

Remarks at the National Peace Officers Memorial Service

May 15, 2012

Please have a seat. Thank you so much. Thank you, Chuck, for that very kind introduction. Chuck is a proud police officer, he's the proud parent of a police officer, and he has dedicated his life to law enforcement and their families. So I want to thank him for his extraordinary service.

I want to recognize the entire Fraternal Order of Police and its leadership, including Jim Pasco, for all your work on behalf of those who wear the badge. I'd like to recognize FOP Auxiliary President Linda Hennie, all the members of the FOP Auxiliary, Members of Congress including Speaker Boehner, Congressman Hoyer, and Senator Leahy, as well as members of my administration. And most of all, I want to acknowledge and thank the families of those who have fallen.

As Scripture tells us, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Our country's law enforcement officers use force when they have to. They are well armed, and they are well trained. But they never forget that theirs is a mission of peace. Their job is to keep the peace, to allow all of us to enjoy peace in our neighborhoods and for our families. And today, with heavy hearts, we honor those who gave their lives in the service of that mission. Their families are in our thoughts and prayers, as we remember the quiet courage of the men and women we have lost.

These are officers like Detective John Falcone, of Poughkeepsie, New York. In February, Detective Falcone responded to a shot fired call on Main Street. And when he arrived on the scene, he saw a man holding a gun with one hand and a small child with the other.

In a situation like that, every instinct pushes us towards self-preservation. But when the suspect fled, still holding the child, Detective Falcone didn't think twice. He took off in pursuit, and tragically, in the struggle that followed, he was shot and killed. He is survived by his parents.

But there's another survivor as well: A 3-year old child who might not be alive today had it not been for the sacrifice of a hero who gave his life for another.

This willingness to risk everything for a complete stranger is extraordinary. And yet, among our Nation's law enforcement officers, it is also commonplace. Last summer, the North Platte River was running high near Douglas, Wyoming. When a teenage girl got caught in the current, Deputy Bryan Gross, of the Converse County Sheriff's Office, jumped in after her.

The girl was eventually pulled from the water, but Deputy Gross was swept away. And he is survived by his wife Amy. Today we remember a man who swore to protect his neighbors and who kept that promise no matter what the cost.

I suspect that at that moment, Deputy Gross wasn't trying to be a hero, he was just doing his job. You can find that bravery, the courage to do your duty, day in and day out, in so many officers across our country.

One of those officers was Deputy Sheriff Suzanne Hopper, from Clark County, Ohio. Deputy Hopper was known as the go-to person in her department, no task was too large or too small.

And on New Year's Day 2011, Deputy Hopper arrived at a crime scene and began a preliminary investigation, just as she had done many times during her 12 years of service. But as she was photographing evidence, a man opened the door of his trailer and fired at her with his shotgun, killing her. And today we remember not just a fine officer, but a wife, a mother, and a stepmother.

Like all those we honor today, Deputy Hopper is also survived by the fellow officers who she meant so much to and who meant so much to her. Last week, her childhood friend, Sergeant Kris Shultz, posted her flag at a memorial in Ohio. He made a promise in her memory. He said, "To honor her, we will keep going and continue to do what we've done, no matter how hard it is at times."

We will keep going. There is no pledge that better honors the memory of those we have lost. And there are no memories—there are no words that better capture the unbreakable spirit of those who wear the badge.

Because even in the face of tragedy, I know that so many of you will return home and continue to do what you have always done. Some of you will kiss your husbands or wives goodbye each morning and send them out the door not knowing what might happen that day. Some of you are children and parents, sisters and brothers, whose pride is mixed with worry.

And of course, there are the officers themselves. Every American who wears the badge knows the burdens that come with it: the long hours and the stress, the knowledge that just about any moment could be a matter of life or death. You carry these burdens so the rest of us don't have to.

And this shared sense of purpose brings you together, and it brings you to our Nation's Capital today. You come from different States and different backgrounds and different walks of life, but I know that you come here as a community—one family, united by a quiet strength and a willingness to sacrifice on behalf of others.

The rest of us can never fully understand what you go through, but please know that we hold you in our hearts, not just today, but always. We are forever in your debt. And it is on behalf of all of us—the entire American people—that I offer my thoughts, my prayers, and my thanks.

May God shine a light upon the fallen and comfort the mourning. May He protect the peacemakers who protect us every day. And may He bless, now and forever, the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:25 a.m. at the U.S. Capitol. In his remarks, he referred to K. Charles Canterbury, Jr., national president, and James O. Pasco, Jr., executive director, Fraternal Order of Police; Kenneth C. Canterbury II, son of Mr. Canterbury; and Margaret and John M. Falcone, Sr., parents of Detective John M. Falcone, Jr.

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Names: Boehner, John A.; Canterbury, K. Charles, Jr.; Canterbury, Kenneth C., II; Falcone, John M., Sr.; Falcone, Margaret; Ferryman, Michael L.; Gross, Amy S.; Hennie, Linda; Hoyer, Steny H.; Leahy, Patrick J.; Pasco, James O., Jr.; Shultz, Kris; Welch, Forever.

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