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California Polytechnic State University

## **Reflections on the Events of September 11, 2001**

### **A Memorial Observance**

#### **California Polytechnic State University**

#### **Warren J. Baker, President**

#### **September 11, 2002**

[On the morning of Wednesday, September 11, 2002, California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly) faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends of the University joined together at Dexter Lawn on the Cal Poly campus to participate in a memorial observance of the events of September 11, 2001. The following text is a transcript of President Warren J. Baker's remarks on that occasion.]

#### Welcome and Memorial Observance

Good morning. Thank you for joining us this morning to reflect upon the events that occurred exactly one year ago today. This is but one of many programs which are being held in our community and across the country.

For those of us who have gathered here today at Cal Poly, it is our hope that this program will help unite us as one community and provide some comfort and solace as we remember those who lost their lives both here at home and abroad. By attending remembrance programs such as this one, we are each trying to gain some perspective on the past year and how it has impacted our lives and how it has altered our life as a nation.

To join me in this occasion, I am pleased to recognize valued colleagues and leaders within the Cal Poly community, Provost Paul Zingg, Academic Senate Chair Unny Menon and a new member of the Cal Poly community, Cornel Morton, Vice President for Student Affairs. I thank them for being a part of the program this morning. And I thank everyone in attendance for taking time from your busy days to participate in this memorial observance.

The Governor has proclaimed September 11 to be a "Day of Remembrance." He has asked that all flags be lowered to half-staff in recognition of this day of solemnity.

I am honored to ask two special friends of the University, Jack Spaulding and Bob Lee, to now come forward to lower our flag in remembrance.

Bob Lee is immediate past Commander of American Legion Post 66 in San Luis Obispo and Jack Spaulding is an active alumnus and member of the Alumni Association Board of Directors. Both of these veterans served on the planning committee for the Cal Poly Centennial Celebration Veterans Day Program held this past November 11.

During the Veteran's Day ceremony, the University community remembered those Cal Poly students who went out from the University to offer their service, and for some, their lives, in defense of our country and the values for which it stands - freedom, democracy, tolerance and pursuit of mutual understanding.

The flag that you see before you today was first displayed during this Veterans Day ceremony. As an element of today's remembrance event, we felt it was fitting and appropriate to incorporate this special flag, as a reminder that the terrible losses we have suffered, and the sacrifices we as a nation may yet be asked to make, echo those of earlier generations. We stand today united in memory with those past generations of Americans, civilian and military, who accepted service and sacrifice as the necessary cost of preserving liberty.

The flag will be returned to the Cal Poly Archives and thus will again become an important piece of Cal Poly's history.

Please rise for the lowering of the flag followed by a moment of silence.

Thank you. Please be seated.

### Reflections on the Events of September 11, 2001

The terrible loss of life, on September 11, 2001, as the result of terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, remains cruelly inscribed in our national consciousness as a tragedy of nearly unprecedented dimensions. Thousands of Americans and nationals of other countries were killed without warning. Their lives were taken, and the lives of their families and friends forever altered, by a small group of men who approached this mission of death and destruction with a degree of patience, premeditation and fanatical hatred that remains difficult to fathom and understand. While the immediate shock and grief occasioned by these events has subsided with the passage of time, we remain deeply saddened as a nation, and as a University community, and we are left with many more questions than answers.

It is important, therefore, that we come together today at Cal Poly, faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends of the University, to remember and to reflect upon the meaning of these events.

We continue to feel great sadness at the senseless loss of life occasioned by September 11. The many stories we have heard and seen in the media of individuals killed in the attacks remind us that each of the lives lost was irreplaceable. The terrorist strikes cruelly and arbitrarily snuffed out the love, inspiration, promise and potential that each of these precious human beings brought to their lives, and to the lives of those around them. We remain filled with sympathy for those who lost loved ones - including members of our campus community, and who continue every day to suffer from that terrible loss. So, today we should properly take time, as we are doing here at Cal Poly, to honor the memory of those who were killed and to reach out to those they left behind, in a visible expression of sympathy, solidarity and support. I know that each of you join me in that expression, with the greatest earnestness, sincerity and solemnity.

It is also important that we pause to reflect upon the broader meaning of the events of September 11 - and the intervening year.

By and large, as a nation, we can take great pride that we did not succumb to the fear and hatred the acts of terror were intended to provoke. In the immediate wake of the attacks, we saw many inspiring acts of personal courage and sacrifice - by fire fighters, police officers and emergency medical personnel, and also by average citizens, including the extraordinary heroism of the passengers on Flight 93, in Pennsylvania.

Many here at Cal Poly responded to the tragedy with an outpouring of sympathy and with donations of time and resources.

In addition, and very importantly, our national, state and local leaders, including virtually every university president, made statements affirming the fellowship and community of all Americans. We were reminded that while we are a diverse nation, with people from all corners of the globe, we remain one country, dedicated to the idea of freedom and to the rule of reason and law.

Here at Cal Poly, I believe we largely resisted the impulse to blame these terrible acts on any group, simply because of their ethnicity or beliefs. As a community we took positive steps to reject hate and maintain a strong commitment to the pursuit of mutual understanding, trust and fellowship. Through forums and classroom discussions we attempted to come to terms with the troubled contexts that lay behind the events of September 11. In the best traditions of the University, we responded to the unreason of the terrorists with reasoned inquiry and discourse and with the pursuit of deeper understanding.

This is not to say that we as a campus, or the nation more broadly, have weathered this difficult period without allowing fear, ignorance and misunderstanding to affect our judgments and actions in unfortunate ways. Certainly, here at Cal Poly, we have seen that appreciation for global humanity's diversity of ethnicity, faith and philosophy has sometimes given way to stereotype, prejudice and suspicion. We must continue, as a community, to resist these impulses, and to speak out resolutely against them.

As I indicated last year, in the immediate wake of the September 11 tragedy, at times like these, universities have a special responsibility and obligation to assert and defend the value of civil and reasoned discourse - and of civil liberties more broadly. As we have seen time and time again, the free exchange of ideas and information provides the only path to a just and enduring society.

It is increasingly evident that we as a nation are engaged in a twilight struggle with forces of unreason represented by the terrorists. This struggle will challenge and test our commitment to civil liberties. We will be tempted to trade freedom for security.

As a university community, we must remain steadfast in our pledge to preserve Cal Poly as a bastion of reason, knowledge, unfettered discourse and enlightened understanding. The careful protection of these values offers our best hope for a future in which all peoples around the world can live and work together in peace and harmony - and it is perhaps the most fitting way to honor the lives lost last September 11.

I am delighted to now introduce Cal Poly music faculty member William Terrence Spiller who will perform a work by a much-celebrated American composer, Aaron Copland. He chose a poetic and reflective piece befitting this occasion and I am delighted that he graciously agreed to be part of this program.

*(Musical Interlude: Aaron Copeland, In Evening Air, Performed by Dr. William Terrence Spiller.)*

Thank you, Terry. And thank you again to all of you, for taking time to share in this important memorial observance.

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