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# Government reverses course, now says it won't seize land for Flight 93 memorial

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**Associated Press**

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SOMERSET, PA. — The federal government backtracked Friday and decided not to seize the western Pennsylvania property needed to build a Flight 93 memorial, saying instead it would renew negotiations with landowners.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter, D-Pa., met Friday with people who own 500 acres where the hijacked flight crashed on Sept. 11, 2001. The meeting came a month after the National Park Service announced that talks to get the remaining land for the memorial were unsuccessful and that they would use eminent domain.

The government has said it wants the \$58 million, 2,200-acre memorial built in time for the 10-year anniversary of the terrorist attacks.

"They too were the victims of 9/11 in terms of what happened," Salazar said of the landowners. "I do believe we will find a good way and a positive way to move forward."

Landowners will receive fair-market value for their property, Salazar said. Going forward, the head of the National Park Service's acquisitions program will be directly responsible for communicating with the families, he said.

The announcement, though, doesn't take eminent domain completely off the table. The government said it still has the option to use it, but will do so only as a last resort.

"We are going to make a last and final best effort," Salazar said while visiting the temporary memorial built near the site where Flight 93 plummeted from the sky as passengers stormed the cockpit.

The flight was en route from Newark, N.J., to San Francisco. Investigators believe the hijackers' plan was to crash into the Capitol or another target in Washington, D.C. The 40 passengers and crew killed in the crash have been recognized as heroes for preventing the attack.

Negotiations will begin with new vigor next week, Salazar said, noting the government is on a tight schedule

and determined to break ground for the permanent memorial on Sept. 11.

"I know that if we can't get it resolved, eminent domain is still a backstop," he added.

However, Salazar said he understands that the property owners' connection to the land runs deep. His own family has lived and farmed the same ranch in southern Colorado for 150 years, he said, so listening to the landowners' stories hit close to home.

"They, too, have been victimized by an attack on the United States," he said.

The landowners were pleased after the meeting with Salazar and Specter. Christine Williams, who along with her husband owns about six acres at the site, embraced playfully with Salazar in front of the cameras.

Yet, she said, she does not believe the negotiations will be successful because there is not enough time. The government, she said, will be forced to seize the land so long as it sticks to the current timetable.

"This was to be a property that we retired to," a tearful Williams said. "We didn't want to leave, and we still don't want to leave."

Pat Svonavec, whose family owns 275 acres at the site, also does not believe the timetable allows for true negotiations.

"I'm going to give them, certainly, the benefit of the doubt," Svonavec said. "I want to be a realist. I don't think there's enough time."

But his brother, Mike Svonavec, said he is "still hopeful that there is some possibility." Should the government resort to eminent domain to seize the land through the courts, it will be a painful, costly process, he added.

The Families of Flight 93, a group formed by relatives of the crash victims, said in a statement after the meeting they are "unwavering in their goal to get the permanent national memorial honoring our 40 heroes dedicated by the 10th anniversary of the events of 9/11."

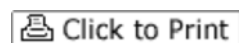
Some of the family members also attended Friday's meeting.

Specter said the "landowners have been good neighbors and there have been some miscommunications. Here and now we have to recognize the contributions of the landowners," he said.

In that spirit, Salazar said the memorial design will be changed to recognize the contribution of the landowners. No details on those changes were available.

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