They draped flag-draped caskets stood next to twelve smiling portraits of the fallen firefighters and their families. The procession began at 11 a.m. Uniformed first responders marched hand-in-hand past firefighters and law enforcement officers who lined the route. The crowd was punctuated by the ringing of the bell. Each name was read, saluted and presented a helmet to family members sitting in the front row, directly in front of the stage. When officials opened the doors at 10 a.m., the line already stretched from the Ferrell Center beyond the parking lot. 

At 1:24 p.m., the crowd of 2,000 persons, including firefighters, first responders and grieving families of the victims and residents of West, was gathered to pay tribute to the fallen firefighters. The mayor, the West Public Safety Director, and the West police chief led the procession where firefighters, many of whom were described as always ready to help others when they are needed, carried the caskets to the Ferrell Center. At 11 a.m., the crowd of first responders and family members of the victims and residents of West, who were in attendance at the memorial service, filled the actual arena. First responders change places and continue to share their support with the grieving family members, said, "Our hearts and prayers go out to the families of the victims."}

President Obama was moved by the vigil — a vigil they held from early Thursday morning until the service concluded Thursday evening.

In front of each stood a uniformed firefighter from Tool — northeast of Corsicana — said he at the service out of a sense of camaraderie, said, "Every man or woman that's here, we're all family. We all support one another," Abbas said. Abbas said he did not, but privileged to attend. "I hope they know that they are part of this family, too," Abbas said. The families of the victims and residents of the stricken town, which has already started the slow rehoming process, said, "The heart and prayers go out to the families of the victims." Many showed up early that morning to dance with them through the gathering outside of the arena.

"May the sun shine upon their paths, may the wind always be at their backs and may the Lord hold them in the palm of his hand." The president, who arrived a little after the fly-over turn of the accident site on his way from Dallas, pledged his support to West in the wake of the accident that has torn apart the small Texas town. "You are not alone. You are not forgotten," he said of the families of the victims, who have had to cope with the destruction of many buildings in addition to the death of loved ones. In a speech often interrupted by applause, he praised the faith and dedication of the residents of West, and emphasized the bonds that draw together not just the area but the nation. "We may not all live in Texas but we're neighbors," Obama said. "We're Americans, too. And we stand with you and we will not forget, and we'll be there even after the cameras leave and after the attention turns elsewhere." Obama praised the courage of the firefighters, many of whom were described as always ready to help others when a call went out, and also the citizens of the town. He also praised members of the surrounding communities and others who reacted to help in the wake of the blast.

"That's the thing about this tragedy. This small town family is bigger now," he said. And though there will be hard days ahead, he predicted, the love of the community will keep West going. "And if you see in the people of West, what makes West special isn't going to go away," he said. America needs small towns like West where "there's always someone to call," he said.

"With the American flag draped on the casket, a small pilot car led the procession, a so-called ‘vanguard’ car on the roof of the Ferrell Center. They were a group as different as the citizens of West themselves. There were suits, casual clothes, cowboy hats and T-shirts, modern blessed and ghastly dresses. More than once, one of the mourners would pass the casket of a loved one and slowly, silently, clip their hand on it, with a smiling portrait of one who would never come home, collapse. Each time, two first responders would stop forward and catch the person before they could fall before gently taking them to their seats. In addition to the president and first lady, Rep. Joe Barton, Gov. Rick Perry, Mayor Ben Kent Strat, congressmen Bill Flores and former congressman Chet Edwards were in attendance. The president, who arrived a little after a fly-over turn of the accident site on his way from Dallas, pledged his support to West in the wake of the accident that has torn apart the small Texas town. "You are not alone. You are not forgotten," he said of the families of the victims, who have had to cope with the destruction of many buildings in addition to the death of loved ones. In a speech often interrupted by applause, he praised the faith and dedication of the residents of West, and emphasized the bonds that draw together not just the area but the nation. "We may not all live in Texas but we're neighbors," Obama said. "We're Americans, too. And we stand with you and we will not forget, and we'll be there even after the cameras leave and after the attention turns elsewhere." Obama praised the courage of the firefighters, many of whom were described as always ready to help others when a call went out, and also the citizens of the town. He also praised members of the surrounding communities and others who reacted to help in the wake of the blast.

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