

Remarks at the Peace Officers Memorial Service May 15, 2002

Thank you very much. Thank you all. Please be seated. Thank you for that kind welcome, and thank you for the privilege of joining you today at this annual tribute.

Today and every May 15th the American flag flies at half-staff in grateful memory—in grateful memory—of thousands of fallen police officers. This year we pay special homage to 480 men and women whose names are being added to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial. We do so with enormous respect and appreciation for the courage and character of all who have answered the call to be a law enforcement officer.

I want to thank my friend Steve Young, the president of the FOP, for inviting me to be here, and I want to thank him for his leadership. I want to thank members of my Cabinet who are here. I want to thank the Members of the United States Congress who have joined us on the stage and who are here with us as well. Thank you all for coming.

I appreciate Aliza Clark and those who work so hard to help the families of the fallen. I want to thank the United States Capitol Police, Vernon Baker. I want to thank Daniel Rodriguez for lending his fabulous voice in tribute after tribute to the greatness of America. And I want to thank Marc Anthony as well.

So many family members of fallen officers have come to Washington for this service, and I want you to know we are honored by your presence. Standing by you today and always are brother and sister officers who are faithful to the memory of lost friends.

I thank all the officers in attendance and the departments you represent. Thank you for your loyalty to one another and for your service to America. The loyalty of police officers is seen in the neighborhoods of America when our officers are on duty and

whenever one of your comrades is suddenly taken from us. That happens on average about three times a week in the life of our Nation, and each time we witness the powerful family that unites the police officers of America. When an officer dies in the line of duty, an entire community will pause in sorrow and in admiration with the depth of feeling Americans reserve for people who protect us every day.

Last September the 11th, our entire Nation grieved at the loss of 72 police officers. It was a loss unlike any we have known before, all in one moment, all at one place. More than 300 firefighters and rescueworkers died as well in New York, along with thousands they were trying to save. As the buildings fell, the sound, said one survivor, “was like the roar of the devil.”

September the 11th was a day of great horror and great heroism. It was the first day of a long struggle against determined enemies. It was the first day in which this mighty Nation will hunt down the killers and their like one by one and bring them to justice.

It’s the saddest day in the history of law enforcement. In his final moments, trapped in rubble, Officer Dominick Pezzulo called out to one of his fellows, and he said, “Just remember me.” The last voice he heard was Officer Will Jimeno, promising him they would never forget. So, Dominick, today we remember—we remember courage and bravery and sacrifice.

Sacrifice like that of John—Police Officer John Perry, who retired on September the 11th. Early that morning, he had turned in his badge at the 40th Precinct. A moment later, he heard the sound of the first attack and the radio traffic that followed. He put his badge back on and was last seen directing people to safety at the bottom of the tower.

I have the police shield of another officer who died on that day. His name was George G. Howard. His mother gave me this badge. She gave it to me in love for George, but she gave it to me because I'm confident she wanted her President never to forget what took place.

We call all those we honor today, those who lost their life in 9/11 and those who lost their life before and after 9/11, heroes—because they are heroes. Their families are proud of them and always will be. Yet there's not a husband or wife here today or a parent or child who would not trade the honor to have them back. In a eulogy for his son who died on September the 11th, one father said, "I know he's in good hands, but I wish he was in my hands." We know how you feel.

There are more than 700,000 sworn law officers across America. When the oath is administered, they accept great responsibilities and accept great risk. Even in the most routine moments on watch or patrol, you protect us. Even on the quietest day, the next call may send you into extremes of danger. America is grateful. You just need to know, America is grateful.

We have confidence in our law enforcement because we know the kind of men and women we select and we know the nature of the men and women we train for the job. They're the ones who face down threats, who place themselves between the innocent and the guilty, who step into scenes of chaos and violence thinking only of whom they can help.

No one goes into police work for the money, nor does anybody put on the uniform expecting a life of ease. You take the job because you respect the law and you know that someone has to do the challenging work of enforcing it. Fortunately, this great country, America, has never been short of such men and women and your devoted service, and we are very grateful.

Every day in every place in America, we can be thankful for the integrity and courage of our officers of our law. Today we give thanks for the special courage of the fallen, those whose watch ended with their lives. America cannot fully repay our debt to them and to the families. We can only acknowledge that debt, which we do today with pride and affection of an entire nation.

May God bless you all, and may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:45 p.m. on the West Grounds at the Capitol. In his remarks, he referred to Steve Young, national president, Fraternal Order of Police (FOP); Aliza Clark, president, Fraternal Order of Police Auxiliary; Officer Vernon Baker, chaplain, Fraternal Order of Police of Ohio, who gave the invocation; Officer Daniel Rodriguez, New York City Police Department, who sang the national anthem; singer Marc Anthony; Officer Will Jimeno, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey; and Arlene Howard, mother of Officer George G. Howard. The Peace Officers Memorial Day and Police Week proclamation of May 10 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Statement on the Terrorist Attack in Jammu and Kashmir, India *May 15, 2002*

The United States condemns the terrorist attack carried out by militants in Jammu and Kashmir yesterday. On behalf of the American people, I extend my condolences

to the families of the victims and the people of Jammu and Kashmir, whose citizens were killed in this attack.