

President Salutes Federal Worker From Oklahoma

By Stephen Barr
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Richard H. Dean, the federal employee saluted by President Clinton last night, believes "there are a lot of people who could fill my shoes just as easily as I do. There were a lot of things happening that day."

The day was April 19, 1995. Dean was at his desk in the Social Security office on the first floor of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, finishing his first cup of coffee. Then a truck bomb demolished the building, piling eight stories of concrete and debris on Dean's office.

"I saw a brilliant flash, the lights went off, I heard a huge noise. . . . You could hear people up front yelling for help. But the next thing you heard was like a gravel truck dumping its load. We're talking about a time frame of five to 10 seconds. After that, you didn't hear anybody," Dean said.

He was buried under ceiling tiles, shattered glass and furniture. Barely able to see because of the dust and darkness, Dean pulled himself free. Minutes later, he started responding to cries for help.

Dean dug through the rubble, trying to comfort hysterical co-workers. He told rescue crews where to find the employees and helped carry them out. Last night, President Clinton praised Dean for "his extraordinary heroism," saying he saved the lives of at least three women.

The bombing killed 169 people, including 15 Social Security employees and a volunteer worker. Twenty-two visitors in the Social Security waiting room also were killed.

In his State of the Union address, Clinton also praised Sgt. Jennifer Rodgers, an Oklahoma City police officer who pulled bombing victims out of the rubble, and Lucius Wright, a Jackson, Miss., schoolteacher who has helped inner-city children turn away from gangs.