

9/11 Families for a Safe & Strong America
www.911familiesforamerica.org

The Honorable Tom Coburn, M.D
United States Senate

February 9, 2012

Dear Senator Coburn:

As family members of the victims of the September 11, 2001 attacks, we are deeply disappointed with your decision to put a procedural hold on the National September 11 Memorial & Museum Act of 2011 (S.1537), effectively killing the proposed legislation that would provide federal funding to this vital organization. We understand that over the years you have consistently taken such action on so-called earmarks which are not accompanied by budget off-sets. We sincerely appreciate and share your concern about the country's alarming debt problem and agree that our children and grandchildren shouldn't have to foot the bill for the spending we engage in today.

However, the 9/11 memorial and museum is not a local extravagance aimed at benefiting a few today at the expense of the many tomorrow. The attacks of September 11, 2001 may have centered in New York, Virginia and Pennsylvania, but they were experienced by all Americans and were viewed as an attack on the entire country. The 9/11 memorial and museum is a national project which will tell the comprehensive story of 9/11 and commemorate the victims of the three attack sites, as well as the victims of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

Those of us who lost loved ones on 9/11 feel an urgent duty to our children, grandchildren and future generations to preserve the history of that day, to faithfully convey the catastrophic nature and emotional impact of the attacks--witnessed in real time--on the nation and the world. The memorial museum will show the scope and magnitude of the attacks, the history of Al Qaeda, the events leading up to that day and the aftermath of the attacks.

Why is this museum urgently needed? In the ten years that have passed since that dark day, we have witnessed a disturbing phenomenon in which 9/11 is compared to natural disasters, bridge collapses, workplace shootings and other forms of violence that bear little similarity to the kind of human agency involved in the September 11 attacks or the global impact that followed. We believe that this failure to vividly remember the savage nature and world-changing effect of the attacks undermines the country's ability to address the myriad issues attending the continuing and ever-evolving threat of Wahhabi-based terrorism.

Further, we believe that the mission of the 9/11 memorial and museum should not be categorized simply as a memorial to the victims which will "help those still in pain with their healing process" and then cast aside like a pork-barrel project akin to a "bridge to nowhere." Ten years later, despite the deeply felt promise to "Never Forget," we feel that many have forgotten the posture of the country on September 10th, and how the catastrophic nature of the attacks the next day "changed everything." We think the public, certainly young adults who

were too young to remember, cannot reasonably appreciate or judge where 9/11 led us without the benefit of understanding what the country went through on that brutal day when America's sense of vulnerability changed dramatically. The 9/11 memorial and museum will provide the historic context which is urgently needed, and which will become ever more so as we travel further from the memory of that day with each passing year.

With respect to the cost of building the memorial and museum, we agree with you, it is enormously high. The eight acre site which the memorial and museum occupies happens to be located in perhaps the most complicated and expensive piece of real estate in the United States. Most people don't realize that Al Qaeda destroyed not just the twin towers but seven high rise buildings situated atop a subterranean transportation hub which includes a commuter railway and several subway lines. The 1.8 million tons of rubble cleared at the site in 2001-2002 represented 11 million square feet of office and retail space.

Even if the master plan to rebuild included no memorial and no museum, the infrastructure for the site, which required reinforcing the massive slurry wall--the sea wall which holds back the Hudson River--cost \$300 million alone. Seasoned engineers with experience in multiple-use public projects say they have never in their careers encountered a construction project as massive and complex. Senator Coburn, we didn't choose this site, a metropolis where some 8 million people live and work. Al Qaeda did.

The memorial and museum are being built through a true public-private partnership. The public side is provided by HUD block grants specifically dedicated to rebuilding the World Trade Center site in the wake of 9/11. To be clear, the federal grants you describe are 100% used for construction. On the private side we have raised over \$450 million toward construction, exhibitions, and operations to date.

The funding we are seeking now is entirely separate from that used for building, and solely for the ongoing operation of this historic institution. We, along with the foundation's president, Joe Daniels, would be happy to meet with you and explain the budget decisions the board has made and the considerations that went into those decisions. There is nothing duplicative about the grant in S.1537 and we would be happy to explain why. In the meantime, we would like to point out two of the most significant misunderstandings in the February 1 letter you submitted to Minority Leader Mitch McConnell about the 9/11 memorial and museum project.

First, the \$584 million in assets listed in our 2010 tax filings are not liquid assets. The overwhelming majority of that sum consists of the asset of the brick and mortar memorial itself, as well as the museum in progress. We have met all of our fundraising goals for building, but now face the additional challenge of raising money for maintaining and operating the memorial and museum in perpetuity.

Second, since the memorial opened last September, it has been visited by more than a million people from all over the U.S. and 140 countries. We expect museum visitors to approach three million per year. However, the 2010 operating expenditures of \$13.9 million which you noted are costs incurred *prior* to the opening of either the memorial or the museum. Costs have of course risen now that the memorial is open and we must maintain it, ensure the security of our

visitors, and provide a level of visitor services befitting a national monument. Those costs will rise again when the memorial museum opens.

Without question, the lion's share of operational costs going forward will be for security at this site that has been attacked by terrorists twice. And even with those costs, our 8-acre memorial and the entire museum will operate on a budget less than that of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and other important national museums located in Washington, DC.

We believe, and Senator Daniel Inouye, the chief sponsor of S.1537, agrees, that preventing a mass casualty terrorist attack at the site where 6 people and a 7 month old unborn baby were killed in 1993, and 2,753 people were killed in 2001, should not be solely dependent on the generosity of small private donors.

We respectfully, but adamantly, disagree with any charges that the 9/11 memorial and museum foundation has excluded 9/11 families from either the process or the planning of this project. We can provide you with actual evidence that those claims are not true, including the minutes of regular family advisory meetings which date back to 2003, before the foundation was in existence. Outreach to 9/11 families has been on-going, consistent and meaningful. Families are major contributors to the content of the museum itself. The foundation has repeatedly acknowledged that input from families has been critical to its effort. In fact, 9/11 family involvement can be credited with significant material changes to the design of both the memorial and the museum. This may account for the overwhelmingly positive response by 9/11 families to the memorial when it opened in September. That said, no organization can hope to achieve 100% agreement, especially concerning a subject which is so deeply personal to this large and diverse group of families.

Finally, the 9/11 memorial and museum project should not be the subject of a protracted and unseemly political fight over funding. We vividly remember how the country came together ten years ago. Americans from every walk of life, all across the country, dropped everything and rushed to the attack sites to help in the rescue or support the recovery. 1,000 small boats evacuated nearly half a million people from lower Manhattan. FEMA search and rescue teams from several states arrived within hours and brought their own heavy equipment. Close to 300 K-9 teams worked the sites. Volunteers provided material, food, and relief in countless ways. Those that couldn't come to the site of the attacks helped in other ways, establishing internet bulletin boards for information on missing people, sending children's art to hard hit firehouses, organizing prayer groups and sending teddy bears to the hundreds of children who lost a parent that day.

Everyone wanted to "do something." That is the remarkable unity that people who lived through this day remember and which would be tarnished by an effort to diminish this historic project by labeling it an "earmark" which burdens the very people it is intended to educate and inspire, our children.

One special group of Americans who wanted to do something were the young men and women who joined the Armed Forces. The September 11 attacks moved them to quit their jobs, suspend their college studies, and leave their families to answer their country's call to service. Those

already in uniform re-enlisted. As one wounded warrior who lost friends in battle recently lamented to members of the foundation board, "No one connects us to 9/11 anymore." Our combat veterans need this museum to help explain to their children who they are and why they served.

We urge you and your colleagues in the Senate to work together to help move this project forward. We will provide you with any information that will help you understand the work we have done, the progress we have made and our plans going forward. We also invite you, Senator Coburn, to come to New York City and let Alice Greenwald, the director of the museum, walk you through it and give you a presentation of our plans for the museum exhibition.

We feel that the American people, who demonstrated such decency on 9/11, deserve no less.

Very truly yours,

Debra Burlingame

Sister of Capt. Charles F. Burlingame, III, pilot, American Airlines Flight 77
Board Member, National September 11 Memorial & Museum
Co-founder, 9/11 Families for a Safe and Strong America

Tim Sumner

Brother-in-law of LT Joseph G. Leavey, Ladder 15, FDNY
Sergeant First Class, U.S. Army (retired)
Co-founder, 9/11 Families for a Safe and Strong America

cc: The Honorable Mitch McConnell
The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand