
Remarks by U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao at the National Peace Officers' Memorial Service

15 May 2008

Thank you, David [Hiller, National Vice President, Fraternal Order of Police]. I know that President Canterbury [National President, Fraternal Order of Police] is unable to be here today, but his leadership is very much appreciated. Thanks, also, to Jim Pasco, Executive Director of the FOP, Beverly Crump, National President of the FOP Auxiliary, and to everyone else who made this beautiful tribute possible.

Let me also acknowledge my colleagues in the Cabinet, the leaders and members of the United States Congress, and the other distinguished officials who are with us today.

It is a solemn privilege to be here today, on behalf of President George W. Bush and a grateful nation, to honor the fallen heroes of law enforcement. The President sends his special greetings to all of you today.

Each and every day, men and women in law enforcement put themselves at risk to keep their fellow Americans safe and secure.

Most return home, every day or night, to their loved ones. But some are called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice. It is a heavy burden that every police officer accepts willingly.

They know that without their courage, there would be no security. And without their sacrifice, there would be no justice.

As an immigrant to this country, I have a deep and personal appreciation for what it means to live in a society that is ruled by law. My parents fled civil war and turmoil in their native land. Like so many others, they came to this country because of its freedom and opportunity. But they also sought stability and security. These precious gifts would not be possible without the men and women we honor today.

That's just one reason why the Department of Labor was honored to join with your Fraternal Order of Police to establish a scholarship program — named after your late National President Steve Young — to benefit the spouses of these fallen heroes.

It helps families like Andrea Matthieu and her 3 year old son, Nicholas, of Hudson, Wisconsin. Andrea and Nick lost a husband and father, Officer Mark Bedard, in the line of duty. The program helped Mrs. Matthieu complete her Masters degree, enabling her to build a future for her family. If you know of the spouse of a police officer who lost his or her life in the line of duty, I hope that you will tell them about this program.

As President George W. Bush has said many times before, it takes a special kind of person to serve in law enforcement. Most people run from danger. Law enforcement officers run towards it.

Officers like Daniel Cruz Martinez, from the Fort Smith, Arkansas Police Department. He was only 33 years old when he was shot and killed while trying to help a mother rescue her child from a violent situation. Officer Martinez is survived by his wife, Sabrina, and their five children.

Or officers like Lee Stewart Newbill, who was shot and killed when a suspect fired into an emergency dispatch center in Latah ("Lay-TAW") County, Idaho in an attempt to lure police officers into the line of fire. Officer Newbill was killed as he rushed to help.

And in my home state of Kentucky, three police officers lost their lives in 2007 trying to protect others. One of them was Garry Lacy, of the Clay City police department. He was killed by a prisoner he had just arrested for driving under the influence. He is survived by his wife, three children and three grandchildren.

And Vu Nguyen, a Deputy Sheriff in Sacramento, California, was shot and killed last year while participating in an undercover operation against violent gang members. He had just gotten married several months earlier.

They are among the 192 heroic officers we honor today, whose names have been added to the sacred wall of remembrance.

With every inscription, we honor their memory. With every thought, we remember their sacrifice.

And with every prayer, we commend them to the loving arms of our Father in Heaven, who will not hesitate to reward those who did not hesitate to follow his greatest commandment.

These brave men and women will live in our hearts forever, as examples of the best our country has to offer.

God bless them and the families of the fallen. And God bless all of you who serve, and the families who wait and watch with you every day.

And thank you for inviting me to share in this very special tribute.