

Sen. Susan M. Collins
9-11 Statement
Sept. 11, 2019

Earlier today, we paused and commemorated those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001. Eighteen years have passed, but the memory of that day remains as vivid as if it were yesterday. We each have our own recollections of where we were and what we were doing as the horrifying terrorist attacks on our country began to unfold. I remember having the television on and watching a report that a plane, originally reported as a small plane, had struck one of the Twin Towers. I then, shortly thereafter, saw the second aircraft strike the World Trade Center. It was then that I knew that our country was under attack.

I told my staff to stay away from the Capitol building because I feared that it too could be a target. Today, we all still share the powerful emotions of shock, anger, and grief. I was worried not only about my staff, those in the building, but also staff members that I had who were on their way back from Portland, Maine, which turns out to be where some of the terrorists began their journey of death and destruction that day.

On the evening of that terrible day, members of Congress gathered together on the steps of the U.S. Capitol. With tears in our eyes and sorrow in our hearts, together we sang, “God Bless America.” The emotions of shock, anger, and grief were joined by unity, resolve, and patriotism.

That sense that swept over us as we sang was a source of strength in the challenges we faced in the fight against terrorism.

So many were killed that horrific day. In my State of Maine, we remember Robert and Jackie Norton of Lubec, a devoted retired couple who boarded Flight 11 to celebrate a son’s wedding on the West Coast. We remember James Roux of Portland, an Army veteran and a devoted father, on his way to a business meeting in California. We remember Robert Schlegel of Gray, who was celebrating his recent promotion to the rank of Commander in the United States Navy, and was still settling into his new office at the Pentagon when the plane struck. We remember Stephen Ward of Gorham, who was working on the 101st floor of the North Tower that terrible morning.

On this solemn anniversary, we join all Americans in remembering the nearly 3,000 people who lost their lives that day – lives of accomplishment, contribution, and promise. Each loss leaves a wound in the hearts of families and friends that can never be fully healed.

And we honor the heroes of that day. We still are moved by the selfless courage of men and women on Flight 93 who wrestled that plane to the ground in Pennsylvania, sacrificing their lives so that others might live. We are inspired by the firefighters, EMS personnel, and police officers at the World Trade Center who continued to climb upward to rescue those who were in peril even as the Twin Towers were tumbling down. The

New York City Fire Department alone lost 343 firefighters who responded to the attacks. We pay tribute today and every day to the first responders, the military personnel, and the civilians who rushed into the smoke and flames at the Pentagon to lead others to safety. We express our gratitude to those who have given so much to defend our nation against terrorism—the men and women of our armed forces.

While millions of Americans watched in horror as the tragedy unfolded on that terrible day, the thousands of courageous first responders who rushed to the World Trade Center, who rushed to that field in Pennsylvania, who rushed to the Pentagon to help search for victims and to help bring anyone they could to safety still inspires us. They put themselves in imminent danger to save the lives of others. Later on, we learned that the toxic dust and debris that many were exposed to have caused chronic illnesses. The overwhelming bipartisan vote here in the Senate this July to permanently reauthorize the 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund ensures that those first responders who risked their lives to save their fellow Americans will always be supported and their illnesses treated.

September 11 was a day of personal tragedy for so many families. It was also an attack on the United States of America and an assault on civilization. We must never forget what was lost and what remains at stake. We must continue our pledge, the pledge that we made that horrific day, to do all that we can to prevent future attacks.

The fundamental obligation of government is to protect its people. Since September 11, 2001, we have done much to meet that obligation, but more work remains. In the aftermath of those attacks, former Senator from Connecticut Joe Lieberman and I, as leaders of the Homeland Security Committee, worked in a bipartisan way with the leaders of the 9/11 Commission and the families of those who were lost to terrorist attacks on that day to pass the most sweeping reforms of our intelligence community since World War II. It is significant that the *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act* passed the Senate by a vote of 96 to 2 and that, of the hundreds of amendments considered, not a single one was decided by a party-line vote.

In what seemed like a moment, September 11, 2001, was transformed from a day like any other into one that, forever, will stand alone. The loss we relive reminds us of the value of all we must protect. The heroism reminds us of the unconquerable spirit of the American people. Our accomplishments remind us that we can meet any challenge. As long as we keep this day of remembrance in our hearts, we shall meet the challenges that lie ahead.

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