



Official Remarks

9/11 Remembrance Ceremony at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson

9.11.23

Hello, my name is Mary Peltola. As the Representative for all Alaska, it is my profound honor to speak to you all, and to welcome our President to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson on this day.

Like many Alaskans, I come from a family of pilots. I grew up in small planes, and the sight and sound of them were constants in my life. The buzz of a single engine prop overhead will always remind me of home.

For me, 9/11 will always be the day where there were no planes in the sky over Alaska. No planes, anywhere. While only a fraction of the horror unfolding across the country, the silence above was an eerie symbol of how the world had suddenly and completely changed.

Today, one of the most solemn days in our nation's memory, is a time for many things. It is a time for mourning for all the innocent lives that were lost and the families who will never be the same. It is a time of remembrance, and for honoring all those brave souls—firefighters, police officers, EMS teams, and passengers—who rushed into danger to save others.

And most importantly, I believe it should be a time of hope. Because alongside the darkest memories of today, I also remember what happened afterwards--how we all came together to rebuild and to heal. In the aftermath of devastation, we remembered what it means to believe in America. It is that spirit of sacrifice and patriotism that I see in my two sons who currently serve in our Coast Guard, and in every member of this audience today.

To all of those here and across America who have sacrificed for us in the armed services or in civilian roles—to you I say, on behalf of all Alaska: you have our sincere and undying thanks.

As I stand here, I'm reflecting on something that I've said before and that is often on my mind when people speak about partisanship and division in Washington D.C. That is this: no fellow American is our enemy. Our nation has real enemies in the world, and the events of 9/11 demonstrated that without a doubt. But they also demonstrated that when we come together, we can defeat any threat.

Because after everything, America remains the world's indispensable nation. And Alaska's location, people, and resources are among America's greatest strategic assets.

Alaskan energy is one of our nation's best defenses against foreign aggression. It's why the Naval Petroleum Reserve was originally created after World War One, why the Trans-Alaska Pipeline was built in the 1970s to combat the Middle Eastern oil embargo, and why China and Russia don't want us to develop our natural gas resources in the present. Today, our President is returning from meeting partners in Asia who seek independence from the influence of authoritarian states – and see Alaska's resources as a means of achieving their own freedom – showing that America remains a beacon of hope around the world.

When Russia flies their bombers to the edge of our airspace, or when they sail their warships alongside China's near our coasts--as they did only a month ago--they are acknowledging our strength and our resolve, and testing our ability to respond.

I know, looking out at all of you here, that this ability is strong. It's our job in Congress to make sure it stays that way, and you have the tools and support you need. Taking care of our servicemembers and their families is a top priority of Alaska's Congressional delegation, because we know that America is only as strong as all of you. Thank you again for all you do. We can never thank you enough.

While Alaska may be far from Ground Zero, we too felt the impacts of that day. Many of our brave soldiers were deployed overseas in the following years, where they fought and some died in the service of this nation. Everyone standing here today is in their debt.

I thank the President for taking the time to visit us on this day, and for sending so many members of his administration to Alaska in recent weeks. As they toured the state with our Senators and me, they learned about our unique needs, and came to understand the vital role that Alaska plays in our nation's security. Alaskans are proud to be America's first line of defense, and on behalf of us all, I say: welcome, Mr. President.