

20th Annual Peace Officers' Memorial Service

May 15, 2001

National President Gil Gallegos' Memorial Speech

President Bush, distinguished Members of Congress, Secretaries of the Cabinet, honored guests, law enforcement officers and especially you, the survivors of the officers who made the ultimate sacrifice, I welcome you to our annual memorial. This is the 20th Anniversary of the memorial service sponsored by the 293,000 active members of the Fraternal Order of Police, our Auxiliary and Associates. Today, we remember those special officers whose sacrifice has been etched in the souls and minds of the survivors and the officers who cared for them.

Today, we remember and celebrate the lives of 150 special officers. We call on all Americans to remember these officers not only on this Law Enforcement Memorial Day, but each and every day.

The officers who remain will continue their goal to protect and serve and maintain the loving spirit of those who passed before us even though law enforcement officers throughout this country are under extreme pressure and scrutiny.

In the past few months, we have been the focus of many accusations and investigations that we often perceive as being unfair and unfounded. We have found it necessary to defend ourselves from broad-based charges of racism, bias and unfair enforcement of the laws we have sworn to uphold. Law enforcement officers will always be scrutinized. Some of the media and certain anti-police organizations' scrutiny is often misguided or simply reflective of bias against police officers and what we represent.

But I am confident that despite the many questions about how we perform our professional duties, the majority of people truly believe and support us. Not only for the job that we do, but for what we represent. We represent the spirit and success of a democracy and a free nation because without law and order, our country would be destined for anarchy.

You, the survivors, know what your beloved officers stood for and how they felt about their jobs and the community they served. They really believed in their profession and in addition to giving their heart and soul to the job, they gave their lives for us. They gave their lives so that we could safely walk the streets of our communities. They helped turn the tide against the criminal element in our society and have helped remove the barriers of distrust. Together, in partnership, communities have joined police officers in fighting crime.

I am confident that in each community—its citizens and police officers together—can take the streets back from the thugs who prey upon the disadvantaged, the young and the elderly. We must take the streets back from those whose disrespect for human life is such that it causes them to take the life of a police officer—an act which must be met with swift justice and effective

punishment. I believe that someone who takes an officer's life must forfeit their own. It isn't about vengeance; it's about justice.

I, too, have lost friends in the span of my career. I still remember my friends, co-workers and partners; Officer Phil Chacon, John Carrillo, Shawn WcWethy and Gerald Cline, all members of the Albuquerque Police Department. I remember losing them, but more importantly I remember what they gave me and so many others—their dedication to duty and service.

We must also remember all victims of crime. They suffer so often at the despicable hands of criminals who lack respect for human life and the rights of others. I firmly believe we should continue the call on Congress to pass the Victims Bill of Rights. A bill that does not develop extraordinary privileges or considerations, but grants a sense of justice for those who fall prey to criminals. It ensures that the courts and the criminal justice system respect the rights of victims.

Each commemorated officer has his or her story that is unique to their lives and those of their survivors. We could write volumes about those lives and each evokes the same emotion and a deep sense of loss. Each was unique, yet part of a greater family of law enforcement officers. A closely knit family that mourns their loss, yet remembers the joy of their lives. It is because of them that we continue on our path of public service.

Those of us left behind continue their work and will strive to protect and serve all Americans even in the face of adversity, danger and too often the lack of recognition and appreciation.

The 700,000 law enforcement officers from federal, state and local agencies remain committed to making our streets and highways safe. They remain on the front line continuing on a never-ending struggle to make what is wrong right and what is evil good. Indeed, a daunting task.

Police officers often feel like the accused, rather than the accuser. Our job performance and behavior is put on trial as a means to diffuse the guilt of a criminal. We become the target. This is why police officers need a Bill of Rights. We deserve to be treated with professional fairness with justice and with due process like all Americans. Not only do we deserve it, we have earned it.

Mr. President, I assure you that police officers throughout this land will remain dedicated to protect and serve. But we need your help. We need more funding to continue fighting the scourge of drugs and the violence that it breeds.

We need to continue funding community policing partnerships to ensure the safety and security of all neighborhoods. We must also strive to ensure that people from differing ethnic, racial and economic backgrounds can live harmoniously and free from strife created by criminals.

Crime, though reduced, has not gone away. We must remain forever vigilant just like the officers we honor today. Their example implores us to carry out their life's work.

Another group of officers so often overlooked are those who retired honorably and those whose call to duty left them disabled. They set the stage for us, were our mentors and gave us guidance as we all began our careers. I offer a special salute to them.

As a tribute to you, the survivors, I will assure you each that your loss will never be forgotten by your law enforcement family or grateful nation.