

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024*

## **Remarks at the National Peace Officers Memorial Service**

*May 15, 2024*

President Yoes, Auxiliary President Hennie, Auxiliary President Lehmann, Executive Director—and good friend—Jimmy Pasco: Thank you for your service to our Nation and for inviting me to join you once again today.

I'd also like to thank the Attorney General and Deputy Attorney General Monaco and—as well as the deputy of—the Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas; and the Director of the FBI; Secret Service; Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms; the U.S. Marshals Service; and the Capitol Police for their leadership.

We're also joined by my good friend, Wade Carpenter, president of the Chiefs of Police, and Ed Kelly, president of the firefighters' union.

And thank you, Members of the Congress who are here today.

Two weeks ago, I was in Charlotte, North Carolina, to spend some time with the families of the eight brave police officers who were shot in the line of duty. Tragically, four of them were killed. They were husbands, fathers, heroes.

And all of you who serve and for your families left behind, you live a simple truth: Every time you put on that shield and walk out of the house, your family wonders if that call will come or if they'll get that terrible call somewhere during the day or night. We owe you as a nation.

This year, we honor over 200 heroic women and men from all across the law enforcement community who made the ultimate sacrifice. For all the families of our fallen officers, I know hearing the name of your husband, wife, father, mother, son or daughter, brother, sister brings it all back as if you got that news just 10 minutes ago. That black hole in the middle of your chest—you feel like you're being sucked into. It's like losing part of your soul.

I know. When my son Beau spent a year in Iraq, he came home with stage-4 glioblastoma and was going to die, and he did. I know what it's like. I get a feeling that you all know, as well, who have lost in the past. You know, I found out there is only one thing—at least for me, when my—got the call that my wife and daughter were dead; when I got the call my son was about to die—I know the only one thing that helped: family.

If you have family, hold them tight. Hold on to each other, because the day will come—it's hard to believe—when the thought of your husband or your wife or your son or your daughter will bring a smile to your lips before it brings a tear to your eye. It takes a long time, but it will come. My wish for you: It will come sooner than later.

There is a line from the English poet John Milton. He said, "They also serve who only stand and wait." Every family of an officer stands and waits so their loved one can serve the rest of us.

I admire your courage in being here. And I hope you take comfort in the knowledge that their sacrifice will never be forgotten and that, in this extended family of women and men assembled here today, they'll always be there for you—other police officers, they'll always be there for you.

Throughout my career, I've unfortunately spoken to too many funerals of too many police officers: extraordinary, brave, heroic public servants who kept us safe. Being a police officer is not just what you do, it's who you are.

You're just like all the women and men in law enforcement I grew up with in Scranton and Claymont, Delaware. You always run toward danger as others run away from it. Most of you, even when you were kids, you did it, long before you became an officer. You run toward the cries for help knowing that you could be of help. It's part of your DNA to serve, to protect, to defend.

You represent the very best of America. You're the steel spine of this country.

Back in February, I convened a group of police chiefs at the White House to talk about the hard work you're doing to make our communities safer.

Being a cop is one hell of a lot harder than it's ever been. We expect everything of you. We expect everyone: drug counselors, you're supposed to be, protecting people who are overdosing; social workers to kids who have been abandoned; guardians in communities flooded with weapons of fear.

That's why, since day one of my Presidency, I've been working to make sure you have the tools you need to protect, the partners you need, and the community to help.

During the pandemic, I signed the American Rescue Plan that provided \$350 billion to States and cities that they could use to keep communities safe, retain and hire more police officers, pay overtime and bonuses, expand benefits for disabled first responders, and support violent [violence; White House correction] prevention strategies.

Places like Detroit, Toledo, Kansas City, Houston put more cops on the beat. It was one of the largest Federal investments ever made in public safety.

I also signed the most sweeping gun safety law in nearly 30 years to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous individuals, while strengthening background checks and—for gun purchases, cracking down on illegal gun sales, reining in "ghost guns" that are increasingly found at crime scenes.

My Safer America Plan invests \$37 billion in public safety to hire more police officers trained in community policing, to build trust, to solve crimes faster.

I'm grateful for the partnership of Jim and the other law enforcement officers that we worked together on my Executive order on policing.

My Safer America Plan also makes investments to support programs that are proven to tackle the root causes of crime, to ensure you have the psychologists and the social workers responding to crises alongside you.

We also know that police officers deal with unbelievable stress. Every time you respond to a call, execute a warrant, or conduct a traffic spot [stop; White House correction], there's a tremendous risk: fear of ambush, anxiety of not knowing what's behind that door, the trauma of bearing witness to the most horrible tragedies imaginable.

That's why our administration is laser-focused on providing you with the mental health and wellness resources you need and deserve. That's why I also signed extended benefits for families of officers who tragically died by suicide, honoring Capitol Police officers like Howard Liebengood, who defended the Capitol on January 6 and whose dad I knew well when he served as Sergeant at Arms in the United States Senate.

We remember all our law enforcements who defend this Capitol and our democracy on that terrible day.

And Congress should also pass the Honoring Fallen Heroes Act that extends benefits to first responders who are exposed to toxic substances and die of cancer.

I know so many of you still carry the physical and invisible wounds of your service. We can never thank you enough for your courage, your service, and your sacrifice. You risk your lives every day for the safety of the people you don't even know. That's why each of you, each and every one of you, is a hero.

It's no accident that violent crime is near a record 50-year low—a 50-year low. It's because of extraordinary efforts by all of you in your communities, together with historic steps taken to support you—to stop the flow of illegal guns, to hold gun traffickers accountable for crimes.

It matters, and it matters a lot.

I often say: There is no greater responsibility of government than ensuring the safety of the American people and those who sacrifice to protect us all. We've made a lot of progress, but there's still much more to be done.

Let me close. To the families here today, my wife and I know how hard it is in different ways, but I promise you the day will come again when the memory of your loved one will bring a smile to your lips before it brings a tear to your eye. It may take a couple seasons, but it will come.

And I hope you always remember one thing that is never fully lost: your love for them and their love for you.

God bless you all, may God protect law enforcement, and may God protect our troops.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:21 p.m. at the West Front of the U.S. Capitol. In his remarks, he referred to Patrick Yoes, national president, Linda Hennie, former Auxiliary national president, Glenda Lehman, Auxiliary national president, and James O. Pasco, Jr., executive director, Fraternal Order of Police; Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Christopher A. Wray; U.S. Secret Service Director Kimberly A. Cheatle; Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives Steven M. Dettelbach; U.S. Marshals Service Director Ronald L. Davis; Chief of the U.S. Capitol Police J. Thomas Manger; Edward A. Kelly, general president, International Association of Fire Fighters; and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department Officers Christopher Tolley, Michael Giglio, Jack Blowers, and Justin Campbell, members of the U.S. Marshals Service Carolinas Regional Fugitive Task Force, who were injured in a shooting while attempting to serve an arrest warrant in Charlotte, NC, on April 29.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : National Peace Officers Memorial Service.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Biden, Jill T.; Blowers, Jack; Campbell, Justin; Carpenter, Wade; Cheatle, Kimberly A.; Davis, Ronald L.; Dettelbach, Steven M.; Garland, Merrick B.; Giglio, Michael; Granger, J. Thomas; Hennie, Linda; Kelly, Edward A.; Lehmann, Glenda; Mayorkas, Alejandro N.; Monaco, Lisa O.; Pasco, James O., Jr.; Tolley, Christopher; Wray, Christopher A.; Yoes, Patrick.

*Subjects:* 2021 civil unrest and violence at U.S. Capitol; Attorney General; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives; Community policing programs, improvement efforts; Crime rates; Deputy Attorney General; Federal Bureau of Investigation; Fraternal Order of Police; Gun purchase background checks, improvement efforts; Gun violence, prevention efforts; Illegal firearms, antitrafficking efforts; International Association of Chiefs of Police; International Association of Fire Fighters; Law enforcement officers, service and dedication; Mental health programs and services; North Carolina, shooting of law enforcement officers in Charlotte; Peace Officers Memorial Service, National; Secretary of Homeland Security; State and local law enforcement, Federal support; U.S. Capitol Police; U.S. Marshals Service; U.S. Secret Service.

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