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On 9/11, Washington as usual

Dana Milbank, September 10, 2012

There is something for every taste in the Washington area on Tuesday.

The [National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts](#) is having its fundraising gala at the Mayflower Hotel.

The House Oversight Committee is holding yet another hearing probing mismanagement at the Justice Department.

A launch event is scheduled for a provocative new book, "[The End of Men.](#)"

The finale of a [Mason Dixon Master Chef Tournament](#) gets under way in Columbia, a group called "Teen Mom" plays the [Velvet Lounge](#) on U Street, and there's another installment of the "Funny Films Lunch Show" at the [Landmark E Street Cinema](#).

Washingtonians will have so much to do, in fact, that they may have little time to think about what else is happening Tuesday: the 11th anniversary of the killing of 3,000 people in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Nine-eleven just isn't what it used to be. Residents of the capital will awaken to what is forecast to be another clear Tuesday morning, just like that one 11 years ago, and they will find that the day that changed the nation is becoming more and more ordinary.

In some ways, this is a good thing: Osama bin Laden is dead, al-Qaeda isn't as scary, and Sept. 11, 2001, is on its way to joining Dec. 7, 1941 — more historical, less raw. Yet it's also unsettling that the day is losing its power to make Americans pause. This is part of the general amnesia that led Mitt Romney to deliver his [acceptance speech](#) for the Republican presidential nomination without mentioning a country called Afghanistan.

"I'm very surprised there's not a pronounced effort to reflect on that day," Amjad Khan told me at the Rayburn House Office Building on Monday. "It comes and goes as if it was just another day, but it wasn't just another day." Khan is one of the few to make sure 9/11 is still about 9/11: His Ahmadiyya Muslim Community,

a liberal group, runs a “Muslims for Life” blood drive with the Red Cross to honor victims of the attacks; he collected 25 pints at Rayburn on Monday morning.

Khan said he feels an “acute sense of obligation” because the terrorists were Muslim, but he wonders why people aren’t doing more to remember. “It’s a tough year, with the election cycle,” he said, “but you can’t forget.”

Several events will be held in Washington, as in New York and elsewhere, to commemorate the day, including a memorial in the Capitol. President Obama will observe a moment of silence at the White House before going to the Pentagon for a commemoration, and there will be a 9/11 Day of Service in Freedom Plaza on Pennsylvania Avenue.

But for each of those, there is one of these: Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) will speak to the Ripon Society at the National Republican Club of Capitol Hill on the topic “Defusing the Debt Bomb and the 2012 Election.” The debt “bomb” matters, but on 9/11, it sounds tacky.

The sheer volume of events shows how ordinary the day has become: Public-housing directors are having a legislative forum, health insurance companies are meeting to talk Medicare, CPAs are having a banking conference, the Cato Institute is attacking the IRS, a health group is recognizing Atrial Fibrillation Awareness Month, and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius is talking about the elderly.

There are events around town to discuss Mexico, Iran, Syria, Israel, India, the Caucasus and Pakistan. [Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies](#) is having a forum on “The Business of Sanitation.” On the Hill, the Ways and Means Committee is holding another hearing on Obamacare, and the House Natural Resources Committee is bravely taking up the Frank Buckles World War I Memorial Act.

Perhaps we can’t expect the Orioles not to take the field at Camden Yards on Tuesday night. And it doesn’t seem terribly harmful for the Urban Land Institute to mark 9/11 by holding a day-long conference on “walkable urban places.”

Less easy to understand is why Jeff Faile from Fiola restaurant chose 9/11 to give a “cocktail seminar” at A.M. Wine Shoppe (featured aperitifs: Cocchi Americano and Aperol). The nerve! Doesn’t he know he’s competing with the arts gala at the Mayflower?

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