

Sept. 11 Attack 20th Anniversary: Live Updates >

# In Shanksville, Biden says the future of democracy is on the line.



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By Katie Rogers

Shortly after former President George W. Bush spoke at the Flight 93 memorial in Shanksville, Pa., on Saturday, President Biden arrived to observe a wreath-laying ceremony at the place where, 20 years ago, a plane crashed after brave passengers and crew members confronted the terrorists who had hijacked it.

“It’s one thing to say, ‘I know I should step up.’ It’s another thing to do it,” Mr. Biden said to a crowd gathered at a volunteer fire department after the ceremony. “That’s genuine heroism.”

Mr. Biden praised Mr. Bush’s speech, a call to unity for Americans divided by their political differences. And as he prepared to leave Shanksville for his last stop at the Pentagon, the president addressed a topic that takes up great deal of his attention: the existential battle he feels is happening in America, and the choice he believes must be made between democracy and the rising influence of authoritarianism.

“Are we going to — in the next four, five, six, 10 years — demonstrate that democracies can work, or not?” he asked.

As president, Mr. Biden is struggling to move on from the far-reaching aftermath of the attacks. The end of the war in Afghanistan has been politically costly for him and has made it difficult for him to pivot to a foreign policy doctrine that positions the country to fight what he sees as more pressing challenges: combating climate change, preparing for future pandemics and keeping pace with China.

Before he left Shanksville, Mr. Biden said that he was appalled at how coarse the political dialogue between Republicans and Democrats had become.

“They think this makes sense for us to be in this kind of thing where you ride down the street and someone has a sign saying ‘F so and so,’” Mr. Biden said, referring to the expletive-laden signs that are often spotted along presidential motorcade routes.

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