

**Westchester County Executive Robert P. Astorino**  
**15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup> Twilight Ceremony**  
**Remarks**  
**September 11, 2016**

Let me start by thanking the Scarsdale High School choir. Just beautiful.

To all of our 911 families; welcome.

This day can never be easy for you. But, there is great strength being in your company. Your warm and now familiar faces give us comfort. I hope you can feel it as well.

And thanks to everyone else here tonight and watching at home on television. There are countless other things we could all be doing right now, and yet we choose to be here.

I think there are three reasons why: **remembrance, reflection and renewal.**

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It was said that 911 **changed everything**. It certainly struck a body blow to our notions of national security and human decency. When the sun came up on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2,977 innocent men and women had perished: 2,606 at the World Trade Center, 125 at the Pentagon, and 246 aboard the four airplanes.

Westchester's loss was 123.

Our remembrance tonight is bittersweet. We come here to grieve what was so wrongly taken from us. And yet beneath these silver beams pointing to heaven, our prayer is a celebration of all that is good.

The wounds never go away, but thankfully ..... neither do the memories.

The lives we lost on September 11, 2001 touched us ... shaped us ... and contributed to who we are today. We come to remember 15 years later, because we can never stop saying thank you for being part of our lives.

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Tonight also gives a chance to reflect.

911 is not just a memorial for the dead. Equally, it's an opportunity for the living.

It is a chance for all of us to hit the “pause” button on the overstuffed, overstimulated, and over the top activities that consume our daily lives .... and quietly ask ourselves what are the really important things for us to accomplish during our short time on earth?

911 didn't break us. To the contrary, it has given us a path to build a future – one day at a time, one step at a time – where we are smart enough to accept change, yet strong enough to never give up the principles that define our goodness as human beings.

In Westchester, our reflections have led us to act in the service for others.

Rather than focus on how 911 changed things, we've concentrated on what has stayed constant; such as helping others.

Little things can and do make a difference. Small actions have power.

All this weekend, our residents have been busy giving blood, writing thank you letters to veterans and first responders, making blankets for the homeless, donating diapers, joining the bone marrow registry and much more.

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This brings us to renewal; how do we keep the soul and spirit of 911 alive?

Shortly after the Pearl Harbor attack, President Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote a letter dated 15 years in the future to the President of the United States in 1956.

The letter requested that a “young American youth of goodly heritage” be considered for admission to the United States Military Academy at West Point.

That boy was 1-year old Colin Kelly III, whose father Colin Kelly Jr. was killed only days after the Pearl Harbor attack, flying bombing runs against the Japanese Navy. Considered one of the first American heroes of the war, Kelly died after first ordering his crew to bail out of his B-17 shortly before it exploded, killing him.

Fifteen years after the deadliest terror attack on American soil, a generation of 911 sons and daughters is coming of age.

Four of them are right in front of us.

Caitlyn Lyons shared the same birthday as her father, Michael, a New York City firefighter. She was a little over 13-months old when her father died at Ground Zero. Michael never got to meet his younger daughter. His wife was eight months pregnant. In tribute to her husband, Elaine Lyons named their second daughter Mary Michael.

Today, Caitlyn is an 11<sup>th</sup> grader at Westlake High School in Mount Pleasant. Mary Michael is right behind her in 10th grade. Caitlyn plays lacrosse and is a talented artist; her murals gracing both her elementary and high school.

Mary is on the high school track team and has already beaten one of the school records.

Across the county, Ryan and Ethan Zeplin both attend Rye Country Day School. Their story sounds a similar echo of sadness and resilience. Along with their mom, Debra, the two boys lost their dad on 911.

Marc Scott Zeplin, an equities trader at Cantor Fitzgerald, never made it home from his office on the 104<sup>th</sup> floor of the Trade Center's North Tower that day.

Fifteen years later, Ryan, a senior, and Ethan, a sophomore, are both varsity athletes and honor students. Those who know the boys best say their best feature is their positive attitude; smiling every day and living life to the fullest just like their dad.

President Roosevelt said that his letter into the future was intended as “an act of faith in the destiny of our country.”

There is no stronger renewal of President Roosevelt's “act of faith” than seeing Caitlyn, Mary Michael, Ryan and Ethan here tonight.

They give us confidence that whatever our challenges, our future remains an optimistic one.

Caitlyn, Mary Michael, Ryan and Ethan could you please stand.... Elaine and Debra could you please stand as well.

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Let me conclude our *remembrance, reflection and renewal* with these words from the New Testament. John, Chapter one, Verse five.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.”

Our presence here tonight is witness to this immutable truth.

On this the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of September 11, 2001, light continues to shine in America, across the world, and on the families of 911. May it shine forever.

Thank you and God Bless.

