

Remembering and Reflecting

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Words cannot express the outrage that is felt for the despicable and cowardly criminal acts carried out against innocent men and women of our country one year ago today. Everyone remembers exactly where we were and what we were doing that morning. When I placed a legislative call to Richmond in the early morning, I was told to turn on my television for a plane had just hit one of the World Trade Center Towers. I did so thinking all the while that the report must be a mistake. I stayed glued to my television set for days, although I seldom otherwise have an opportunity to watch television.

We can easily become complacent about the risks we face by living in an open society. At the same time, challenges to our way of life remind us of the enduring freedoms we enjoy. If anything can come of these tragic events, we need to focus on maintaining and strengthening our freedoms and on helping others to realize them throughout the world. We need to celebrate and reaffirm our commitment to openness, diversity and freedom and demonstrate to the world that no terrorist can take away these values.

This September 11 will not be a normal day for any of us. I will start the day with a tree planting ceremony at Dogwood Elementary School sponsored by the Reston Character Counts Coalition. The Coalition is doing a wonderful job, and we need to support strongly their efforts. Character does count, and working with our young people on character and values can prevent many future tragedies.

I will then head to Richmond for a legislative committee meeting. Our democratic institutions are still in place and still fully operational, although you do need to go through a metal detector in our state buildings for the first time because of September 11.

But I am glad I need to be in Richmond today. While there, I am going to the Library of Virginia where Virginia's 1789 manuscript copy of the proposed United States Bill of Rights with its original 12 amendments will be on display for the day. Virginia's document is one of only 12 surviving original signed copies. It is being displayed today "to offer visitors a chance to reflect on this tragic anniversary and remember the enduring importance of the Bill of Rights."

When I return to Reston I am going to Freedom Grove where Reston Association staff and volunteers have created a most beautiful memorial. Through plantings and a sculpture by Kathy Kaplan on the hillside behind Browns Chapel, the tragic events and loss of lives including Restonians Norma Cruz Kahn and Leonard Taylor are memorialized.

Many activities are scheduled for the evening in places of worship and in public facilities. Amidst the tragedy and grief in remembering the day, there is so much for which we can be thankful. When we do not give up on our basic freedoms, we will endure beyond any acts or threats of terrorism. That we all should remember today and every day.