

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks at a Ceremony Honoring the National Association of Police Organizations Top Cops

May 12, 2009

Well, thank you, Joe, for the wonderful introduction. Welcome, all of you, to the White House, and joining us on this beautiful spring day. It is an extraordinary privilege to celebrate these top cops, who have traveled here to be recognized for incredible acts of courage and quick thinking, which prevented harm and saved lives.

Before I speak more about these outstanding officers, there're just a few wonderful Members of Congress that I want to introduce. Representative John Conyers, one of the deans of the House of Representatives; Representative Emanuel Cleaver from Kansas City; and Representative Lucille Roybal-Allard, great to see you. Thank you so much. Please give them a big round of applause.

Now, I don't know if you guys are aware that we have a nickname for Joe Biden around here in the White House. Joe's been overseeing the way funds are being used under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to ensure tax dollars are going towards the intended purposes of creating jobs and aren't being wasted. So, we've taken to calling him "the sheriff," because nobody messes with Joe.

And I want you to know that he is making sure that money is getting on the ground helping local communities, including making sure that money is going to allow local communities to hire more police officers and make sure that they've got the equipment and the training they need to succeed.

I also want to thank Attorney General Eric Holder for being here and for his leadership at the Department of Justice, which oversees much of the funding in the recovery plan and the budget that will be providing local law enforcement the resources they need.

And finally, I want to give a particular welcome to the leaders of the National Association of Police Organizations, including their outstanding president, Tom Nee. Thank you so much for being here.

This is an event that we are glad, as Joe mentioned, to bring back to the White House, after a period of absence, in honor of these fine officers and the folks across the country they represent: the men and women who walk the beat, who answer the call, and do the difficult work of keeping our neighborhoods safe. And it's no surprise that many police officers, including many of you, have served in our military or are still serving as members of the Reserve.

Of course, it's not a difficult thing for a President, or a Vice President, or anyone one of us to praise you. You deserve it. You've rescued hostages held at gunpoint. You've ended violent standoffs. You've taken on gunmen in the face of grave danger, refusing to give up or back down even after suffering serious injuries. You've reacted quickly in crisis to protect the innocent. You've reacted with compassion for those that were in need. And you've literally walked through the fire to help your neighbors escape disaster.

Now, that's what police officers do. You step into harm's way to form—officer by officer, block by block, neighborhood by neighborhood—the line between safety and violence, calm

and chaos, hope and despair. And for that it's not difficult to offer our praise. But, you deserve more than just praise, for it's far more important that we actually support you; that we match these words, which come so easily, with the work that can and must follow.

Right now, for example, at this moment of economic challenge, one of the greatest concerns is that we'll see State and local governments forced to lay off police officers, even though we know that crime has a tendency to go up when the economy is in dire straits. We've seen that in my own hometown of Chicago and in many other cities.

So we can't back down, because the job of every American depends on the job you do and the resources that enable you to do that job well. Police officers know better than anyone: A neighborhood that isn't safe is a neighborhood that isn't growing, that won't see old businesses hiring new workers or new businesses opening their doors. You know how devastating crime can be, how it can shatter lives and undermine whole communities.

And that's why the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act includes \$1 billion to save or create about 5,500 jobs through the COPS program. And there's another \$2 billion in grants which will help keep police officers on the beat and on the job. In fact, in March, I went to Columbus, Ohio, to speak at their police academy's graduation ceremony, and these new officers are now protecting the streets of Columbus because of those grants. And there are similar stories being told in precincts all over America.

The budget we've passed builds on the recovery plan, providing additional funding for the COPS program as well as for Justice Assistance Grants, also known as the Byrne-JAG program. Taken together, we're making a significant downpayment towards my administration's goal of adding 50,000 police officers across this country. And that's only part of what we're doing to provide law enforcement with the tools and resources necessary to keep people safe.

As you know, this is a difficult moment for our Nation. But at a time when we face economic crisis born partially from irresponsibility on Wall Street and in Washington, I'm heartened by the folks who are standing behind me today who've demonstrated, with acts of selflessness and bravery, what it means to be responsible; what it means to be a problem-solver, a mediator, an investigator, and protector all wrapped into one; what it means to wave goodbye to your families and start another shift unsure of how it will end; and what it means to put your life on the line for a partner or a stranger in order—in other words, what it means to serve.

So I want to thank all of you for this extraordinary service. I am honored to welcome you to the White House. I'm proud to offer my congratulations, my appreciation, and most importantly, my administration's unwavering support.

God bless you, and God bless the United States of America. Thank you, all, for joining us here today. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:38 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Vice President Joe Biden, who introduced the President. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included remarks by Vice President Biden.

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