**PATRIOT SPEECH**

**FOR**

**JOHN FRANKLIN BATKINS**

It was a beautiful, crisp and clear September morning... cool air and a nearly cloudless sky enveloped the city. Folks scurried about their lives on this idyllic late summer morning and had no time to brace for the shock. At 8:46 am, a catastrophic disturbance never foreseen by Auden when he penned, "Into this neutral air where blind skyscrapers use their full height to proclaim the strength of collective man” literally rocked the earth because AI-Qaeda Terrorists aboard hijacked American Airlines Flight 11 crashed their plane into floors 93-99 of the World Trade Center's North Tower, killing everyone on board as well as hundreds inside the building... And eighteen minutes later American Flight 175 hit the remaining South Tower. Our native son Adam White was one of those killed that day. When his father, Shelby White of Atlanta, was asked by the AJC if he will ever have "closure" on the horrific event, he said, “I don't know what closure is. If it means l am not going to think about my son, well that's never going to happen. I think about him every day, and I will until l'm off this planet." And to America's allies after Osama Bin Laden was killed he added, “This sends a message that we don't give up." Adam's stepmother, Georgia White, who helped raise him from the age of four, also had concerns beyond her grief. “Hopefully nothing will happen but l'm sure those people will retaliate." Georgia noted that she'd been weeping because the vivid memories of that fateful day flooded back to her consciousness as she once more was unwillingly seeing the planes flying into, and obliterating, the Twin Towers, "knowing my son is there."

Another killed that day when American Flight 77 smashed into the Pentagon at 9:37 am is still mourned by Sara Guest of Atlanta. Her sister, Leslie Whittington, was killed along with Leslie's husband, Charles Falkenberg and their two daughters, Zoe, 8, and Dana, 3. Leslie had lived in Athens and Atlanta where she attended Georgia State University and went on to become a Professor of Public Policy at Georgetown University. She and her family were on Flight 77 because she was headed to Down-under Country where she would be a visiting Fellow at Australian National University . This promising family’s future was lost in the blink of an eye.

At 10.10 am, United Airlines flight 93 crashed into Somerset County, Pennsylvania. There are no words for the barbaric brutality we witnessed as all aboard Flight 93 died trying to stop terrorists that late summer day of infamy after which we all wondered what is next?

Liberty and Justice for all in **ONE** Nation under God. In these simple words lie the cornerstone upon which our democratic ideals are built. Our individual Rights as Citizens in America set us apart from most of the world, along with the widely held belief that economic prosperity is possible if one works hard and becomes educated well enough to overcome most deficits from the random circumstances of birth. These Ideals, as manifested in our way of life, are what the Radicalized Zealots attacked on 9/11. They killed 2,753 of our fellow Americans in their coordinated, despicable, and vicious acts of terror. Make no mistake . The emotional after-shocks still linger whether we are conscious of them or not.

It’s on this day, 9/11/2018, proclaimed by Presidential Declaration from each of our sitting Presidents since that infamous day in 2001, that we are called to remember and to honor the lives we lost in those attacks. We also acknowledge and celebrate America's strong history of steadfastly placing Service above self, especially as we manifest our fragile ideals in the face of terrorism’s push to further fear and division between us, both near and far. We cannot allow ourselves to lose sight of who we are because those who wish us ill are trying to blind us by threatening the freedoms that define us.

It can be said that we are winning the war on terror **militarily** but losing it psychologically... although we are diminishing the terrorists’ scope as well as their numbers, we have allowed their threats to affect our way of life. As a result, we have become more fearful and divided, according to Pew and the American Psychology Association research. Specifically, Pew’s 2016 figures state that 40 percent of Americans now believe we are more vulnerable to terrorism than after 9/11. Further, it seems that our sense of security is tied to whether or not our political party of affiliation is in the Oval Office. If the person we support is the President, then we feel safer no matter what the evidence shows regarding the real threats out there. This may reflect confidence in the Commander in Chief that we supported for the office. While this level of division previously existed to some degree, researchers are concerned about the depth of divide. 2016 marked the first year in the survey’s history that most of one party thought the terrorists had the upper hand and most of them in 2016 were folks who did not vote for Mr. Obama. Now that Mr. Trump is in office, the script has flipped, as we say, to show that Democrats are leading the way by being more fearful.

So, has terrorism changed us beyond party loyalty? Attacks have continued around the world and the effects have complex impact. We know that for some of us, life is forever changed. The world is a more frightening place than before 9/11...**NOT** just for those who were personally attacked, and for those who witnessed first-hand, but even those who were in a safe place and just heard or saw or read about it. Many folks are more anxious and hyper-vigilant. The fear of another attack appears to be embedded in our collective conscience. Little data exists on how that rise in fear and anxiety may affect our future decisions, but it can be argued that those threats are changing how we live and how we think. Further, our usual cognitive therapy techniques do not seem to work well, partly because we need to know we are in a safer place to process them.... But if you don’t know when or where the next attack will occur... of course without warning, then traditional cognitive methods will not be as effective... if useful at all. Second, the threat of terrorism is hard to predict , so reasonable fear is present and unreasonable anxiety may follow. Finally, the possibility of terrorism easily leads to anxiety because there is no known end. We researchers, and our neighbors, ask about things that are changed, and Americans respond, “I travel less and have safety in mind when I do; we avoid big events more, and we have less trust in people who are different than us.” Hate crimes as well as gun purchases are up in our search for safety. Justin Sinclair, a professor at James Williams College in New England, wonders what many of us have hesitated to voice about the effect of terrorism . That is, perhaps, it’s not just the horrible damage done in the attacks, but the worse fallout could be our reaction to searching for a sense of safety and the need to do almost anything to protect ourselves. This desperate approach begs for thoughtful consideration. To that end, I submit that doing nothing new in the face of threats is asking for more threats, but reacting out of fear is an urge we need to resist. As one of the world’s superpowers, we ought to engage in behaviors that protect both ourselves, our way of life, and especially our ideals, because that’s what the terrorists want to destroy. Taking effective **action** to maintain our freedoms works to defeat their efforts.

It’s beyond our scope to define and eliminate all the “bad actors” who are simultaneously attacking, such as the most recently documented group of Russian operatives. They seek to widen and deepen our divides using cyber and personal means to insidiously spread misinformation. Their agents’ focus is to weaken our faith in the institutions and methods that support our way of life such as our free press. Russia, and others, have meddled in our elections; pitted millennials against baby-boomers; white people against people of color; poor against rich; political parties against one another, and as many other areas of conflict as they can **gin** to diminish rational outcomes to our common differences. Therefore, let us support our government’s efforts to decrease the attacks when consistent with our nation’s values and help emphasize those noble efforts when they are righteous and effective. When we **don’t** defy these forces, especially misinformation and fear, our trust in one another decreases and we weaken the essence of what holds our Union together. Otherwise, when anxious, we may engage in emotional and impulsive short-term actions that are ineffective in the long term. The result? Instead of fighting the **real** enemy, we will continue to attack **one another**. (We have acted, unfortunately, like rats in a cage where the floor is electrified and escape impossible; so, they attack one another.)

It’s time we face our fears and fight the threats to our Nation’s peace and declared purpose. We must use **reasonable** strategies to achieve long-term results. What better day to come together then on Patriot’s Day, where we remember those we lost in a fight we did not know we were in and a day in which service is celebrated above self. John Lennon said " There are two basic motivating forces: fear and love... all hopes for a better world rest in the fearlessness of an open-hearted vision of people who **embrace life**." So, love one another my friends, and do not be afraid since your cause is righteous.

We know that by making ourselves a more hardened target is one way our institutions can help us be protected, but acting to protect our ideals is every patriot’s responsibility... **especially** if it supports those ideals. In short, America must put an end to our unforgiving divides or our divides will put an end to America. To that end let me tell you about a dream I had on the longest day of this year- On the first day of summer, I dreamed of a shining city on a hill where justice and freedom reigns and where opposing views are openly, rationally, and good heartedly debated in the service of seeking a greater compassion-filled truth for the benefit of all concerned...a truth that lifts the human spirit and strengthens the peace and understanding we all seek.

As Lincoln stated " A house divided against itself cannot survive." We cannot allow ourselves to lose sight of who we are because bad actors are blinding us by threatening the freedoms that define us. We must come together and engage in supportive, constructive, and respectful dialogue. Rotarians, in conjunction with other service-oriented stakeholders, such as The American Legion, The Covington News, Emory at Oxford, the Kiwanis, Covington First UMC, and other apolitical and areligious international service organizations and non-proselytizing religious institutions have expressed initial support in the idea of affirming and defending our ideals through a series of consensus debates. Thus, manifesting Voltaire’s and Hall's famous admonition:” I wholly disapprove of what you are saying and will defend to the death your right to say it”. Since our democratic republic wants full involvement from as many as possible, I see a series of debates that include a range of age groups, the guidelines of which are on the first handout I gave you today. Those handout guidelines will be finalized by a Rotarian panel designated by our President. The debates’ goals are to explore, clarify and defend our constitutional ideals starting with the first amendment and using the pros and cons of free speech to come to a consensus agreement. This process will be shared with other clubs and stakeholders in nearby counties and beyond. The results will be shared with print, electronic and social media.

Lincoln went on to say, " I do not expect the house to fall (but By God- my emphasis not his), I do expect it will cease to be divided." So, my friends let's take back our house and strengthen this precious Union against those who would sow the seeds of fear and mistrust. Let us act to live out the dreams of the founders and defenders of this land of the free and home of the brave. And let's begin today by implementing our humble plan for peace and unity that this grand experiment called America may endure. Margaret Mead said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” In the timeless wisdom of John Kennedy: "Let the word go forth from this time and place to friend and foe alike… that we Americans are unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are still committed today at home and around the world.”

September 11, 2001 began as a relentlessly sunny and pleasant day, but NO **ONE** expected everything to implode. Life, as our generation knew it, changed forever. Innocence, trust, and a good degree of hope died. Residents of Manhattan clearly remember how the burning rubble’s smell permeated the air. The mushroom cloud of destruction replaced the world’s tallest towers. Witnesses remember that even several miles away, “That cloud of smoke burned for DAYS.... maybe even weeks. It was huge and completely surreal. Because the nights were getting cooler bedroom windows remained open, the community kept breathing in the dust of the fallen. And that’s when most realized, **they’re all inside of us** now.” The ashes have dissipated, but America must **never forget and never give in to fear, for our future depends upon our courage to “do the right thing”**.

Finally, we are a Nation puzzled by the polarizing chaos of the present. We are a people in search of a cohesive, respectful future. Our country is rich in resources but splintered in spirit... we may be reaching for the stars but our enemies are working to widen our divides through misinformation and fear. As concerned citizens, our time to **act** is long overdue especially since we have always stood side by side in times of peril in this Great Nation. And once again, as **Americans,** we must find and defend our ideological common ground. This, so that our work may honor the tragic lost dreams of 9/11’s victims who "slipped the surly bonds of earth" to "touch the face of God." My friends, to honor these unrealized dreams I ask you to heed the immortal words of Todd Beamer’s call to action: Let’s Roll!. Let’s roll by supporting our debate on the first Amendment.” And let’s Roll by looking deep within ourselves to find the courage needed to pursue unity among our people at this time of peril . Let’s Roll!! And may God Bless our Work. Thank you.

—