

Administration of Barack Obama, 2013

Remarks at a Ceremony Honoring the National Association of Police Organizations TOP COPS

May 11, 2013

Thank you so much, everybody. Everybody, please have a seat. Well, good morning, and welcome to the White House for what's one of my favorite events all year.

I want to start by thanking Gil Kerlikowske, a former police officer: police chief in Seattle, police commissioner in Buffalo, police officer in St. Petersburg, Florida; now serves as the head of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. He is doing outstanding work every day, helping to make sure that our young people are safe and not exposed to some of the worst drugs out there. And so we very much want to give him a big round of applause. Thank you, Gil. We've got NAPO President Tom Nee right here next to me. Tom is doing an outstanding job every day. And of course, we've got our 2013 TOP COPS. Hey!

Now, as President, I get to meet and work with a lot of extraordinary law enforcement officers every single day, from men and women who protect me and my family—the folks in the Secret Service—to local police who help out on motorcades and events around the country. And I'm incredibly grateful that all these law enforcement officers are doing such outstanding work.

And then, just a few weeks ago, obviously, in Boston, our entire country saw once again the strong stuff that these men and women in uniform are made of: police officers, first responders who were running towards explosions, not knowing if there was something more on the way; law enforcement from different agencies and different parts of the country working together as one united team to identify suspects and bring them to justice; and in a moment that few of us will ever forget, the citizens of Watertown, Massachusetts, lining their streets to cheer on and high five and hug the officers as they headed home after a job well done.

We don't always get that opportunity to stand and applaud the men and women who keep us safe. But they're out there, hundreds of thousands of you, patrolling our streets every single day. And we know that when we need you most, you'll be ready to dash into danger, to protect our lives even if it means putting your lives on the line. That's what these folks are all about. That's what the men in standing—the men and women standing behind me have proven: their heart, their courage, their dedication.

And of course, as always, they're a humble group. They'll tell you they're not heroes. They'll say they were just doing their jobs. And today we honor them as TOP COPS because they're half right. It's true: They were just doing their jobs. From the moment they swore an office—swore an oath to serve with honor, from the first time they put on a uniform and pinned on a badge, they knew they might be called upon to do some really tough stuff. But I think that makes them more heroic, not less heroic, because they signed up for this. They volunteered and yet continued, day in, day out, to dedicate themselves. And when the moment came, they were ready to respond.

I already talked about one of this year's TOP COPS, Brian Murphy, in my State of the Union Address. When a gunman opened fire on a temple in Wisconsin and Brian was the first to arrive, he did not consider his own safety. He fought back until help arrived and ordered his fellow officers, who are here today, to protect the safety of the Americans worshiping inside,

even though he was lying there, bleeding from 12 bullet wounds. When he was asked how he did it, he said, "That's just the way we're made."

That's what you've got to do. That's what you've got to be made of to take down homicide suspects in Los Angeles or Vegas or shooters in Miami or Indiana or Chicago or Iowa, saving untold numbers of lives. That's what you've got to be made of to dodge live power lines during Hurricane Sandy to free your partner pinned down by a tree, all the while saying, I've got you, pal.

So yes, this is their job. But it's not just about the uniform that they wear. It's about who they are, what they're made of. When a gunman entered a restaurant in Pasadena, Texas, it was three off-duty cops who put themselves in harm's way so that others could escape.

Detective Ivan Marcano didn't care that he was off duty when he saw two muggers attacking a cab driver in the Bronx. He got out of his girlfriend's car to stop them and was shot point blank in the chest, a bullet inches from his heart. But his story doesn't end there. As his girlfriend was driving him to the hospital, I'm sure not very happy with him—where's Ivan? There he is. Yes. *[Laughter]* By total coincidence, they ran into the shooter's getaway car.

So what does Detective Marcano do? He jumps out of the car. He's getting—he's been shot—keeps pressure on his chest with his left hand, holding a service weapon with his right, runs after the suspects. Took one of them down, which led to the capture of the others. He wasn't on the clock when any of this happened. This was his date night. You know? It's unbelievable. *[Laughter]* Hey, by the way, did you invite your girlfriend down here?

New York Police Department Detective Ivan Marcano. Yes. She's over there *[inaudible]*.

The President. Where are you? Stand up. All right. She has got to get a big round of applause. She deserves a really nice dinner—*[laughter]*—after putting her through that.

The cab driver who Detective Marcano rescued put it simply. He said, I will be thankful to him for the rest of his life—or for the rest of my life. So today, to all our TOP COPS, let me say that our Nation shares that sense of gratitude. You embody America at its best and at its bravest. And you set an example, because if TOP COPS can risk their lives to do their jobs, the rest of us should just be able to summon some tiny fraction of courage and the same sense of responsibility. And certainly, that applies for those of us responsible for supporting law enforcement and first responders here in Washington.

Even during tough economic times, we've got to make sure they've got the resources that they need, whether that's supporting the COPS program or helping you hire new officers or preventing layoffs or giving you the most advanced crime-fighting tools and the mobile technology and critical data, all of which you need in this 21st century, when it comes to crime fighting. And we also need to take some commonsense steps that protect our rights, protect our children, protect officers in the line of duty by making it harder for dangerous criminals to get their hands on lethal weapons.

These officers represent the best of us, and they deserve the best from us. And that begins with being thankful to them not just today, but for the rest of their lives, and recognizing the sacrifices not only they make, but their parents and spouses and kids who watch their loved ones go off and serve every day knowing that there's real danger out there. So I'd ask all Americans, everybody who is watching all across the country, when you see a police officer, you meet an officer's family, let them know how much you appreciate it. It's the least we can do for the men and women who give us so much and help keep us safe.

All right. So with that in mind, let me give another huge thank you to our TOP COPS of 2003 [2013],* our entire law enforcement community, all the families who are here. All the kids who are here, thanks for being patient and listening to me. [Laughter] And now what we want to do is get a picture. So I think we're going to strike this podium, and I'm going to line up. I think there's a spot left for us. Everybody, say cheese.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:10 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to suspected April 15 Boston Marathon bombers Tamerlan Tsarnaev, who was killed in a shootout with police on April 19, and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev; Lt. Brian Murphy, Oak Creek Police Department in Oak Creek, WI; Jason Levia and Rodain Ortega, suspects in the shooting of New York City police officer Ivan Marcano; Mario Abarca, a New York City taxi driver whose alleged robbery and assault were disrupted by Mr. Marcano; and Hilda Miolan Forteza, girlfriend of Mr. Marcano.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : National Association of Police Organizations, ceremony honoring TOP COPS.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Abarca, Mario; Kerlikowske, R., Gil; Levia, Jason; Marcano Ivan; Marcano, Ivan; Miolan-Forteza, Hilda; Murphy, Brian; Nee, Thomas J.; Ortega, Rodain; Page, Wade M.; Tsarnaev, Dzhokhar; Tsarnaev, Tamerlan.

Subjects: Decorations, medals, and awards : Law enforcement and crime :: Top Cop award; Law enforcement and crime : Drug use and youth availability; Law enforcement and crime : Gun control; Law enforcement and crime : Law enforcement officers, service and dedication; Law enforcement and crime : National Association of Police Organizations, ceremony honoring top cops; Law enforcement and crime : National Association of Police Organizations; Law enforcement and crime : State and community law enforcement agencies, Federal support; Massachusetts : Terrorist attach in Boston; Natural disasters : Hurricane Sandy; White House Office : National Drug Control Policy, Office of :: Director; Wisconsin : Shootings in Oak Creek.

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* White House correction.