Remembering 9/11
By Dr. Richard Kelley

Tomorrow is the 15th anniversary of the terrorist attacks, using three hijacked airliners, on New York City and the Pentagon, just outside Washington, D.C. A fourth airliner that crashed in a Pennsylvania field after passengers fought the hijackers in the cockpit is widely understood to have been targeting either the White House or the U.S. Capitol. I hope we will all take a moment to remember and honor those who were killed or injured in those atrocities – and their widows, widowers, orphans and loved ones.

I’ve written several articles about these events, and they are still available on the Internet.1 Over the past 15 years, many seem to have forgotten the cause, horror and meaning of September 11, 2001, and what we have to do to prevent a recurrence.

In my article dated September 10, 2011, I revealed for the first time how close I was to being near ground zero in New York on the terrible morning when the attacks took place.

I was booked to be staying in the Marriott Hotel at 3 World Trade Center next to the Twin Towers on the night of September 10-11, 2001. The next morning, I’d planned to attend a meeting of the Executive Committee of World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) in the offices of American Express, across the street from the Marriott.

However, a week or so before the attack, my wife, Linda, asked if my scheduled trip was really necessary. She was dealing with the back-to-school issues of our two youngest children, Anne Marie, then 16, and Chris, 18. I had been flying to Hawai’i frequently and had other business travel scheduled that month and on into the fall. “Could you skip the WTTC meeting and help with the kids?” Linda asked.

I agreed to stay in Denver. Of course, the WTTC meeting never took place. After American Airlines flight 11 and United Airlines flight 175 crashed into the North and South towers, both buildings soon collapsed onto the Marriott Hotel. Two Marriott employees were killed. About two hours later, the building housing the American Express offices was also heavily damaged.

In our 37 years of marriage, I have found Linda to have what can seem like a sixth sense, with an occasional intuition or foreboding about things or events before they materialize. When I turned on the TV and watched the second plane fly into the South Tower that day, I felt an absurd sense of déjà vu, as if I had seen it before. That is why I revealed my near miss, and how Linda had a hunch, years before, that a terrible event was about to take place.

The wreckage of World Trade Center buildings 6 (left mid ground), 7 (right mid ground) and 1 (foreground), on September 17, 2001, with most of the smoke cleared.

Credit: Wikipedia
awful morning, I realized that Linda’s inexplicable gift might have saved my life.

A Denver friend, Bob Millen, and his colleague Gary Hibler had an even closer “near miss” and recorded their breathtaking experiences.2

Yes, there are many things to think about this weekend.

Since a peak during the Vietnam War over 40 years ago, U.S. government spending on national defense, as a percentage of our gross domestic product (GDP)3, gradually fell from 9.5 percent to about 3.0 percent in 2001 when those terrorists took nearly 3,000 innocent lives. Today, defense spending is only about 3.5 percent of GDP in spite of the spiraling dangers of today’s world, as manifested in repeated radical Islamist terror attacks and attempts both at home and abroad (Boston, San Bernardino, Orlando, Paris, Brussels, Ankara, etc.).

The magnitude of the risks this has created for our country and the free world are dramatically documented by Dick Cheney and Liz Cheney in today’s edition of The Wall Street Journal, http://www.goo.gl/owsMdM.

We seem to be in a Rip Van Winkle sleep. When will we wake up?

David Scowsill, the WTTC’s president and CEO, points out that Travel & Tourism is a major force for good and that our industry has been a great driver of peace wherever it is allowed to grow and prosper. Fortunately, international travel continues to grow despite a wide range of economic challenges.

Let’s work together to keep Travel & Tourism on that upward path, and every year in early September let us stop for a moment to say a prayer for those killed or scarred by radical terrorism on September 11, 2001.

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Footnotes:
1 Saturday Briefing articles on 9/11 by Richard R. Kelley, goo.gl/dpZJV9
2 “A Day We’ll Never Forget,” by Bob Millen and Gary Hibler, October 2001, goo.gl/nCsKbF
3 GDP – the total value of all the goods produced and services delivered in our country in a year, in both the public and private sectors