



**Homeland
Security**

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Prepared Remarks by Secretary Napolitano on the 15th Anniversary of the Oklahoma City Bombing

Release Date: April 19, 2010

Oklahoma City, Okla.
Outdoor Symbolic Memorial

Secretary Napolitano: Good morning. I am humbled to be here today to mark this solemn anniversary, and to honor the 168 lives taken from us, now 15 years ago in an unspeakable act of terrorism.

We honor the survivors, their friends, and family members, whose continued sense of hope, and strength of spirit, inspires us all.

We honor the first responders who risked their lives rushing into the Murrah Building in acts of selflessness reminiscent of those we've seen since—in the response to 9/11, after the Fort Hood shooting—and in daily acts of heroism that often don't make the evening news.

We honor the continued need for vigilance against the hateful ideologies that led to this attack, so that we can recognize their signs in our communities and stand together to defeat them.

Above all, we remind ourselves that what defines us as a nation, as a people, and as communities, is not that we've suffered, but how we've risen above it—how we've overcome.

The history of Oklahoma City will not be written by this attack. As this memorial and museum attest, the history of this city and its people will be written by what came afterward, and by what's yet to come; by the tremendous outpouring of community support that became known as the Oklahoma Standard; by the immense rescue and relief operation, which included support from over 12,000 federal, state, local, and community participants, including 665 FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] employees; by the difficult lessons learned about the need to steel our defenses against terrorism, and improve how we protect our country; and; by the unwavering determination to seek justice for the perpetrators of this crime.

Fifteen years ago, I was privileged to lead a portion of the criminal investigation into this attack as the U.S. Attorney for Arizona.

In Arizona alone, 150 agents were assigned to the case, and for a full six weeks we maintained a command post in Kingman to ensure that every legal tool available to us would be used to support the investigation.

I wish it were possible to stand here and say that threats from terrorism and violent extremism have gone away since then. We know that's not the case.

Indeed, in the 15 years since this attack, the reality of terrorism has come home to us again. And our adversaries continue to look for ways to exploit our openness and take innocent lives.

Nor have we shed the reality of domestic violent extremism.

When FEMA, now part of the Department of Homeland Security [DHS], joined in the rescue effort here in 1995, my Department was still years from being formed.

Today, our first priority remains protecting against, and preventing, another terrorist attack on America. And we have learned from this tragedy by continuing to implement and refine the security standards and procedures developed since 1995.

In fact, this week the DHS-led Interagency Security Committee announced new security standards for all Federal buildings and facilities.

And our Federal Protective Service announced the broad deployment of a new risk assessment tool to help their inspectors keep more than 9,000 facilities secure.

We will continue to work day and night, and constantly ask ourselves if we're doing everything

we can to prevent another terrorist attack.

But making preparedness part of our culture will ultimately draw on the innovation and civic spirit of the American people. And our nation has never lacked for that.

We can't put a dome over our country. We can't guarantee there won't be another attack. No one can.

But we are a strong, resilient country. And we can resolve that even a successful attack will not defeat our way of life.

We can target our resources against emerging threats and evolving risks. And we are working to better empower the American public, and draw on what President Obama has called our greatest national security asset: our values.

It is those values that define us as a nation. And those values will always be a force more powerful than the ideology of a tiny few.

Our nation has faced down violent extremism before. We've witnessed terrorism, at home and abroad, and could witness it again some day.

But in big ways and small, that resilience is a pillar of our security, and there has been no better example than right here in Oklahoma City.

We've seen it again and again—in the passengers who took matters into their own hands on September 11th, and indeed again on December 25th last year.

And in the citizens of New Orleans, reclaiming their communities after Katrina, and in Greensburg, Kansas, rebuilding their town after it was destroyed by a tornado in 2007.

All these examples could have ended differently. But the resilience, and the sense of shared responsibility that kicked in each time took them in another direction.

Around Oklahoma, and around the country, there are thousands of young elm trees growing, each having started as a cutting from the Survivor Tree that still stands before us.

Among the children who survived that terrible day, the first has now graduated from high school.

And among the many thousands of Oklahomans and Americans whose lives were touched by this tragedy, there are untold and countless stories of bravery, of strength, and of courage.

Terrorism is a tactic designed not just to kill, but to make us feel powerless. But we are never powerless. We control the way we prepare ourselves, the way we anticipate and combat the threats, and the way we respond if something does happen.

America is a strong nation. We are a resilient nation. And as we confront these new threats, we will use our values and our way of life as the most powerful source of our strength. For now, and for years to come.

Here at the Memorial, there is an inscription at the Survivor tree that reads, "The spirit of this city and this nation will not be defeated; our deeply rooted faith sustains us."

This sounds like wisdom to me and describes perfectly that intangible quality that, whatever challenges we face—we will respond, we will persevere, and we will continue to thrive in our families, in our communities, and across our nation.

Thank you.

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This page was last reviewed/modified on April 19, 2010.

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