

**Statement by Congressman Allen West
on the Introduction of
the Foreign Service Line of Duty Death Gratuity Act of 2011
September 9, 2011**

Mr. Speaker: Today I rise, with my colleague Congressman Bennie Thompson, to introduce the Foreign Service Line of Duty Death Gratuity Act.

As our nation approaches the 10th Anniversary of the terrorist attacks on September 11th, it is important to acknowledge that the attacks in New York and Washington, DC were not the first shots fired in this war, but rather just an escalation of previous attacks against the United States.

Over the course of the upcoming weekend, Americans will reflect on the events of 10 years ago. Where were they on that terrible day? What were they doing when the towers fell and when the Pentagon was hit? How did they react when it became apparent that it was a terrorist attack on our country?

The events of that day have guided our Federal Government's approach, and indeed our society's approach, to preventing future attacks in many different ways.

However, there is another significant date -- a date that may be less familiar to many Americans. That date is August 7, 1998. I know that for many Americans, if not most, it is difficult to recall what they were doing or where they were that day.

For the Department of State, and for many Foreign Service Officers and members of the State Department family, that date is a defining moment in each of their lives.

On the afternoon of August 7, 1998, over 8,000 miles from Capitol Hill on the continent of Africa, Al Qaeda terrorists set off two simultaneous truck bombs at the entrances to our embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

When the smoke finally cleared, 300 people were dead. Twelve Americans and 40 citizens of Kenya and Tanzania who were working for the United States Government were among those killed. More than 5,000 were injured, and two United States embassies were destroyed.

Although the attacks were directed at American facilities, the vast majority of casualties were local citizens.

Fifteen years earlier, in 1983, a suicide bomber attacked the United States Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon. In that tragedy, sixty people died – mostly embassy staff members and U.S. service members. At that time, it was the deadliest attack on a U.S. diplomatic mission, and is

considered by some to mark the beginning of attacks by Islamist extremist groups on the United States.

After the Beirut attack, a Commission was set up under the leadership of former Navy Admiral Bobby Inman. Recommendations were made, funding was provided, and the State Department was charged to replace 77 embassies and consulates that failed to meet basic security standards.

The Commission stated that “a large number of facilities around the world, which once may have represented the optimal site for the conduct of American diplomacy, [should] be replaced by more physically secure sites and buildings. The Panel believe [s] that it [is] essential that a substantial relocation and building program be initiated and carried out with dispatch.” Despite this recommendation from the Inman Commission, a lack of appropriate sites and a lack of funding resulted in the Department completing only 22 of the planned Inman embassies.

By the time of the East African bombings, the Department had only one new embassy under construction. After the 1998 East African attacks, another Commission was set up, again under the leadership of retired Navy Admiral William Crowe. Once again recommendations were made, funding was provided, and the State Department was charged to replace 187 aging and unsecure embassies. The State Department worked closely with the Office of Management and Budget and the United States Congress to ensure that a funding commitment was put in place. In response, Congress passed the Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act of 1999.

Over the last 13 years, the Department of State’s Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations has completed, or has under construction, more than 100 facilities around the globe. Approximately 25,000 federal employees have moved into safer, more secure, and functional facilities overseas. With this latest building program, the State Department has moved one-quarter of all U.S. Government overseas employees into new facilities.

Since the East African bombings, American diplomatic facilities have been attacked over 140 times. Recently, attacks in Belgrade, Serbia; Sanaa, Yemen; Nuevo Laredo, Mexico and many others have been covered on the news. When they happen, these events are breaking news stories, but are often quickly forgotten. The State Department has been fortunate in each of these attacks that the perpetrators of the violence have never breached the hard line of the embassy building.

While the State Department continues to build secure facilities, the 13 years since the East Africa bombings have seen the world become more dangerous. The goal of the Bureau of Overseas Buildings is to construct facilities that provide American diplomats with safe and functional facilities where they can advance foreign policy, and ultimately make the world better, safer and more secure. Until that day comes, however, these Federal employees who bravely serve our nation continue to be at risk of terrorist attack.

Many of the Foreign Service Officers who work in United States diplomatic platforms serve alongside and face the same hazards and risks as our military personnel and intelligence officers.

As Foreign Service employees engage more visibly in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is important that they know that their contributions and sacrifices are as highly valued as those of our military personnel.

The Foreign Service Line of Duty Death Gratuity Act would authorize the Department of State to provide compensation for the families of fallen Foreign Service employees that is comparable to what is provided to the families of fallen military personnel.

Under current law, the surviving family members of an American Foreign Service employee are entitled to one year's salary and the proceeds of their federal life insurance benefit. In contrast, the family of a fallen member of the military is entitled to an enhanced life insurance and death gratuity that was authorized by the United States Congress in 2005. This is a disparity that can no longer be overlooked.

The Foreign Service Line of Duty Death Gratuity Act would ensure that the families of Foreign Service employees receive, at a minimum, a death gratuity equal of \$100,000, matching the benefit provided to military personnel. An enhanced life insurance benefit of at least \$400,000 for Foreign Service employees serving at a recognized danger pay post also matches the benefit available to military personnel participating in combat operations or stationed in combat zones. Foreign Service employees with a higher yearly salary or life insurance payout will maintain their benefits as they exist under current law.

This legislation also recognizes our moral obligation to the families of the twelve Americans killed in the August 1998 Al Qaeda bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi Kenya. Many of the surviving family members of that incident have endured significant and continuing financial and personal hardships that serve as a poignant example of the burdens faced by such survivors. These families have been unable to seek damages through the courts as others families in similar situations have because such actions are limited to state-sponsored acts of terror.

Similar legislation has passed the House of Representatives in previous Congressional sessions, but failed to clear the hurdle of the United States Senate. Then Congressman Roy Blunt (R-MO) continually led this effort over the years, and I am honored to carry the torch during the 112th Congress.

As we approach the 10th Anniversary of the September 11th attacks, we need to recognize the individuals who died at the hand of a terrorist attack three years before 9/11, and uphold our foremost responsibility to our courageous and dedicated Foreign Service employees and their families.