



COVID-19 Memorial Speech

June 25, 2022

We come together to honor and mourn 3605 fellow Rhode Islanders, 36 of whom were health care workers, too many of whom got infected and gave their lives trying to save the lives of others. We honor and mourn 1,040,641 Americans, and at least 6,349,274 people around the world, uncomfortable, tragic numbers for me and for us.

We are here to try to comfort their brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, their aunts, uncles, and their cousins, lovers, and friends.

To remember the people they were.
To hear share and celebrate the stories of their lives.
To remember their suffering and their courage.

I have another sad duty.
It is my duty to remember that much of this pandemic was preventable.

In other advanced nations like Australia and New Zealand, the death rate was about one tenth of ours. In Taiwan and Japan, the death rate was one fifteen of ours.

If only we had come together, and battled this virus as one people, we would be here morning 300 or 360 people, a sad enough day—but not 3605.

More than 3000 Rhode Islanders lost their lives to our inability to stand together as one people. 900,000 of our fellow Americans.

We live in a time when a time when truth is under assault
We live in a time when many people are speaking, and few are listening.
We need to remember USA starts with United, with U and not with I
I

The pandemic was a warning -- a reminder that we are desperately interdependent on each other.

We need each other.

And we need to protect our democracy, which when you understand it is really just a political reflection of our desperate need

to be together as one people who listen, just listen to one another.

Today I mourn my cousin Jerry Greenberger,
who died alone at 74 in a hospital bed in the Bronx,
in the hospital where he got infected.

I'll never forgot the cold day in April
when I had to watch on Zoom
while his wife Debbie and their two children, Evan and Emily
buried their husband and father,
alone in the cemetery,
in early April before the leaves were on the trees,
when a cold wind was blowing,
and none of Jerry's brothers or cousins could be with Debbie and
Evan and Emily to hold them up.

I mourn for everyone we lost.
But even more
I mourn for our soul as one people,
standing together,
holding each other up
and I mourn for our commitment
to put people and human life
before profit and political expediency.

I worry about our future,
And I pray we find the courage
to stand up as one people again soon.
I pray that we remember to vote
and vote for people who will fight to save the lives of others, who
don't put the almighty dollar first

And I pray
that all of us remember to do
what our brave health care workers did:
to serve each other before we serve ourselves.



Photo by Elëna Zhukova
