to spend with their families.

Thank you again for having me here today to reflect on our American heroes.

God Bless you, God Bless our emergency service members, God Bless our soldiers, veterans and all those lost because of September 11, 2001. May God continue to Bless the United States of America.

Thank you.