

**VOICES 22nd Anniversary Always Remember Gala
November 9, 2023**

**2023 Leadership Award
Remarks by The Honorable Thomas H. Kean**

Thank you very, very much. One of the extraordinary things in my entire life is getting to know and working with Lee Hamilton. We live today in a polarized world where Republicans don't get along very well with Democrats, or even members of our family. We don't talk too much about politics because we disagree. Lee Hamilton is the idea of public service personified. All of his life, he's tried to do the right thing. And he has done the right thing. And that's made a country a lot better place. So, it was a great, one of the great pleasures of my life to work with him. And this whole experience, since the tragedy of 9/11, has been one of the highlights of my life, in so many ways, and there are people here have been part of that highlight. Anne Tatlock, are you still here? Maybe went to go home. There she is. Anne Tatlock was I think one of the first woman CEOs of a major financial institution in New York. Fiduciary Trust, under her leadership, got hit terribly hard on 9/11, and lost a lot of people. She kept that firm going. And then she asked me to do one of the hardest things I've ever done in my life. I was on the board, and she had a memorial service for the people who lost on 9/11 from Fiduciary Trust, at Cathedral of St. John the Divine. And that because of the tremendous loss and the families, that cathedral was full, and I got up to speak. And I'll never forget, I looked out on the audience, and in the front two rows, mostly young women, some of them were very young babies, some of them pregnant. Those babies would never see their father. I looked at that couple of rows, and I choked – first time, I really choked giving a speech, and I had trouble. But Anne went on, to never forget what had happened on 9/11, to work continually to make sure it was remembered. She worked on the Commission with Bloomberg, she was on your board at the Memorial, and she works to this day to make sure that New York City never forgets. And it's a better place because of that remembrance. So Anne, I just wanted to thank you.

I was sitting alone with my wife, one evening at home in New Jersey, and the phone rang. And up Rita said, "The White House is calling." I don't get those calls very often, so I sat up and took like a little notice. And it was cause the request which was totally unexpected to me – to

chair the 9/11 Commission. My life changed at that point – with the people I got to know, with the families I got to know, and so many other things. I went down to Washington that week and met the vice chairman who I met once or twice but never before, and met Lee Hamilton. His description of that meeting is accurate. I mean, we decided to agree that he is a Democrat, and I as a Republican, would never do anything, without first conferring with the other. And we said I think an example for the rest of the Commissioners which stayed in place. In fact, I think the Commission has told me let us some of them, we figured you and Lee had some secret agreement that you were never going to disagree in public. Well, we didn't have any agreement at all. We just didn't disagree. Period. And we work so closely together, as I say that's a friendship, I'll treasure the rest of my life.

But I want to talk just a minute about the families. You all know a lot about the families, but maybe not enough. They are one of the extraordinary forces in all my mind, in all of American history. If you think of what those families *did*. You know the investigation was supposed to be done by the Congress. And they did an investigation, they came out with a report. It wasn't very good. Not that Congress always does things badly, but they didn't have the staff, didn't have the time, didn't have the money, and they did a slipshod job. And yet, they accepted it, and the President was going to accept it. And then the families decided, we will *not* accept it. Because it's not right for our families, it's not right for their memory, and it's not right for the future of the country. And these women, with Mary and so many others, came down to Washington, these women in some cases had never been to Washington before – I don't know any of them who had any experience lobbying anybody or getting anything done. And yet they came down to that city, not only came to see congressman, they sat across the thresholds of Congressman's offices, so they couldn't get in and out *without* seeing them. They picketed the White House. They went on the *Today Show*. They made the point that we are not going to be quiet until this is fully investigated, until a recommendation is made, so this never ever, ever, happens in this country again. And these were simply family members. No experience whatsoever is extraordinary what they were able to accomplish. The President didn't want a Commission because they were worried the US Congress didn't want a Commission. Yet those families forced the Commission to be created by the Congress and signed by the President.

And then, the families came and presented themselves to me as Chairman, and to every other member of the Commission as to what they expected of us. And it was no less than a full, impartial, tough investigation. And they wanted the facts made plain, and they wanted the American people to know how we could have failed this way. How could the government have failed to some way, or another prevent these people from coming over and crashing planes into buildings. And they never let us up. They were there every hearing we held, they'd come down to Washington together. They'd come to the offices, I think I was president of the university then I think maybe 10 – or – 11 times family members came to see me and make sure that we were doing what they expected us to do, or if not to make us do what they expected us to do. It's an extraordinary example, the best I know in all of American history, of citizens taking something into their own hands, and making sure the government acts the right way. And every time you were into a problem, they didn't always quite trust us. But we were what they had, and we're going to make sure we did the job. And they were always there. When we went short of money because of federal government not wanting the Commission anyway to start with, didn't give us enough money, to do the job. Well, we asked for more money, and we got stonewalled. Guess what, the families came to life. The families come down, they lobbied Congress, they lobbied whoever else it took, the White House, to get us the money. We weren't given the adequate time to do this kind of report. And guess what? The families came and they lobbied the Congress, until the Congress gave way. And I remember they did radio shows and members' home districts, I mean they acted better than any professional lobbyist I've ever seen. If these were families with no experience whatsoever, that got the job done. The reason I talk about this is extraordinary. There is not an historian – I used to teach history – there is *not* another example in the long history of this country of successful and persistent advocacy to get something important done the way the families of 9/11 did.

And we ended up having a Commission. And I think by the way, when we voted unanimously, after a lot of work on our report, and we overcame stuff. I mean, we, the President and the Vice President didn't want to see us, not because they were stonewalling, but because the President sent me a message and said, you know, no president has ever responded to a

congressionally created Commission in the United States history – ever. And we don't want to set a precedent so that Congress feels like just call the president anytime. Well, that was unacceptable to us, because we had to hear from the President, how this happened, and the Vice President. And sure enough, again, the families were there, they lobbied to help, they got editorials written and everything else, and eventually we had, and I remember sitting in the Oval Office. We went out, we're unelected citizens, we didn't hold any public office except the Commission membership, and the President opened it up and he said, "I will answer every question you ask, and stay as long as you want, until the questions are over." And I looked out that window of the Oval Office, you know, the Washington Monument and Capitol and all of that, and I thought, this is extraordinary – and can only happen in this democracy. I don't know any other place in the world where that would have happened. And so, we got what we wanted. We got the president to testify. We got the things we needed. And we made a report and tough recommendations – 41 recommendations that really reorganized the whole of American intelligence the largest regularization in the United States government, probably one of them in history. We had a wonderful staff, Chris Kojm is here who was one of the top members of that staff and really got the thing done in a very, very important way. But so we got the report written. Five Republicans and five Democrats voted for it, unanimously. It went to the Congress, and it got by partisan support in the Congress, and passed both houses. And those recommendations went now I think every, every single recommendation for reform to make us safer, was passed, by the Congress, except for one – the recommendation to reform the Congress.

But 40 other recommendations passed. And the country's like safer because of that. Now, I bring it up for two reasons. One is, that was the last time something that major and that bipartisan got done in this country. It's a long time ago, but not since then, has something that bipartisan done. And secondly, we used to call the wind in our sails, and that was a family of 9/11, that helped us get it done. And when we were lobbying for those recommendations, Lee and I testified 20, 25, 30 times before Congress trying to get those recommendations done, I never testified before Congress *once*, without having members of the families of 9/11 in the audience to help me out. Two or three years after they were still coming down to help. So, this is extraordinary. And I think Mary, you know, nobody's really written a book on the families and

how important that was and how unique in American history what you did *is*. I don't think it would have happened in any other country in the world. It's one of the best examples I've seen at American democracy at its very best. And I was just you know, extraordinary proud to be part of it. You know, Tolstoy I think it was, who said the whole business of life should be to serve humanity. The families of 9/11 have served humanity very, very well, and they're still doing it to this day, and I simply say, thank you for that.