

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks to Federal Bureau of Investigation Employees

April 28, 2009

Good afternoon, everybody. Well, it is a good excuse for you to be outside on a nice day. And it is a great honor to be here with the men and women of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Now, I am grateful to the FBI for the t-shirts, for the teddy bear for the girls; even though we've kept our promise on the dog, I wouldn't want to come home emptyhanded. *[Laughter]*

I want to thank your outstanding Director, Robert Mueller—*[applause]*—not just for the introduction, but because Bob has led the Bureau during incredibly challenging times. He became only the sixth Director of the FBI just 1 week before the 9/11 attacks, and since then he has worked as hard as anybody to prevent additional attacks and to carry out the FBI's enormous responsibilities. So I appreciate him, and I appreciate all of you. Thank you.

So last summer, the FBI celebrated its 100th anniversary. I think it's safe to say that it has been an eventful century for the Bureau. Back in 1908—oh, did somebody faint? Do we have a EMT here? Right down here. Just give him a little bit of space. This happened during my political campaign all the time. I was talking too long, people would be falling out every which way. *[Laughter]* They're usually fine, they just need a little bit of air and a little bit of water. Right down here, right in the middle. Not you—*[laughter]*—you're doing fine. Right in here. All right, I think they'll be all right.

So back in 1908 there were just 34 Special Agents reporting to Theodore Roosevelt's Attorney General. Today, there are over 30,000 men and women who work for the FBI. Back in 1908, those agents worked out of one building here in Washington. And today, you work here at FBI headquarters and at field offices across America and in countries around the world.

So much has changed in the last 100 years. Thank God for change. And part of what makes the FBI so unique is its ability to adapt to an ever-changing world. Back in 1908, even the most imaginative of minds would have struggled to anticipate all of the challenges that would confront the Bureau: from bank robbers to bootleggers, from hate crimes to white-collar criminals, from public corruption to counterintelligence, from international terrorism to cyber threats.

The challenges of the 21st century have called on us to think anew, and to act anew. And in recent years, the Bureau has undergone a profound transformation to keep pace. With the attacks of 9/11, your mission became focused more than ever before on prevention, so that we have the capacity to uncover terrorist plots before they take hold. With the spread of new technologies, you increasingly confront adversaries in unconventional areas, from transnational networks to cyber crimes and espionage. And through it all, you must continue to stay one step ahead of all who step outside of the law.

And I know that change means much more than moving around some boxes on an organizational chart. You've set new priorities. You've developed new capabilities. You're working to use new technologies and teach new skills. And because these challenges cross borders, both seen and unseen, you've developed new partnerships abroad, while sharing information more effectively with law enforcement here at home.

This is a tough business, but it is essential to protecting our country. Because in the end, it's your hard work that makes the difference: your decisions, your analysis, your action. Because of you, the men and women of the FBI, the American people are safer, and our country is stronger. For that, you have my personal gratitude, but you also have the thanks of a grateful nation.

So I know that much has changed in the last 100 years. But as your Director said, I know that some things have remained constant. That starts with the values that we have sworn to uphold: liberty and equality, opportunity, and the rule of law. That's the foundation upon which America is built. That's the purpose that has always guided our power. And that is why we must always reject as the false—as false choices the choice between our security and our ideals.

In so many ways, the FBI is a unique institution. You're unique because the FBI is both an intelligence agency and a law enforcement agency. You must both prevent danger and help us pursue those who carry it out. You protect us and you protect the civil liberties that we cherish.

But after all, that is why America is unique, because of that fundamental belief that we are committed both to our security and to the rule of law, because of that hard-earned truth that we are always stronger when we act in concert with our most deeply held values.

I have no illusions that this is simple or easy. Many of you made enormous sacrifices and are incredibly dedicated. Living our values means that we must hold ourselves to higher standard than our enemies. We face a long struggle against a determined adversary. We know that Al Qaida is not constrained by a constitution or by allegiance to anything other than a hateful ideology and a determination to kill as many innocents as possible. But what makes the United States of America so special is precisely the fact that we are willing to uphold our values and our ideals not just when it's easy, but when it's hard. We've been called to serve in such a time.

And I have to say that I am heartened but what I see here today. Each of you has made the decision to serve your country, and you are doing so at a critical time. And you know, none of us can know with certain what the future will hold. But I do know that the FBI can and will continue to adapt to new dangers, that you will be critical in leading the way in keeping this country safe. And we are counting on you.

There's much to celebrate from the FBI's first 100 days [years]*. We remember notorious criminals who have been caught, and public corruption that has been ended, and civil rights that have been protected, and terrorist plots that have been uncovered. None of that would have been possible without the work of men and women like you, and we're calling on you again.

Behind me is the motto that you carry forward and that your Director alluded to: "Fidelity, Bravery, and Integrity." These are more than words etched into a building; they're a signal of the character of the men and women who work here. And I am confident that if you stay true to those words, no matter what challenge may come our way, we'll be able to look back a hundred years from now with the satisfaction that you advanced the cause of America's security and America's ideals in your time. What an enormous gift that is to give back to your country.

Thank you, God Bless you, and God Bless the United States of America.

* White House correction.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:33 a.m. at the J. Edgar Hoover FBI Building.

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