

## GREAT TRAGEDY ... GREATER HEROES

May 21, 2017—Your Excellency Governor (Gina) Raimondo, Your Excellency Governor (Donald) Carcieri, Rev. Dr. (Don) Anderson, distinguished public servants, members of The Station Fire Memorial Foundation, first responders, and most especially, the families and loved ones of those we honor and remember here today:

It was a night like any other, a festive club filled with laughter and fun as a group of hard-working people enjoyed a night of music together. But as we all know, it was to become a night that would always be remembered.

We stand here today, some 14 years later, basking in the sunshine sent to us, I am sure, by 100 angels above us. They are watching it all, on the ground made holy by them—those who perished here. We remember their good souls, their happy faces, and now, etched into the granite of this monument, their names. But, more importantly, they are forever etched into our hearts and our lives.

Yet, as that night of joy turned into terror, the first responders arrived. The first were from West Warwick and Warwick, and then eventually they came from every corner of the State. These brave men and women, from both fire and police departments, faced an inferno beyond description and chaos beyond belief but, without hesitating, went to work.

Without fear or panic, but with courage and determination, they began the long, difficult efforts to save those trapped and to tend to the wounded. The clear thinking, compassion, kindness, and heroic actions of these public servants saved many lives and brought order to the chaos. As someone who witnessed it all first-hand from the beginning moments, I stand before you today to say that **these** words—and **any** words—fall short in expressing our gratitude to all those heroes—some known, but many unknown—who rose above the rest and risked their own lives to save the lives of others.

Many of us met with the families of those who perished. We listened to their stories and tried to tend to their grief. But so many of our first responders, who always seem hardened and tough, professional and poised, also suffered great wounds that night and in the days and months and years to come. Still, they returned to work doing what they do best: making sure that you and I and our loved ones are kept safe.

What amazing people they are, what gifts they have, and what virtues they embody, as they freely place themselves in great danger so that danger might flee. Yes, February 20, 2003 was a night of great tragedy, but it also became a night of greater heroes: those first responders who made us proud then, and who make us proud every day—not just by what they **do**, but, more importantly, by **who they are**.

You know, there is always much public discussion about the salaries of our police officers and our firefighters, but as I said to each of them in the days and weeks that followed, “*Ladies and gentlemen, on the night of February 20, you earned your entire pay for your entire career.*” I meant it then, and I mean it now.

My friends, as we end these ceremonies and hear the names read of those who left our embrace on this very spot, let us be ever grateful for the difference they made in our lives. Let us never waiver in our love, respect, and admiration for our first responders and their families who make the many sacrifices—so often hidden from view—just so that we are kept safe.

May God bless them all, and may God bless and sanctify this memorial made holy by the ones we loved and lost and will never forget.