

19th Annual Peace Officers' Memorial Service

May 15, 2000

National President Gil Gallegos' Memorial Speech

President Clinton, distinguished Members of Congress, Secretaries of the Cabinet, honored guests and law enforcement officers, I welcome you to the annual memorial sponsored by the 290,000 active members of the Fraternal Order of Police, our Auxiliary and Associates. I extend a special welcome to you, the survivors, because this is the day of remembrance for your loved ones—those officers who made the ultimate sacrifice.

This annual FOP memorial honors 139 law enforcement officers who sacrificed their lives for this nation—a nation which mourns their loss. It doesn't matter where these officers served, but it does matter that they accomplished their duty for us all, with honor, integrity and distinction. I believe, sincerely, that we are here not only to mourn their loss but to celebrate their lives.

As members of the law enforcement profession, these officers, like us all, were responsible for the impressive reduction of crime in 1999 and the seven years before that. Like you, I read with interest the headlines and various articles about the reduction in crime. Though few articles gave credit to the police officers working the streets of America, we know who was responsible for the 7% reduction.

It was the officers we commemorate today along with their federal, state and local partners in police service. It was the police officers working with enlightened chiefs and sheriffs in community policing efforts. It was the police working in partnership with communities. And it was those in Congress and in State legislatures who believed in the work that we do who are responsible for the reduction in crime. Though a few will take all the credit, in reality we know it has been a massive initiative that has helped us take back the streets of this country.

Mr. President, I know that you have helped us gain additional funds and have helped us focus on our community service. We are very appreciative of your help and that of Attorney General Reno who brought a local perspective to the office of the Attorney General. I thank both of you.

While we know these officers were special, they really were very typical people. They were hard working, honest and devoted to their family and profession. They were devoted to pursuing the cause of justice for the innocent victims of crime and with compassion for those less fortunate in our communities.

These 139 officers lost their lives because of their sense of duty. A duty performed with the knowledge that at some time in their careers, they may be called upon to not only take a life, but to give a life. That is exactly what happened in 1999 and in every year before that. Unfortunately, loss of law enforcement lives will occur every year hence.

With that reality, officers throughout this country continue daily to perform their duties with diligence to community service despite the fact that there are some in this country who condemn and stereotype police officers as brutal racists and bigots who exemplify the violence in our society and who question our ability to keep our communities safe for all citizens.

I witnessed this notion at a recent protest rally we held at Antioch College in Ohio. The graduating seniors invited cop-killer Mumia Abu-Jamal to speak at their commencement ceremonies. I was disgusted to hear some of the students yelling that all police officers should be killed and that we are a bunch of racist bigots, obviously misconstruing the actions of a few officers as the practices of us all.

If any profession in this country understands the problems of racism and intolerance, it is the law enforcement profession. Racism and intolerance are a cancer and we in law enforcement, because we see its devastating results, have a responsibility to do our part to eliminate it from our society. We can't turn a deaf ear nor close our eyes to this terrible problem. After all, our job is to protect the innocent and the weak and to promote public safety in every community.

On the other hand, we also have a responsibility to expose the truth.

As in the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal, an avowed revolutionary and obvious racist himself, we must expose the truth of this case. It really isn't about him. It is about Philadelphia Police Officer Danny Faulkner who was killed on December 9, 1981. The truth is that this coward, Jamal, murdered a young officer and has never expressed remorse or regret, and continues to use and abuse the legal system to his own sick benefit.

The truth is that Maureen Faulkner, Danny's widow, has never had closure because of the legal controversy surrounding her husband's murderer. The fact that this murderer continues to be treated as a martyr and celebrity tears at Maureen's heart. She knows the truth and can't understand why those who support Jamal don't or won't look at and understand the facts of the case. Likewise, I don't understand either.

Some of the murderer's supporters claim that Maureen is simply fixated on the death of her husband and is unable to move ahead with her life. She is not fixated on the death but on the fact that there has been no justice in this case. I believe there will be no justice in this case until the court's death sentence is carried out.

I can assure Maureen Faulkner that we will continue to support her right to speak out for justice as well as for those of you, the survivors, whose cases have not been resolved or brought to closure.

Also, we in law enforcement will continue to use our First Amendment right to speak out when we see injustice in this or any case.

For several months this country has been embroiled in a controversy involving a six-year-old Cuban child found floating off the Florida coast. Because of what has happened in this controversy, there are renewed calls for the normalization of relations between Cuba and the

United States. Each of us has our own view, but I believe you will share my opinion that normalization cannot be accomplished until all the criminals and cop-killers living in that country are returned to our prisons here in the United States.

There are scores of fugitives as there are scores of victims of crime. There are survivors of officers killed in the line of duty waiting for justice and closure. We will not rest until these matters are resolved.

Mr. President, I hope you share my opinion on this matter and will use your power to bring justice where none has occurred.

Various incidents involving police officers have received high profile notoriety that has caused some to view us all based on the failures of a few. I am confident that despite the negative atmosphere we in law enforcement will remain resilient and devoted to protect and serve. To do less would be a disservice to the officers we commemorate today because their ultimate sacrifice cannot be in vain.

I wish you, the survivors, the very best and assure you that as a part of the police family we will never forget your pain, anguish and loss.

Thank you.