Mr. President, I vividly recall, as do most Americans,

exactly where I was 12 years ago this morning. My son, Al, who had only

recently celebrated his third birthday, was beginning his very first

day at preschool. It was a big day for my wife Jenny and me, filled

with that mixture of excitement and trepidation that is familiar to all

young parents.

Shortly after waving goodbye to Al, we heard the shocking news--an

airplane had hit the South Tower of the World Trade Center.

As a native New Jerseyan, raised in the shadow of the Twin Towers, I

could picture the scene in my mind's eye.

My first assumption was that a small plane--perhaps one of the

sightseeing planes that provided visitors with a bird's-eye view of the

wonders of Lower Manhattan and the harbor--had somehow flown off course

into the building.

Less than 20 minutes later, however, when the second plane hit, I

knew, as we all did, that this was no accident. America was under

attack. And as the morning unfolded and the horror increased--the

Pentagon was hit, the towers fell, United flight 93 was brought to the

ground near Shanksville, PA--my thoughts turned to faith and family.

I thought of my son--young and innocent, starting his very first day

in school--and I realized the world that existed when we dropped him

off that morning had changed.

I thought of so many friends and neighbors who might very well have

been on the plane that flew out of Newark that morning or in those

proud buildings that had been reduced to rubble. I hoped and prayed

that they were safe.

I thought of the people who had surely lost their lives in the

attacks--in numbers more than any of us could bear, as Mayor Giuliani

so eloquently put it--and prayed for them and their families.

And as the day drew to its awful conclusion, I knew that for so many,

the terrible anguish of this day was just beginning, and the reminders

of that were everywhere: the children whose parents would never arrive

to pick their children up from school, the empty place at the dinner

table, the gaping hole in the hearts of those who loved those who

perished.

Twelve years later, the passage of time has, for many, helped to

bring some measure of healing. But the scars remain, and they will

never completely fade away.

So today we remember, as we do every year and as we should every day,

all those who lost their lives, both in the terrorist attacks

themselves and also on foreign fields of battle in the defense of our

freedom and our way of life.

We remember today, as we do every year and as we should every day,

all those who were injured in the attacks and on the battlefield.

We remember today, as we do every year and as we should every day,

all those who responded to the attacks with bravery and determination

and many of whom still struggle with the aftermath of their courageous

actions.

And we remember today, as we do every year and should every day, all

those who lost friends, colleagues, and family members in the attacks

and in the years since. Their suffering is our suffering and we must

never forget that.

Today is also a day for renewal, for renewing the sense of purpose

that united our nation in the aftermath of the attacks, for renewing

the spirit of cooperation that made it possible for our country to move

forward, both through individual acts of courage, kindness, and

compassion and through acts of governance that helped us meet the

challenges we faced, and for renewing our determination to keep America

safe while also safeguarding our liberties.

Twelve years ago today, when Jenny and I dropped off our son for his

very first day of school--he is, by the way, now a high school

freshman--we could never have imagined how much the world would change

before he had even settled in to his new preschool routine.

But although so much has changed, one thing remains constant:

America, is, as she always had been, a beacon of hope to the world. No

act of terror--no matter how brutal--will ever diminish the bright,

shining light of the American spirit.