

*Remarks to the
Support, Prayer and Memorial Service
Coahoma Community College
September 18, 2001*

It's been over a week now since America suffered the greatest and most costly attacks in its history. The unconscionable and cowardly attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have startled us out of our national comfort, and drawn us together as one nation, under God.

As the attacks took place last week, millions of Americans gathered around televisions in their homes and offices, watching in disbelief.

The immediacy of today's media hit us all like never before. Never before had America watched, and watched again and again in replays, as attacks were made directly against us.

These attacks were not just against us as a nation that respects and demands freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and the freedom to live like no other civilized country. These attacks were against us as a people and an ideal for the rest of the world.

Our world changed last week. The normal pace of our lives was disrupted – but as a result, we have been drawn closer together as a nation. We are bowing our heads, but have never stood taller. We are mourning those lost, but working hard for justice.

In the past days we have watched in disbelief as the attacks took place, and with pride as people lined up for hours to donate blood.

We've watched with sorrow as the names and faces of those who died became known, and with awe as the stories of heroism unfolded.

The work of our nation in the time to come will focus on exacting justice from those responsible for these attacks. This work should not be hindered by politics, but enhanced by unity.

This unity must include, by definition, all Americans – regardless of race, creed or color. If anything, the attacks have reminded us that we are all human beings, that we all have a desire to live in peace and share a common belief in what is right.

We must affirm that belief in the days to come. By that, I ask that we remember those Americans of Arab descent and those Americans who practice Islam. Their hearts are just as pained as ours by the attacks.

We cannot tolerate any attempt to blame based simply on race or religion – to do so completely shatters the foundation of our nation.

We have not fallen as a country; we are bowed, but not broken. We will rebuild and return stronger than ever, and we will do so together.

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

We do not bear this burden alone.

I want to share something with you today,
something written nearly 40 years ago at
another time of national tragedy.

“We in this country, in this generation, are –
by destiny rather than choice – the
watchmen on the walls of world freedom.

We ask, therefore, that we may be worthy of
our power and responsibility, that we may
exercise our strength with wisdom and
restraint, and that we may achieve in our
time and for all time the ancient vision of
‘peace on earth, goodwill toward men.’

That must always be our goal, and the righteousness of our cause must always underlie our strength. For as was written long ago, ‘except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.’”

Those words were written for a speech that was never given. They were the closing remarks in the speech President Kennedy was to give in Dallas on November 22, 1963.

Those words are heard here today and their message is just as clear. Let us remember the “righteousness of our cause” and never let our emotions lead us to foolish acts.

I pray for our nation and our people. I pray for the innocent lives lost in the attacks, and take comfort in the knowledge that they are at peace – as written in the 7th chapter of Revelation:

“For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.

They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to the springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

May God bless our people and our nation.