

Statement of Lawrence Provost

***Progress Since 9/11: Protecting Public Health and Safety of the
Responders and Resident***

September 8, 2006

Good morning, thank you for permitting to come. Anything I say does not represent the opinions of the U.S. Military or U.S. government. However, it is as a soldier who volunteered to respond to the attack on our nation that on September 11, 2001 I arrived at the World Trade Center site, on my own initiative in uniform after gaining clearance from my military unit, to assist in the search and rescue and remained for the first seven days. On September 11, 2002, my Army Reserve team arrived in Afghanistan, returning home to NY March 11, 2003. In September 2004 my team landed in Iraq and returned home March 11, 2005. It is impossible not to forget that what has happened in my life, and all our lives these past five years is, regardless of political opinion, a result of September 11; our war began at home and ultimately will be won at home. Speaking as a member of two groups in the September 11 community, the military volunteers at the World Trade Center Site and the so called undocumented victims, those who did not work for the city or state of New York, we are faced with three major issues related to September 11 illness; Emotional, Physical, and Spiritual Health.

EMOTIONAL HEALTH

It has been a tough road mentally.

The compensation and treatment, especially the emotional treatment, I receive from the VA was only because I served in Afghanistan, Kuwait, and Iraq. Being at the World Trade Center as a military volunteer did not make me eligible for anything. No first responder, no downtown resident, should have to go to Afghanistan or Iraq in order to get treatment for any health issues related to the World Trade Center. I get some treatment but it is only because of my combat veteran status. What about the others in the military and those who wear no title other than the office of citizen and were affected by the actions of ruthless barbarians?

Ironically when I received treatment for emotional trauma related to September 11, I was penalized for it in one of my recent evaluation reports. Though still fighting this report, it will remain forever a part of my file and my chances of getting promoted again are slim. This penalization represents the stigma that exists still in American society, especially in the military, towards anyone who admits "I need help" You will find this in police departments, in fire departments, and in everyday life.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

On Friday September 14, 2001 at the World Trade Center I began to develop severe rashes on my arms, back, neck. These continue to this day. I was treated on Site but because I did not go to a hospital, I was denied federal compensation related to September 11. At age 27, I am much weaker physically now than before September 11 though I do not experience most of the symptoms others have. Still I have it easy, I am not dying.

EMT Bonnie Giedfried, whose ambulance corps was contracted to the City of New York, and was buried twice that day, once by each tower, is sick. Father Lyndon Harris, The Priest who ran the St. Paul's Relief Operation, is sick. My military battle buddy, whom I searched with at the Trade Center for the first two days, is on a respirator. It gets worse. People from out of state came, and they already have died. Lt. David Michaels, another military reservist, came from the Midwest with his police department to work at Fresh Kills, died in his 40s recently.

Preventative treatment from the beginning would have helped many of the chronically, critically, and terminally ill have a longer life span. In many of the monitoring programs specific toxins aren't identified while strain on the heart and the atrophy of the organs continues. For example Father Harris' lungs are currently deformed and he has a history of coughing. He has not received workmen's comp.

Pataki's recent bill was for City and state public servants. In NYC 49 percent of EMS are volunteers and private ambulance services do not cover volunteers and other rescue workers not affiliated with the City. If you were down there giving to your country you should have been given treatment. And what about the downtown residents whose only crime was living and working in the greatest city in the world?

We have seen little assistance from the Mayor and the Governor. Each is in a power grab for their piece of the most valuable real estate in the world, the World Trade Center site, while neglecting first the families of the victims, the developer, and now the first responders and residents of Lower Manhattan.

The Mayor's administration hasn't declared war on first responders and residents, but its' actions in effect have sent the message for us to drop

dead. I do not believe the administration is uncaring; on a level they genuinely believe what they are doing is in the best interests of the city, but they have not realized yet in the billions they will inevitably spend in lawsuits, that it would have more profitable to save our sick than to let them be killed by the terrorists. This is not the stronger and better New York that Mayor Giuliani spoke of.

This leads to our spiritual health.

SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Our government cannot compel state sponsored religion; that is what makes us different from the terrorists; we should never discourage the need for faith especially amongst those who are suffering.

We must understand that many of the programs to address the health of our responders will not work without a faith component. We cannot escape faith in regards to September 11. It was faith based terrorists that brought this war to us and it is faith that sustained us in those few weeks after. Any program that the federal government initiates must take into account the faith element of all those who will seek help.

Finally in regards to spiritual health, we feel terrible knowing there are remains of our military brothers and sisters in the garbage dump in Fresh Kills and also even today around the World Trade Center site where hundreds of remains have been found over the summer. I saw it here and I saw it in Afghanistan and Iraq, remains can be, and usually are, everywhere. I guarantee there are remains from September 11 in other places in Lower Manhattan. Also, the emotional and spiritual health of the downtown residents is affected in knowing that remains are still around the World Trade Center.

We are at war and the only way to win wars is total mobilization by the national government in all areas to defeat the enemy and this includes the area of September 11 health. Many suspect that the attack on the Trade Center itself will never actually be considered anything more than the result of a criminal conspiracy. Our definitions of war are far too outdated. The fact is, those attacks on 9/11 were a coordinated attack by a foreign (non-state) enemy. A Federal Law to cover all effected and treat them as victims of an attack by a foreign entity, is certainly called for.

We live in a strange world with many different and often conflicting interests but putting September 11 under the umbrella of the Federal government is the best guarantee that no one is left behind and creates a win win situation for all parties concerned.

SOLUTIONS

-Any military that responded, in any fashion, to September 11 must be classified as combat veterans which makes them eligible for VA benefits. This includes any military who have responded and/or were at the World Trade Center, Shanksville, the Pentagon as well as service members who worked with any GWOT remains at any of the U.S. military mortuaries outside of CENTCOM area of responsibility. However, that only covers part of the issue.

-In future disasters, you will not be able to keep independent military, EMS, Fire, Construction and other entities away from the Site. They will in fact run towards it. Instead of discouraging it, the federal government needs to take the lead at the site of all attacks, which did not happen in New York. Plans for databases for these volunteers must be set up BEFORE any disaster strikes. One central database, with backups, must exist.

-Congress should enact reforms immediately to discourage the military culture which penalizes those who admit they need any sort of physical or psychological assistance relating to the total War on Terror including September 11

REGARDING SPIRITUAL HEALTH

--Any federal program for the World Trade Center sick and future disasters/attacks of this magnitude must take into account that the best remedy for many will be in their faith.

-All remains of all our service members need to be brought out of the area in and around the World Trade Center site, not just the Deutsche Bank building where hundreds of remains continue to be found. This must also include the remains and ashes at Fresh Kills landfill so no one is left behind and a proper religious burial has not been denied to any of our fallen service members or

civilians at the World Trade Center. This summer I had the opportunity to become Mortuary Affairs qualified for the Army Reserve. Let Mortuary Affairs, especially the JPAC, come back to the WTC Site to finish the job and retrieve our fallen brothers.

-Most importantly. This was an attack by a foreign entity with alien values upon the United States. Without choice, tens of thousands of people were thrust into the role of a soldier on September 11 and the following days. Any victim should be covered by a comprehensive federal program. A victim compensation fund is but a part of this. Some victims will not develop illnesses till years later. Free on the spot care, similar to the VA but to include volunteers, construction, and downtown residents is the only option.

There are a host of other issues which hopefully at another venue can be hashed out but our immediate priority is to care for our dying homefront warriors. In doing so we must never again allow ourselves to be caught up in the complacency of the September 10 era.

This September 11 the whole world is watching including our enemies who rejoice at the death of yet another American in New York City. We must not give Islamo Fascism anymore ammunition to where they can say "Americans do not take care of their own."

These are difficult times and difficult issues for this generation of Americans and its leaders but thankfully this also was the generation of Americans and leaders that God has placed for this time and purpose. We will not fail. We as responders, as military, as civilians, as volunteers, as residents, as members of the Congress, let our purpose and our prayer be to help our sick, to bind up the wounds of the nation at home, and save our homefront wounded. Let the legacy of all of our loved ones, at home and abroad, not be to have died in vain. Let September 11 be remembered not just for the worst of humanity, but the very best of humanity.

Thank you for your letting me address you today.