

It was a beautiful early autumn morning across New England, the Mid Atlantic and much of the country when millions ventured out of their homes to face the routine challenges of traffic jams and work. Some were up early boarding flights for the west coast. In New York City's financial district, executives, secretaries, accountants and clerks settled into their desks and cubicles. Still others who donned crisp military uniforms or civilian dress made their way to duty stations amidst the corridors of the Pentagon. No one across our land suspected that the bright light of that peaceful morning would soon turn as dark as night.

When news reports first broke of an unidentified aircraft crashing into the north tower of the World Trade Center, many did not pay close attention. It seemed like the unfortunate mistake of a wayward small aircraft. Then, 17 minutes later, after an airplane struck the south tower of the World Trade Center, the nation took pause.

I remember the morning of September 11, 2001, all too well. I was in Montgomery preparing for a meeting with state lawmakers. Like the rest of the world, I was slow to take notice of the fateful events unfolding before me. Within 30 minutes of the second plane crash, President Bush made an impromptu statement from a Florida classroom that America was under attack. Ten minutes later the third hijacked airplane collided with the west wall of the Pentagon. Minutes later all aircraft were ordered out of the skies and the White House and U.S. Capitol buildings were evacuated.

I recall watching the collapse of the Twin Towers on television and realizing that so much had changed in an instant. We did not yet know our adversaries, but each of us instinctively understood America was under attack.

Moved by the unbelievable courage of average Americans, first responders and others, we came to understand that our security and safety depended upon our reaching out to help our fellow countrymen and standing behind those who keep our nation safe and secure.

For everyone who lived through the horror of that mid-September morning ten years ago, the memories are hard to forget. Among them, images of desperate office workers leaping to their deaths from the heights of the World Trade Center buildings, the smoke billowing from the Pentagon and cell phone calls of those who made a last stand against their terrorist captors as their doomed flight came to a violent end in the quiet Pennsylvania countryside.

Each generation encounters life changing moments. The bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 and the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963 come to mind. For many of us, September 11, 2001, forever known as "9/11," is such a time.

This Sunday, the country will mark the tenth anniversary of the day that both shocked and inspired us. We will stop to reflect upon the 2,977 innocent victims of that day, including citizens of more than 90 countries.

We will reflect upon the amazing sacrifices that so many made that fateful day to save others. We will also reflect upon the miracles of that day, which enabled many to survive despite seemingly impossible odds.

We will reflect upon the thousands of American military personnel who have given their lives in the war against terror, including nearly 130 service members from Alabama. They are all remembered, and they are all our heroes.

Ten years after the horror of 9/11, evil is on the run. Osama Bin Laden, the elusive leader of the terror group which carried out those attacks, is dead. Additionally, the mastermind of 9/11, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, is in U.S. custody. While the battle against Al Qaeda and its allies continues, the once formidable international terrorist organization is stumbling.

During the dark hours of 9/11, President Bush predicted correctly that evil would not win the day. "The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them."

The triumph of the human spirit has never been as evident as what we witnessed on that Tuesday ten years ago. It remains with us today as we continue the struggle against those who would do us harm. It is manifest in the men and women in uniform serving on the front lines to protect our nation, and it is embodied in our community firefighters and law enforcement who routinely risk their lives for our safety. We can never thank them enough. We will never forget.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

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