

DECEMBER 18, 2001

**SCHAKOWSKY SAYS AWARDING CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL TO HEROES OF
SEPTEMBER 11 IS
"SMALL TOKEN OF INFINITE APPRECIATION"**

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3054, a bill to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the heroes of September 11. I hope that this small token of appreciation will symbolize America's appreciation for the endless bravery that was shown on that day.

There are some, for whom there is no sacrifice too great when the call to duty sounds. There are some, in a world wrapped in a shroud of self-promotion, who see beyond the "me", the "my", the "mine" and the "I". There are some that so regard their brothers and sisters that they disregard their own safety, their own well being, and even their own lives, to lend a hand. There are some, which in a split second make a decision to forget themselves and do what it takes to save others; they are heroes.

For heroes, there is no room to think or to rationalize. It is never practical to endanger ones existence in the hope of promoting the survival of others, but they do. It goes beyond what is logical. The hero possesses an innate and instinctive ability to respond to extreme situations with others in mind. By nature, the hero defies the basic human impulse for self-preservation. The hero is selfless.

On September 11, many Americans heeded the call to action. On a beautiful morning, ordinary people awakened to start the day, to go about their normal routines with smiles, frowns, traffic, and cups of coffee. The Pentagon was still an impenetrable fortress and the skyline of New York was still intact; the morning proceeded as usual. In the moments to follow, shocked and horrified, firefighters, police officers, servicemen and women, and everyday people sprang into situations that were simply incomprehensible; they fought to save lives. They saved lives and returned to save more, and in an instant, the courageous fire that burned in their hearts was extinguished.

Above the mayhem, Flight 93 swam the skies to reach the West Coast. Aboard this flight the passengers eagerly awaited landing, waiting to meet their loved ones miles away. Nonetheless, with angry shouts the silence was broken and the passengers realized that terror's arm had reached yet another flight. The terrorists made their move and fought to carry out this horrible act. They were headed to Washington, DC to destroy the very symbols that shine as beacons for freedom throughout the world. The terrorists were trained and prepared to destroy lives and break the spirit of America. However, they were never trained to defeat the spirit of heroism.

The passengers of Flight 93, after talking to their courageous and heroic family members and learning of the attacks, decided that there would be no more death and destruction.

They decided that America had suffered enough for one morning. They decided that they would trade their lives to save hundreds, maybe thousands more, quite possibly my own.

For them, heroism was not the goal. They did not seek a grand prize or recognition. They sought only to prevent the destruction that was sure to come absent their intervention.

For heroes, there is no reward other than the satisfaction of knowing that their sacrifice may allow the life of others to continue. Since September 11, America has received so many lessons in heroism. We have been schooled in selflessness and courage. We have learned what it means to sacrifice. We can only honor and thank them for these lessons and for the lives that they saved, and the lives they gave.

The Congressional Gold Medal is the nation's highest civilian award. The medal recognizes outstanding achievements and unusual acts of valor and courage. Be it over a lifetime or in one instance, it recognizes that its recipients have-- in their own way-- changed the world for the better. The heroes of 9-11 have shown a courage that is rare to modern times. They fought the hatred and the malice of that terrible day with love, compassion, courage and selflessness. And they changed the world.

It is difficult to find good in such a tragic event. However, we can look to the many men and women who worked tirelessly and who died courageously to save life, and know that even in the face of death and terror, the good in humanity prevails. The Congressional Gold Medal is but a small token, but I hope it will symbolize the immeasurable thanks that we pay to these heroes. I urge my colleagues to support this bill.