

18TH ANNIVERSARY

America vows to ‘never forget’ 9/11

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Associated Press

NEW YORK — Americans commemorated 9/11 with solemn ceremonies and vows Wednesday to “never forget” 18 years after the deadliest terror attack on American soil.

Victims’ relatives assembled at ground zero, where the observance began with a moment of silence and the tolling of bells at 8:46 a.m. — the exact time a hijacked plane slammed into the World Trade Center’s north tower.

“As long as the city will gift us this moment, I will be here,” Margie Miller, who lost her husband, Joel, said at the ceremony, which she attends every year. “I want people to remember.”

After so many years of anniversaries, she has come to know other victims’ relatives and to appreciate being with them.

“There’s smiles in between the tears that say we didn’t do this journey on our own, that we were here for each other,” she said.

President Donald Trump laid a wreath at the Pentagon, telling victims’ relatives there: “This is your anniversary of personal and permanent loss.”

“It’s the day that has replayed in your memory a thousand times over. The last kiss. The last phone call. The last time hearing those precious words, ‘I love you,’” the president said.

The nation is still grappling with the aftermath of 9/11. The effects are visible from airport security checkpoints to Afghanistan, where the post-9/11 U.S. invasion has become America’s longest war.

Earlier this week, Trump called off a secret meeting at Camp David with Taliban and Afghan government leaders and declared the peace talks “dead.” As the Sept. 11 anniversary began in Afghanistan, a rocket exploded at the U.S. Embassy just after midnight.

The political legacy of the 9/11 flowed into the ground zero ceremony, too.

After reading victims’ names, Nicholas Haros Jr. used his turn at the podium to tear into Democratic U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota over her recent “Some people did something” reference to 9/11.

“Madam, objectively speaking, we



J. David Ake/AP Photo

A U.S. flag hanging from a steel girder, damaged in the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, blows in the breeze at a memorial in Jersey City, N.J., on Wednesday.

know who and what was done,” Haros, who lost his mother, Frances, said as he reminded the audience of the al-Qaida attackers.

“Our constitutional freedoms were attacked, and our nation’s founding on Judeo-Christian values was attacked. That’s what ‘some people’ did. Got that now?” he said to applause.

Omar, one of the first Muslim women elected to Congress, has said she didn’t intend to minimize what happened on Sept. 11, and she accused critics of taking her words out of context.

Another relative at ground zero underscored that Muslims were among the dead. Zaheda Rahman called her uncle, Abul Chowdhury, a “proud Muslim-American man who lived his life with a carefree nature, a zeal for adventure and a tenacity which I emulate every single day.”

Haros’ remarks weren’t the only political message to draw applause at

ground zero. So did Debra Epps’ plea for tighter gun laws.

“This country — in 18 years, you would think it had made changes to bring us to more peace. However, gun violence has gone rampant,” said Epps, who lost her brother, Christopher.

The anniversary ceremonies center on remembering the nearly 3,000 people killed when hijacked planes slammed into the trade center, the Pentagon and the field in Pennsylvania on Sept. 11, 2001.

All those victims’ names are read aloud at the ground zero ceremony by loved ones — now, quite often, ones so young they knew their slain relatives barely or not at all.

Jacob Campbell was 10 months old when his mother, Jill Maurer-Campbell, died on 9/11.

“It’s interesting growing up in a generation that doesn’t really remember it. I feel a connection that no one

I go to school with can really understand,” Campbell, a University of Michigan sophomore, said as he attended the ceremony.

Others made a point of spotlighting the suffering of firefighters, police and others who died or fell ill after exposure to the smoke and dust at ground zero.

A compensation fund for people with potentially Sept. 11-related health problems has awarded more than \$5.5 billion so far. More than 51,000 people have applied. Over the summer, Congress made sure the fund won’t run dry.

The sick gained new recognition this year at ground zero, where the new 9/11 Memorial Glade was dedicated this spring.

Sept. 11 has become known also as a day of service. People around the country volunteer at food banks, schools, home-building projects, park cleanups and other charitable endeavors on and near the anniversary.

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