

24th Annual Peace Officers' Memorial Service

May 15, 2005

National President Chuck Canterbury's Memorial Speech

Mr. President, Members of Congress, my fellow officers and, especially, the families of those men and women we honor here today. I want to extend to you a solemn welcome to the National Peace Officers' Memorial Service for 2005. This Service is intended to honor those fellow law enforcement professionals who have given their all for this great country and to let you [the families] know that we will never forget the sacrifice that they have made. Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give." These words spoken about the sacrifice that so many made during the Second World War are very appropriate for the 156 officers we honor here today.

The life of a police officer is never an easy path for anyone to travel and when the unexplainable occurs, it is an even harder path for those of us left to ask the question why? Last year, after the Memorial Service I had the pleasure of meeting a young officer who demonstrates the total commitment that our police officers have towards each other, our families and the citizens we protect. Officer Gabe Keithly of the St Louis Police Department was recovering from gunshot wounds that had been inflicted on him in January 2004 in an incident that took the life of his friend and partner Nick Sloan. Officers Sloan and Keithly were conducting a narcotics operation when in a struggle with Officer Sloan the suspect grabbed Nick's weapon and opened fire on both officers. Officer Keithly was shot in the strong arm shoulder and stomach and went to the ground. Officer Sloan was shot and also went down. Officer Keithly struggled to switch his weapon to his weak hand but he was able to stop the attack by shooting the assailant. After hearing his story, I was very touched and very proud to be from the law enforcement family.

It was not just empathy for his loss or injuries, but it was his desire to recover, to be able to return to work and his desire to support the family of his partner, Nick Sloan, that so impressed me about this young man. The spirit of the thin blue line, the spirit of an American hero and the spirit of a member of our family who exhibited what Prime Minister Churchill told the brave soldiers. Nick Sloan gave all he could for us and Gabe Keithly gave all he had that day and every day since to honor his friend's memory. Gabe told me that he had been through the three worst things that could happen to a police officer: he lost his partner, was seriously wounded and took a human life—all in a few seconds in one day on the job. Gabe Keithly has struggled, worked hard and has been able to return to work. Gabe is here with us today and I want to thank him for making me remember why I so love the law enforcement community. And I will always remember the sacrifice that he has made for us and because I met him I have been enriched as a police officer and he has helped to fuel my already high pride in being a police officer.

Every officer we are here today to honor has provided a reason for us to be proud of our profession and they are the reason that we do what we do. Their sacrifice and yours as their family members provides all of us with grief and pain but it also fuels our hearts with a pride and solace that can only be found in the law enforcement family. We honor our fallen Brothers and

Sisters best by our actions—doing our duty as they did their own. We honor them today, not because they died, but because they lived, because they did their duty and upheld their oath. Each and every one is an example to all of us. God bless you all and may God Bless America.