

Governor's Column – 9/12/01

Despite Tragedy, Americans Stand Together

This past Tuesday, we watched in horror as terrorists attacked the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. The immediacy of the reporting and the video footage streaming in through our televisions and computers brought the incredible tragedy into our lives in a way that made the nightmare all the more real and vivid.

Tuesday was a national tragedy. The unconscionable attacks on America and the senseless loss of innocent lives were the work of those who see violence and death as an honorable means to an end. As Americans, we believe differently.

We believe in a freedom that allows us to express our thoughts and views in public forums without fear of retribution. We believe in a country where we can worship with the knowledge that, when we pray to God, we can do so with a sense of peace and comfort. We believe that, in the midst of the collective mourning and disbelief we feel now, we are strengthened as a nation.

There is an old Yiddish proverb that says God, while he gives us burdens, also gives us shoulders.

Tuesday's events brought out a wave of different responses. Across the state, people felt anger, sadness, hurt, frustration and fear. Churches opened their doors for crowded prayer services. Phone lines were tied up as friends and family called to check on each other.

At the same time, rumors rapidly spread that gas would be unavailable in the coming days, and long lines at stations and price hikes only served to increase a sense of panic. As a result, I declared a state of emergency to protect consumers against those who would profit from the events that brought our country to a standstill.

Under the state of emergency, retailers who hike gas prices to take advantage of the tragedy are subject to investigation and prosecution. We will not stand for such actions, and there will be consequences for those who test us.

Back to the positive things that make America the greatest country on earth.

In addition to the state of emergency, I also issued an executive order Tuesday afternoon for the American and state flags to be flown at half-staff statewide until further notice. We are in a period of mourning right now, and the American flag is a symbol that draws us together as a nation.

It can be frustrating to watch the rescue efforts in New York and Washington, sometimes with the feeling that there is nothing that we can do here in Mississippi. Well, there is something we can do, and it's already being done in great numbers. Give blood.

I gave blood Wednesday morning, and the center was crowded with people who had waited nearly two hours to roll up their sleeves. I visited with some of those waiting to donate and was touched by the common desire among them to share what they could with those who are in desperate need.

The images of September 11 will never be erased from our minds, but we can choose which of those images remain most prominent. I choose to push the images of the actual events to the back of my mind, and focus on the policemen helping others to safety, on the firemen embracing each other in grief and exhaustion, the hundreds of people lining up to donate blood, the members of Congress singing "God Bless America" on the steps of the U. S. Capitol.

In Tuesday's events there are those who see a hopeless end; I see an endless hope.
America is the greatest nation in the history of mankind, and nothing will change that.
The people, with their diversity of race, creed and color, will continue to stand tall and proud.

America is not just a country. It is an ideal, a principle. That principle remains strong today and forever.

May God bless our state, our nation and our people.