

**TESTIMONY OF DEBRA BURLINGAME**

**HEARING ON THE NATIONAL 9/11 MEMORIAL AT THE WORLD  
TRADE CENTER ACT, H.R. 3036**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL RESOURCES, SUBCOM-  
MITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS**

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2015**

Mr. Chairman, Ms. Ranking Member, Members of the Committee:

Today, our nation marks the 14th anniversary of the most horrific foreign terrorist attack on American soil in the history of our country, killing 2,977 innocent men, women and children, and resulting in the greatest single loss of rescue personnel in American history. This is our generation's "day of infamy."

It is entirely fitting that this hearing takes place today, on the day when the country and the world remembers and honors those we lost 14 years ago. What greater honor can we give them than to ensure that their memory, and the memory of who we were as a nation in those dark and difficult days, endures long after we, the witnesses to this history, are gone?

September 11th is more than a day on the calendar that comes and goes once a year. "9/11" is the name of an experience that has never really left us. Indeed, in fourteen years, not a day has gone by that 9/11 is not referenced in some way, somewhere, whether in political and policy discussions, in the news media, in books, movies, television and the arts. The lexicon of 9/11 has become a part of the fabric of our shared memory as Americans, and perhaps for the estimated 2 billion people all over the world who watched that day unfold in real time. It is the day on which all of our lives changed forever.

My family lost our oldest brother, Captain Charles F. "Chic" Burlingame, III, pilot-in-command of American Airlines Flight 77, the Los Angeles-bound plane that was hijacked and crashed into the Pentagon. We learned from the Flight Data Recorder that Chic and his co-pilot, David Charlebois, fought their attackers for six long minutes in the confined cockpit of their plane. It gave his two brothers and

me some solace to know that Chic, a former Navy fighter pilot, gave every last ounce of his strength to save his passengers and crew.

Everyone in this room knows the larger facts of what happened that day; four commercial airliners were hijacked by 19 radical Islamic terrorists and flown into the World Trade Center twin towers, the Pentagon and crashed into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. The entire attack, from the moment the first cockpit door was breached at 8:18 a.m. to the collapse of the second World Trade Center tower at 10:28 am, took a mere 130 minutes. 2,977 mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, daughters, sons and siblings, including foreign nationals from 93 different countries, were brutally murdered in two hours and 10 minutes. They were going to work, or flying home, just starting their day, never dreaming that it would be the last crystal clear, beautiful morning they would ever see.

The attacks were savage, merciless and cruel. They were carried out in a manner intended to inflict more than human loss and physical destruction. The shocking sight of passenger planes slamming into buildings was a calculated act of psychological terror. The attacks were meant to instill great fear, panic and confusion.

Instead, the country reacted with courage, compassion and moral clarity. The contrast between the culture of death and the sanctity of life couldn't have been more profound: 19 religious fanatics who were willing to die in order to kill thousands of people, including eight small children, versus hundreds of firefighters, police and ordinary citizens who rushed to the scene or stayed behind in those buildings, who risked or gave their lives or suffered terrible injuries and disfiguring burns to get other people to safety. That is the memory all of us cherish 14 years later, the other side of human agency, brotherly love.

This was the triumph of human decency over human depravity. That is how my family got through that day, and all the hard days that followed, and that is how this country got through it. United flight 93, believed to be headed for the U.S. Capitol while both houses of Congress were in session, became the first counterattack in the war on terror. In the blink of an eye, 40 unarmed citizens assessed their situation, *took a vote* and decided to take back the plane or die trying. Their decisive act of courage inspired an entire nation to follow their lead, determined, in the words of United 93 passenger Tom Burnett, to "do something."

Volunteers arrived at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon from as far away as Alaska and Hawaii. Some brought heavy equipment or vital provisions, others brought working K-9s. Some just brought their skills or their muscle, clearing de-

bris, working on their hands and knees. Thousands of people stood in line for hours to donate blood, while others saw a need and, on their own initiative, filled it. When it was reported that rescue workers' gloves and boots were melting from the heat of the fires underneath the debris field, hundreds of replacements pairs appeared, like magic. No one knew who sent them. A Manhattan lawyer received a frantic call from his wife who was volunteering at Ground Zero telling him to stop everything he was doing and bring ice to treat rescue workers' eyes. He did, supplying 20 tons a day for nine weeks, as well as raising the funds to pay for it.

Much of the massive effort at Ground Zero and the Pentagon was never reported by the press. The media, for the most part, were not allowed inside the perimeters of the sites, in part because it was so dangerous, in part out of respect for the victims whose remains were scattered everywhere.

I asked a New York City firefighter who responded that day and who worked "the Pile" for nine long months what he thought the victims went through that morning. He said, "Imagine the twin towers were two giant blenders that suddenly got switched on. The people inside were cut to pieces, and flung from river to river." Their remains landed on the rooftops and window ledges, all over Lower Manhattan. This was the horror that confronted rescue and recovery workers which the public did not see.

Three days after the attacks, when the fires were still burning and the missing still unaccounted for, President Bush invoked the character of our nation from a lectern at the National Cathedral, calling our unity a "kinship of grief" that hardened a steadfast resolve.

Indeed, the recovery and building effort was viewed as a blunt message to Osama Bin Laden. Work went on at the Pentagon 24 hrs a day, seven days a week, as construction workers showed up from other states and business-as-usual rules were suspended. A giant digital clock, emblazoned with Todd Beamer's last known words, "Let's Roll," displayed a running countdown of the days, hours and minutes, inspiring workers on the site to meet their goal, finishing by 9:37a.m. on the one year anniversary of the moment when American Flight 77 crashed into the building. An estimated four-year job was completed in less than 12 months.

At the World Trade Center, an army of iron workers and heavy-equipment operators cut and moved twisted steel and steaming concrete, clearing an astonishing 1.8 million tons in a continuous convoy of trucks and a 20,000-barge armada. The last beam to be cleared, covered from top to bottom with handwritten prayers and mes-

sages of hope from those who'd worked the site, was hauled away in a solemn ceremony that left grown men weeping openly. It is of utmost importance to acknowledge the sacrifice of these magnificent Americans.

Over 71,000 people, from every state in the union, and 429 Congressional districts, worked at the World Trade Center site. All were exposed to toxic airborne debris, with devastating and long-lasting consequences. A staggering 3,700 hundred responders and survivors have been certified to have a 9/11-related cancer, 85 New York Police Department officers and over 110 Firefighters have died of their 9/11 injuries and more are expected in the coming years.

No reflection about 9/11 and the nation's response to that day is complete without recognition of the commitment, accomplishments and heroic sacrifices of our military whether in the mountains of Afghanistan an the sands of Iraq. A large number of these men and women signed up for service or re-enlisted as a result of the September 11 attacks. They have never taken down the flags of 9/11 or forgotten that day.

According to the Department of Defense, 2.5 million members of all five branches of the military, including Reserves and the National Guard served in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Congressional Research Service report on Military Statistics published last month, states that we have lost a total of 6,779 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. 52,000 troops were wounded.

These valiant men and women continue to serve and sacrifice. They are a central part of the story of 9/11 and they have earned the right to be remembered with profound gratitude on this day.

My intention today is to make clear that the National September 11 Memorial is much, much more than a collection of names. It is a place where people from all over the country and the world can remember the people we lost, and the people we were on that day, to touch the place that touched us all, and to reflect on what we hope our future to be.

The Memorial has been universally embraced by 9/11 families, by the American public, and by foreign visitors from all over the world. Since it opened four years ago, the Memorial has been visited by over 21 million people from 175 countries, including three U.S. presidents, hundreds of heads of state and foreign dignitaries and over 125 members of Congress. Later this month, His Holiness, Pope Francis I, will be visiting the Memorial and holding an interfaith service there. This is a

testament to the power of this history, and the universally shared belief in the sanctity of life.

I was deeply honored when the Memorial Foundation's first and founding Chairman, the late John Whitehead, asked me to be one of 9/11 family members to join the foundation's board of directors eleven years ago. It has been a great privilege to serve alongside such distinguished people who, each and every one, brought their own professional expertise to this project. This has been and continues to be a real working board, including engineers, builders, financiers, CPAs, public officials, and of course, our chairman, who succeeded John Whitehead, Mayor Michael Bloomberg. He has been, without question, instrumental to the success of this project.

I can tell you that this board, along with Memorial Foundation CEO Joe Daniels and his extraordinarily dedicated staff, has met or exceeded every goal we have set for ourselves. We come to you, members of Congress, not to ask for a free ride, but to help us bridge the gap to get us to the next stage of our development.

In closing, I leave you with this thought. All of us who witnessed the attacks of September 11, 2001 have a "9/11 story." Everyone I meet has one. And they are all poignant and real. Even the humblest reflection can touch my heart or give me pause. But what about the children who were not yet born on that day? The babies born in 2001 are starting 8th grade this month. The five year olds who were starting their first day of kindergarten on the morning of September 11th are in college now.

I have talked to these young people, the post-9/11 generation. They have no first-hand memories of that day. Indeed, for many of them 9/11 is a static picture of an airplane exploding into a building, eerily similar to what they see in action movies, or graphic video games. We who lived this history owe it to these children to preserve it for them and future generations. The foundation's board and staff feel a solemn obligation to remember, record and collect this history, even as it continues to unfold 14 years later. This is our legacy, ladies and gentlemen of the committee. We respectfully and humbly ask that you and our government recognize the sacredness of this place, and help us to fulfill this legacy on behalf of our fellow Americans, our friends throughout the world, and future generations who will be left to grapple with the world we leave them. Thank you.

## **Memorial Mission Statement**

**Remember and honor the thousands of innocent men, women, and children murdered by terrorists in the horrific attacks of February 26, 1993 and September 11, 2001.**

**Respect this place made sacred through tragic loss.**

**Recognize the endurance of those who survived, the courage of those who risked their lives to save others, and the compassion of all who supported us in our darkest hours.**

***May the lives remembered, the deeds recognized, and the spirit reawakened be eternal beacons, which reaffirm respect for life, strengthen our resolve to preserve freedom, and inspire an end to hatred, ignorance and intolerance.***

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