

Long-term solution only option

By David Holt

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As we approach the five-year anniversary of 9/11, my memories of that time renew my certainty in the mission we've embarked on since.

In February 2001, I was hired as an aide to U.S. Speaker Dennis Hastert. That's how, on 9/11, a kid from Oklahoma came to be sitting 10 feet from the speaker, in an office at the center of the U.S. Capitol, looking out over the National Mall.

I remember after the speaker was evacuated, I was the last one out, and I turned off the coffeemaker. Meanwhile, a delay in the departure of United Flight 93 had allowed those passengers to do what Americans do best — rise to an occasion. I remember thanking them a few months later at the field where they perished.

I remember the boom as we stood outside, caused by fighter jets but interpreted as another attack. I remember coming home to my fiancée, who feared she had become a widow just 10 days after I had proposed.

I remember making a point to stand on the House floor during the Afghanistan vote because it seemed likely that all young men would be needed. I remember when the president addressed Congress. I sat behind Lisa Beamer, whose husband had just given his life for mine.

I remember, after moving on to the White House in 2002, living in a city under siege by fear. Airplanes were followed by anthrax, and then snipers. Even an epidemic of exploding manholes in Georgetown seemed more sinister than before.

That's terrorism. Those who export it would like to see paranoia in every American city. To date, they have failed.

As I left Washington in 2004, I left a city where some were starting to forget this threat against civilization, and entered a world where too many already had. Perhaps it's because those sacrifices I anticipated never came. That's the blessing and the curse of having a military that can overwhelm most enemies simply with volunteers. But their mission still requires everyone's support. Thankfully, that exists at the highest levels of our government.

In the wake of the unprovoked slaughter of civilians, our leaders have led us into one of the most reasoned and effective responses imaginable. An idealistic mission to spread freedom into the swamps of hopelessness that breed terrorism has been executed through a military effort resulting in 5 percent of the deaths we faced in Vietnam, and 1 percent of the deaths we faced in World War II. Meanwhile, vigilance at home has prevented another attack here.

As we mark this anniversary, we will see many reminders that disturb us. If that's what it takes to renew support for the determination and vision of our leaders, so be it. We need to remember that history's greatest civilization is at stake, and we need to remember that a long-term solution is the only course of action.

And if you ever have trouble remembering what it was like to cry every night thinking of those who died, or what it's like to take every step in fear, talk to me, because I will never forget.