



What Is Life Worth?: The Inside Story of the 9/11 Fund and Its Effort to Compensate the Victims of September 11th

Kenneth R. Feinberg

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Just days after September 11, 2001, Kenneth Feinberg was appointed to administer the federal 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund, a unique, unprecedented fund established by Congress to compensate families who lost a loved one on 9/11 and survivors who were physically injured in the attacks. Those who participated in the Fund were required to waive their right to sue the airlines involved in the attacks, as well as other potentially responsible entities. When the program was launched, many families criticized it as a brazen, tight-fisted attempt to protect the airlines from lawsuits. The Fund was also attacked as attempting to put insulting dollar values on the lives of lost loved ones. The families were in pain. And they were angry.

Over the course of the next three years, Feinberg spent almost all of his time meeting with the families, convincing them of the generosity and compassion of the program, and calculating appropriate awards for each and every claim. The Fund proved to be a dramatic success with over 97% of eligible families participating. It also provided important lessons for Feinberg, who became the filter, the arbitrator, and the target of family suffering. Feinberg learned about the enduring power of family grief, love, fear, faith, frustration, and courage. Most importantly, he learned that no check, no matter how large, could make the families and victims of 9/11 whole again.

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