

## **18th Annual Peace Officers' Memorial Service**

**May 15, 1999**

### **National President Gil Gallegos' Memorial Speech**

Vice President Gore, distinguished members of Congress, Secretaries of the Cabinet, members of the Dixie Chicks, special guests and law enforcement officers, I welcome you to our annual memorial service. On behalf of our 277,000 active members, our Auxiliary and Associates, I want to extend a special welcome to the survivors of those officers who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

May 15th has been the day set aside by President John Kennedy as a day of commemoration for officers who lost their lives in the line of duty. This day is part of an eventful Police Week which highlights law enforcement's service to the community. Police Week is marked by memorial services and other community events which recognize the work and sacrifices of the 700,000 federal, state and local law enforcement officers across this great nation.

We are the law enforcement officers who represent the thin blue line of defense between good and evil. Our paramount duty is to protect the innocent and justly enforce our laws. Each officer here and the thousands across the nation fully understand our role in a democratic society where there is a delicate balance between Constitutional freedom and the need for social order.

On July 24, 1998, this balance between freedom and order was tested in the halls of Congress with the loss of Capitol Police Officers Jacob Joseph Chestnut and John Michael Gibson. These two heroes lost their lives while protecting others and brought nationwide attention to the Capitol. This attention focused on the ability--or inability--to protect ourselves from those bent on making victims of the innocent and testing the freedoms we hold sacred. We do hold as sacred the ability to move about and to enjoy our nation's institutions and historical treasures.

But more important, we cherish our freedom. Officers Chestnut and Gibson are but one testament to the one hundred fifty-five other officers across this land who we commemorate today.

A recent article in American Police Beat, authored by Craig Floyd, Executive Director of the Law Enforcement Memorial, quotes COPS president Debbie Geary when she said, "People need to understand that the courage and heroism displayed at the U.S. Capitol on July 24 are typical of what occurs every day at law enforcement agencies across the country. Our nation's officers die on rural roadways, on the doorsteps of troubled families' homes, and in dark, dingy alleys. These sacrifices are all selfless and supreme."

I agree with you, Debbie; what occurred in the Capitol was repeated in Chicago; New York City; Los Angeles; Idaho; Cortez, Colorado; Eagle Lake, Texas and so many other communities which suffered through the loss of one of their finest.

Despite these nationwide losses and many tribulations, law enforcement officers endeavor in protecting their communities large and small. We do so despite the hazards and adverse public scrutiny of the actions we take in the normal performance of duty. While there are some who believe that police officers overzealously use force, I am gratified that most American citizens support us. A recent national poll conducted by the Commission on the Advancement of Federal Law Enforcement indicates that over 60% expressed a "great deal of confidence" or "quite a lot of confidence" in law enforcement.

But those vocal few who do not support us bring the most media attention. Recent tragic events in New York illustrate the need to expose the facts before judgments are made and there are some who would rather prejudge the officers involved in spite of the evidence. Diminishing their due process rights seems to be okay, thereby giving the illusion that the Constitution of the United States does not apply to police officers. The Constitution applies to all citizens, including law enforcement officers.

In a coordinated effort, protesters have displayed their dissatisfaction with police regarding the recent shooting in New York. Ironically, during one recent demonstration where a bridge was blocked, there was also an event taking place which highlighted support for the police. The event was the funeral for Officer Joyce Carnegie who was killed in the line of duty in Orange, NJ. This officer, of African American descent, was honored by thousands of fellow officers and citizens of New Jersey and surrounding states. What struck me was that not one of the protesters in New York, including ex-mayors, other politicians and other celebrities uttered one word to protest the killing of this officer, nor did they offer any expression of support for her family. While I understand the issue they were protesting, I do not understand why they would not be equally outraged about the murder of an officer.

The police community, even though distressed about the New York situation, is resilient and devoted to duty. As the police community, we must call to attention the injustices we see. I am particularly troubled by what I term "foreign injustice."

Mr. Vice President, I recently wrote a letter to President Clinton citing my continued frustration that cop killers wanted in the United States remain free in other countries. For example, Rudy Romero allegedly killed Phoenix Officer Ken Collings in 1988 and then fled to Mexico where he remains free. The Mexican government has done nothing to extradite this cop killer. Their failure to cooperate has forced authorities in Colorado to consider establishing a special office aimed at ensuring that accused killers who flee the state for Mexico are brought to justice.

Then we have fugitives who live in Cuba. Joanne Chesimard, who killed New Jersey Trooper Werner Foerster in 1973, and Charles Hill and Michael Finney, who killed New Mexico State Police Officer Robert Rosenbloom in 1971, have been given asylum in

Cuba, purportedly because they are victims of political repression. I say they are victims of their own lawlessness and the United States should not normalize relations with Cuba until all fugitives have been returned for prosecution. Nor should we give aid or comfort to those countries--ostensibly, our allies like Mexico--until they agree to return cop killers and other fugitives. We should not give one penny of American aid to any country which hinders or laughs at our justice system.

Vice President Gore, with your help law enforcement can continue to struggle to reduce crime. Instead of reducing drug enforcement funds, we need increased funding to battle the scourge of drugs in our society. We know drug use is still at an unacceptable level and continues to waste the minds and lives of many of our young people.

We need enhanced federal and state penalties which punish those who take advantage of innocent victims and make the illegal use of firearms a serious, yet prosecutable crime. We need your help in our struggle to assure due process rights for all police officers. We need your support to educate those who see us as racist and out of touch with our communities. We need your help because we are cops under fire. We need your help because we lost officers under fire.

They sacrificed themselves and remained vigilant to duty to their last breath. I am certain that each was devoted to his or her family, as well as community. Their time came too soon, but the spirit and professionalism they fostered gives us the energy to enforce the law and protect the innocent. That is the legacy they left behind. Our job as police officers is to continue that legacy even when accused of being brutal, racist or uncaring. To do less would stain the memory of the officers we honor today.

Lorraine Warren from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania recently wrote to American Police Beat because she was appalled that a law enforcement organization was honoring a famous celebrity who supports cop killer Mumia Abu-Jamal. I thought her words hit the point quite eloquently: "...Columnist after columnist decries this country's 'racist' law enforcement officers. Precious few add balance by writing about the ultimate sacrifices made and the random acts of kindness practiced by the 'thin blue line'.

"If the rabble-rousers succeed in driving out those who seek to protect and serve, all law abiding citizens will be left with 'dial-a-prayer' instead of 9-1-1. No one of honor and integrity will remain to stand between us and those who respect neither the law of God nor man.

"And so we beg that strength and courage will be yours to withstand the storms of criticism, the hatefulness, simply because you wear a badge.

"And, when we see you going about your appointed rounds, remember that our whispered prayers are always the same: stay safe out there."

Thank you, Ms. Warren, for those beautiful words. I also say to police officers: Do your duty with pride and honor and indeed stay safe out there.