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Remarks to Firefighters and Law Enforcement Personnel in Los Angeles

May 8, 1992

Let me just say I'm very pleased that the Governor's with us and Senator Seymour's with us. And really, what we did is to want to come over here and, one, see where some of the action stemmed from, but mainly to thank the firefighters and the patrolmen for a heroic job well done.

You know, at a time like this you think of your faith, and you remember that the Bible talked about, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Well, I must say, when I think of the firefighters and the highway patrol, I think of what you have done and, frankly, do all the time in keeping the peace and restoring the peace. You certainly have the gratitude, you may not know it, but you have the gratitude of people all across this country.

I wanted to just recite a fact or two that you all know but the rest of the country might not. There were almost 6,000 fires responded to, nearly 12,000 arrests, thousands of buildings saved along with untold lives. That, I would say, is just one of the legacies of your work. And there was another one: You showed that people that would wantonly destroy, wantonly terrorize, wantonly kill their fellow citizens were not going to prevail. What you did took a good deal of courage, whether it was the patrol, whether it was the firefighters. I salute you for that, the country salutes you for that. And I think your very presence restored a sense of civility to an otherwise outrageous situation.

Yesterday, I was privileged to go to a memorial service—it was National Day of Prayer—at Reverend E.V. Hill's church. When I mentioned those who worked to restore the law, the police, et cetera, why, it broke out in spontaneous applause. People are very grateful in the neighborhoods for all that you have done.

I heard a lot of stories, anecdotes about what went on. They told me about Rich Perez, the lone gunman, the only armed officer guarding L.A.'s traffic control center. And these rioters came in and tried to break down the doors. Somehow, he managed to convince the rioters that they had met their match, and they turned away. And the traffic control system was safe and sound, and a legend was born.

I've just come from the hospital, from seeing one of your own, one of the firefighters' own, Scott Miller. You talk about courage and you talk about the way his fellow firefighters helped him, it's a great lesson for our whole country. Incidentally, he's a courageous man. They told me that what had happened to him was serious. But they also told me, the doctor, that because of his spirit, the same spirit so many of you exemplified, that he's going to make it. He's fighting hard, and his wife was there and his kids—his kids weren't, but they were together as a family. I'll tell you, the doctors and nurses are rallying around, and he's getting the best possible care.

But here was another example of an innocent guy going out to help others, taking a shot from some hoodlum going by in a car. And we just cannot condone that sense of violence, that kind of violence, anywhere in this country for whatever reason. There's no explaining it. There's no rationalizing it. And I will try to take that message to the country day in and day out.

There was Captain Kaemmerer, a captain of a fire company which doused flames at an ammunition shop in the face of gunfire. Here's a guy going into what you might call a hostile environment anyway, firefighting captain, and fighting that.

We all know the case of the LAPD's Michael Strawberry, Darryl's brother. Darryl

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said, "Michael was my rock." Well, that's fine. And the LAPD have many, many such rocks, people doing a job and doing it well. And you were rocks, saving buildings and saving lives. These pictures that I was handed, I mean, I'll tell you, they make a profound impression on—I'm sure they make an impression on firefighters, but they make a profound impression on the layman to think about battling something this powerful and doing it with the heroism and the dedication you do.

So, really, what I wanted to do is drop in here, trying to do it just as President of the United States, trying to leave the politics back there somewhere on the Potomac and come out here to see what I could see with my eyes and to give my heartfelt

thanks to those—in this instance, highway patrolmen, firefighters—who have done so much for their country.

So that's my message, and it's a profound one in a sense that today and yesterday it was the riots in Los Angeles, tomorrow it'll be something else. And over the last years it's always been the same, the dedication, the selfless dedication. I don't want to think any of you guys would say you're overpaid, but you're doing something for your fellow man, and that in itself means an awful lot to your country.

So thank you, and may God bless you.

Note: The President spoke at 7:51 a.m. at Fire Station No. 26.

Remarks to Military and Law Enforcement Personnel in Los Angeles

May 8, 1992

Thank you all. Thank you very, very much, and I'm just delighted to be here. I first would salute all that participated in keeping the peace, guaranteeing the peace, fighting against those who wanted to break the peace. And the events of the past 10 days, not just for the people in Los Angeles but people in the rest of the country, have been packed with emotion, raw and intense.

And in my time out here I've heard the shouts of anger and heard some whispered prayers yesterday in a lovely ecumenical church service. We've seen utter devastation, all of you have that have looked around the streets at all. We've seen the beginnings of restoration. And we've seen the worst that human beings can do, and then we've seen some of the very best.

So, I really wanted to come over here and thank all of you, the LAPD, the members of the military, the Guard and the regulars, both Marine—[*applause*]. And I think what this particular group and others that I just met with, the highway patrolmen, firefighters, are saying to the country is that we stand to defend decency and honor; we stand to defend and protect the honest men

and women in this country. And that's the message that I think has gone out. And you did what's right, and you did what's demanded of you.

And yesterday in this little church service I mentioned, I mentioned the police officers particularly, singled them out, and the place broke into spontaneous applause for those officers that are out there bringing civil tranquility to this country. And I salute—[*applause*]. And then I want to single out and salute also the Federal law enforcement officers who worked side by side with many of you who were on the streets. The special agents from the FBI, the Bureau of Prisons people, the marshals, the Border Patrol, all were out there assisting the police in stopping the terrible violence and the looting. And of course, again, the local police officials, the LAPD, the officers on the beat who have the toughest job in the world. And I came, really, just to thank each and every one of you who worked around the clock to restore order.

I might say, I've just come from the hospital where I saw a young firefighter who