

Thank you.

A few years ago, we created the Star of Texas awards to honor our first responders who were injured or killed in the line of duty.

Every year, we have family members of the fallen to the Capitol...
...along with any injured responder who can make the trip.

I've met with these families...and I've heard their stories.

Without exception, the stories of these brave men and women are touching...

...and demonstrate an extraordinary amount of dedication and community pride.

To a person, our first responders know they're placing themselves in danger...

...whether braving the flames of a fire...

...transporting the injured via helicopter...

...or racing to the scene of an accident.

First responders know better than anyone that there is no such thing as a routine emergency.

The firefighters and medical technicians who died last week in West certainly knew that...

...but it didn't slow them down as they raced toward the burning factory.

[PAUSE]

Their stories are as inspirational as they are heart-breaking.

There are the brothers who did everything together...

...including fighting fires.

There are the EMS technicians who left a training seminar and wasted no time in driving toward the growing plume of smoke.

There is the Dallas fire chief...

...who was off-duty...but responded anyway because his community was threatened.

There are more.

In fact, each of the men we lost had stories...

...stories we're seeing in these videos tonight.

They each had friends and family...and hopes and dreams.

But the true common thread that bound them all together was their love of community...

...and a sense of pride in who they were, and what they did.

Again, these were volunteers...

...ordinary individuals blessed with extraordinary courage...

...and a determination to do what they could to save lives and property.

They're the ones who proudly say, "Not on my watch."

[PAUSE]

In the moments immediately following that explosion...

...what many described as sounding like a nuclear blast...

...many of the remaining volunteer firefighters did what they always do...and headed to the flames, as well.

They knew full well that another explosion was a possibility...

...but if there was a chance of saving their fellow volunteers...

...or preventing another blast...

...they were going to take it.

[PAUSE]

It's also proper to acknowledge and commend all the people of West...

...who have seen their town so profoundly damaged...

...and seen so many injured.

There are no words to ease the pain this community has suffered...

...no way to put a sense of normalcy to it.

Please know that the spirit that drove the men we lost lives on...

...in their fellow volunteers...

...and in the families and friends they've left behind.

Let their deeds serve as inspiration for all of us to live lives of meaning...

...and commit to serving our neighbors and communities.

West will never forget what happened here...

...or forget the sacrifices of those who were first on the scene.

May God bless you and, through you, may He continue to bless the great State of Texas.

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