

JOU 2303 speech story

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President Barack Obama honored the community of West, Texas, and the 15 citizens killed in fertilizer plant explosion during memorial speech at Baylor University on Thursday.

“No words adequately describe the courage that was displayed on that deadly night,” Obama said to a crowd of nearly 10,000 mourners at Baylor in the nearby city of Waco, Texas. “What I can do is offer the love and support and prayers of the nation.”

Throughout the speech, the president consistently reminded West that America supports them through this challenging time, and recognized the bravery displayed by the small town.

The fertilizer plant explosion measured as a 2.1-magnitude earthquake and damaged over 500 buildings in West. Ten first responders were among the 15 fatalities, and more than 280 others were injured. Caskets and photographs of the deceased were displayed with honor in front of the stage where Obama spoke.

Obama specifically acknowledged the five West volunteer firefighters, the four volunteer firefighters from Abbott, Bruceville-Eddy, and Mertens, and the Dallas fire captain who lost their lives protecting the citizens of West. Two of these volunteers were civilians, and received the title of volunteer first responder posthumously.

Photographs and stories of the victims were shared prior to his speech and introduction by Texas Sen. John Cornyn.

“This small town’s family is bigger now,” Obama said. “It expands beyond the boundaries of West.”

The population of West is only around 2,700, meaning everyone knows one another. The president noticed this sense of community, and the reliance on one another and God.

He honored the fearless work of medical and hospital staff and the efforts of those that helped evacuate. He similarly commented on the compassion of strangers who drove hours to donate supplies and the people in West that selflessly offered up their homes and resources to those displaced by the disaster.

“America needs towns like West,” Obama said, referencing the courage, love, faith and sacrifice displayed by the people in West.

The president admired the faith of the community of the town, emphasized that God is bigger than the tragedy, and reminded them that people all across the country were praying tirelessly

for healing, comfort, and strength for those affected. He frequently quoted scripture, referencing God's protection and plan.

He also shared the well wishes of former presidents in this encouragement. This included George W. and Laura Bush, who Obama said "spoke longingly about the kolaches, and the even better company."

"West isn't only a community for the people there," Arlington freshman Claire Goodyear said. "It makes everyone driving through there feel special."

Like many, Goodyear has fond memories of stopping at the Czech Stop in West for kolaches. For many others she knows, West has become a place to look forward to.

The places and things that haven't changed—the fighters and neighbors the community can count on—will help rebuild West with support from all across America.

"What makes West special isn't gonna go away," Obama said.