Remarks at the International Association of Chiefs of Police Annual Conference in Chicago, Illinois

October 27, 2015

Well, good afternoon, everybody. Please have a seat. Welcome to Chicago, my hometown. Chief Beary, thank you for that introduction because it was brief, which—[*laughter*]—and that's what I like. At this point, one way or another, people know who I am.

And let me also thank our outstanding mayor of the city of Chicago, Rahm Emanuel, for hosting us. I know that thousands of you, from Federal, State, county, local, and tribal agencies have been working hard to share strategies and solutions to better serve and protect all of us. And we are profoundly grateful for your work. I do hope that you've gotten a little time to enjoy my hometown as well, because there is fun to be had here. Somebody clapped. [*Laughter*]

Now, even as we meet here today, though, another gathering of police is taking place in New York. Randolph Holder was born in Guyana to a family of police officers. His dad was a police officer. His grandfather was a police officer. And after his family came to America, Randolph followed in their footsteps and joined New York's finest. A week ago today, a shots-fired call came over the radio. And as Officer Holder chased down a suspect, he was shot and killed in the line of duty.

Officer Holder didn't run toward danger because he thought of himself as a hero, he ran toward danger because he was a cop. It was part of his job description, part of his calling. It's why so many of you wear the badge. Every day, you risk your lives so that the rest of us don't have to. You serve and protect to provide the security so many Americans take for granted. And by the way, your families serve alongside you. And as you serve, America places very high expectations on you, expectations that cops across America work every day to meet.

So I want to start by saying, on behalf of the American people, thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

This country is safer because of your efforts. Look at the statistics. Over the last 20 years, police have helped cut the violent crime rate and the homicide rate in America by almost half. It's an astonishing statistic. Today, Americans are nearly half as likely to be the victim of an aggravated assault and less than half as likely to be the victim of a robbery. And even lesser known are the countless acts of kindness and support, helpfulness that your officers perform in your respective communities each and every day.

So I want to be as clear as I can be. I reject any narrative that seeks to divide police and communities that they serve. I reject a storyline that says, when it comes to public safety, there's an "us" and a "them," a narrative that too often gets served up to us by news stations seeking ratings or tweets seeking retweets or political candidates seeking some attention. I know that's shocking that political candidates do that. Because your work and your service really has helped to make America safer than it's been in decades, and that's something for which every American should be proud.

Now, that doesn't mean that things are perfect. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't have a serious and robust debate over fairness in law enforcement, over our broader criminal justice system when it comes particularly to communities of color. I was just talking to Chief Beary before I came out. And I know that there was an outstanding discussion with the NAACP. I've talked to enough chiefs and beat cops around the country to know you care about these issues; you want to do the right thing. And I know there are a few people—there are few people that are more invested in declining crime rates than minority communities that so often have historically been underpoliced. They want more police presence in many of these communities, not less.

And that's why I'm confident that in this debate, people of good will can and should find common ground. And many of you have shown that there are actions—specific actions—we

can take that will make a difference in moving us in that direction.

Now, first, we do need to get some facts established. So far, the data shows that overall violent crime rates across the Nation appear to be nearly as low as they were last year and significantly lower than they were in previous decades. It is true that in some cities, including here in my hometown of Chicago, gun violence and homicides have spiked, and in some cases, they've spiked significantly. But the fact is, is that so far at least, across the Nation, the data shows that we are still enjoying historically low rates of violent crime.

Moreover, over the past few years, the number of police officers shot and killed in the line of duty has fallen to their lowest levels in decades. In fact, 2013 saw the fewest cops shot and killed in the line of duty since 1887.

Of course, each victim of crime is one too many. Each fallen police officer is one too many. I've spoken to too many families of the fallen—including right before I came out here—to not fully appreciate the pain and the hardship, the fear that so many families go through because police officers are putting themselves in the line of fire.

Moreover, because the spike in violent crime in a number of predominantly urban, minority communities is real and deeply troubling—and I want to make it very clear, this is not something that I just think of as being academic. I live on the South Side of Chicago, so my house is pretty close to some places where shootings take place. Because that's real, we've got to get on top of it before it becomes an accelerating trend. And that's why I've asked my outstanding Attorney General, Loretta Lynch, a former prosecutor, to work aggressively with law enforcement and prosecutors and leaders in these communities to find out exactly why is this happening and then target resources where they will have an impact.

So for the remainder of the time that I am in this office and then as a private citizen, I will do everything that I can to encourage cooperation and work hard to make sure that the work that's being done by law enforcement is appreciated and supported and that we maintain this incredible progress that we've made in terms of reducing crime. But in order for us to do that, we do have to stick with the facts. We—what we can't do is cherry-pick data or use anecdotal evidence to drive policy or to feed political agendas. If we stick with the facts and we maintain effective coordination across Federal, State, and local agencies, then we're going to continue the hard-fought progress that you and so many law enforcement officers have made over the past two decades that saves lives and keeps families intact.

Now, it's to maintain this progress that I've spent a lot of time this year with people of all backgrounds working to reform our criminal justice system, to think about how can we make it work better. I visited a prison in Oklahoma, met with inmates and corrections officers. I just, last week, visited a community in West Virginia and met with recovering substance abusers and those working on new solutions for treatment and rehabilitation. I've met with rank-and-file officers in the Oval Office, met with police chiefs in the White House, met with chiefs and rank-and-file officers in Camden, New Jersey, paid tribute to those who have fallen in the line of duty, and listened to families talk about what they're looking for in terms of support.

And as I said in my State of the Union Address this year, I am convinced that progress comes together when we work together, and we work together best when we're willing to understand one another: when, instead of having debates over talk radio, we stop and listen to each other so that we can empathize with the father who fears his son can't walk home without being mistaken for a criminal; and when we sympathize with the wife who can't rest until her husband walks through the front door at the end of his shift.

Those of us in positions of power have an obligation to give you what you need to do your jobs even better and to facilitate the conversations and reforms required to move us all forward. So today I'd like to focus on three things. Obviously, I don't have time to touch on every aspect of these issues. I'm sure you've already heard a lot of speeches today and yesterday.

But I want to focus on three things that I think are really important.

First, making sure you've got the resources you need to get the job done. Second, criminal justice reforms that will make the system smarter and fairer. And third, reducing the risks your officers face in the field with commonsense gun safety reforms.

We need to start by supporting you, the men and women who walk that thin blue line. Over the past 6½ years, my administration has invested more than $2 billion to retain or hire 10,000 police officers. When State and city budgets were paralyzed during the economic crisis, we stepped in to save the jobs of thousands of cops. Right now we're helping make sure departments throughout the country have the equipment they need, like bulletproof vests and the training to use that equipment. We've opened up data so that police departments can use new technology to spot patterns and stop crimes. And we're setting aside radio spectrum for first responders so that, for the first time in history, America's police departments will share a single network. We're creating a nationwide blue alert system and launching anti-ambush training programs to help keep officers safe.

Vice President Joe Biden, a lifelong friend of law enforcement, has an expression he likes to offer; he's got an expression for everything. [*Laughter*] "Show me your budget, and I'll tell you what you value." Well, I tell you what, in my budget proposal, I've asked Congress to increase funding for the COPS programs so that we can hire even more police officers and make sure you have the training and equipment you need. That's what I value. It's in my budget.

And I'll be honest with you. In the past, some Republicans in Congress have tried to cut funding for the COPS program to zero. And I've argued that's wrong. It won't make us safer. It's time more folks in Washington started valuing our cops, not just giving lip service to it.

Now, the good news is, the COPS program and other programs that your departments rely on to do your jobs may get some relief from the harmful spending cuts that Congress imposed a couple of years ago, because last night Democrats and Republicans in Congress came together around a long-term budget agreement. I'm pretty happy about that because it reflects our values, growing the economy and the middle class by investing in the things like education and job training that are needed, and it keeps us safe by investing in our national security. It's paid for responsibly, in part with a measure to make sure hedge funds and private equity firms pay what they owe in taxes just like everybody else. It's the right thing to do.

And it's an actual bipartisan compromise, which hasn't been happening in Washington a lot lately, locks in 2 years of funding for budgets that finally free us from the cycle of shutdown threats and last-minute patchwork fixes. It allows us to plan for the future, and as a consequence will allow your departments to plan for the future. So that's good news for everybody. It's a step forward.

And I hope both parties come together to pass this agreement without delay. They've got a few days to do it. And then, I hope Congress gets right to work on spending bills to invest in America's priorities and that they don't get sidetracked by ideological provisions that have no place in America's budget process.

Now, I believe valuing law enforcement starts with making sure that it provides you the resources you need. But I also think it means more than just funding our priorities. Money helps. More police officers help. But we've got to do more. So the second thing I want to focus on is fundamentally reforming our criminal justice system to make it smarter and fairer and easier for your officers to do their jobs safely and effectively.

Now, this is not an easy conversation to have. First of all, we all care about keeping crime rates low. And things have been working, and so a lot of folks say, "What's the problem?" But for generations, we've had African American and Latino communities who have pointed to racial disparities in the application of criminal justice, from arresting—arrest rates to sentencing to incarceration rates. And all too often these concerns, no matter how well

documented, have bene brushed aside. And we can't have a situation in which a big chunk of the population feels like maybe the system isn't working as well for them.

At the same time, too often, law enforcement gets scapegoated for the broader failures of our society and our criminal justice system. And I know you do your jobs with distinction no matter the challenges you face. That's part of wearing a badge. But we can't expect you to contain and control problems that the rest of us aren't willing to face or do anything about: problems ranging from substandard education to a shortage of jobs and opportunity, an absence of drug treatment programs, and laws that result in it being easier in too many neighborhoods for a young person to purchase a gun than a book.

So, if we're serious about protecting our communities and supporting our police departments, then let's invest in more opportunity, and let's try to stop more crime before it starts. Let's go after the racial disparities at the root.

One study found that every dollar we invest in pre-K—in universal pre-K, early childhood education—we save at least twice that down the road in reduced crime. Getting a teenager a job for the summer may cost some money, but it costs a fraction of what it will cost to lock him up for 15 years. It's not enough to tell our young people that crime doesn't pay if they have no prospects at all. We've got to make sure they grow up knowing that hard work and responsibility pay off and that they've got other paths available to them.

For those who do break the law, we do have to take a hard look at whether in all circumstances punishment fits the crime. Now, I want to be clear about this. Right now America is home to less than 5 percent of the world's population, but about 25 percent of its prisoners. Now, plenty of them belong there. I don't have sympathy for dangerous, violent offenders. I don't have sympathy for folks who are preying on children. I've got two daughters; I care about making sure these streets are safe. So this is not some bleeding-heart attitude here. Violence is real in this city and around the country. And I've seen firsthand the devastation the drug trade has wrought on individual lives and entire communities, and I believe that those who peddle drugs need to be punished. I don't think decriminalization is some panacea.

But down in West Virginia, you'd hear stories of families where—these are good folks whose children were getting caught up in drugs and young people suddenly overdosing three, four times and getting caught up in the criminal justice themselves because they were hooked.

But it's also important for us to acknowledge that our prisons are crowded with not only hardcore violent offenders, but also some nonviolent offenders serving very long sentences for drug crimes at taxpayer expense. And it's important to acknowledge that having millions of Black and Latino men in the criminal justice system, without any ability for most of them to find a job after release—and most of them will eventually be released—that's not a sustainable situation.

It is possible for us to come up with strategies that effectively reduce the damage of the drug trade without relying solely on incarceration. And the reason I say that is because we've seen States and local police departments and law enforcement do it. States from Texas to South Carolina to California and Connecticut have already reduced their prison populations over the last 5 years and seen their crime rates fall.

So let's take some of the $80 billion we spend each year to keep people locked up—not all of it, because like I said, some of those folks, you want behind bars—but let's look at the system and see where are areas where we can use some of that money to help law enforcement go after drug kingpins and violent gangs and terrorists. And if we can get some with a drug addiction or mental health issue into treatment, that may save us some money that allows us to put a murderer in that jail cell instead.

When we do that, we're not just making it more likely that a nonviolent offender can be reintegrated into society, we're making the en-

tire community safer. If rehabilitation programs help a prisoner become a skilled worker instead of a hardened criminal, you are less likely to have to arrest that person again and again and again and again. And I can't thank the chiefs enough here because a lot of you are out front on this issue, and you've talked about it. I know because I've met with you on it.

Now, in a hopeful sign, good people in both political parties are actually ready to do something about this. Just last week, the Senate—which basically gets very little done, as you may have noticed—[*laughter*]—the Senate voted to move forward on a bipartisan criminal justice reform bill. And that bill would cut back on mandatory minimums for nonviolent drug offenders. It would give prisoners time off their sentences if they complete programs that make them less likely to commit a repeat offense. It would invest some of those savings in law enforcement so you've got more resources that you need. And there's a similar bill in the House of Representatives. So this is not something I get to say very often: I am encouraged by what Congress is doing. [*Laughter*] I hope they get a bill to my desk so that I can sign it and together we can work to keep reducing America's crime rate and its incarceration rate at the same time.

Now, even if we pass bipartisan reform, we are still going to have communities that experience a disproportionate amount of crime. In every big city in America and some small ones, folks know where are the neighborhoods where crimes are taking place disproportionately. And in some of those communities, we've still got work to do to restore trust between law enforcement and the citizens they protect and serve. This is also a hard conversation, but I hope you don't mind, I'm going to go ahead and have it. This one of the benefits of not having to run for office again. [*Laughter*]

I'm sure if you polled this room, people would have different takes on what happened in places like Ferguson and New York. And let's face it, the media tends to focus on the sensational and the controversial and folks on both sides who say stuff that's not designed to bring people together, but oftentimes, makes the situation more polarized. And as a society, we tend to lurch from shock to complacency on these issues. And I'm suggesting we have to resist that impulse. With today's technology, if just one of your officers does something irresponsible, the whole world knows about it moments later. And the countless incidents of effective police work rarely make it on the evening news. So—[*applause*].

So it's important for us not to just pounce and jump on anything that happens and immediately just draw conclusions. We've got to resist the false trap that says either there should be no accountability for police or that every police officer is suspect no matter what they do. Neither of those things can be right. It's on all of us to let investigations uncover facts; to make sure that stories of misconduct aren't spread before we know the facts and that they're not the only stories that we share. Because, as I said before, every day your officers aren't just stopping crimes, they're responding to emergencies and protecting victims of domestic violence and volunteering to coach Little League and refereeing pickup games. Those stories need to go viral as well.

But you know as well as I do that the tensions in some communities, the feeling that law enforcement isn't always applied fairly, those sentiments don't just come out of nowhere. I mean, there is a long history here in this country. It's not something that any individual person here is responsible for, but we all have a responsibility to do something about it because it's part of our legacy.

I was at an event last week with L.A.'s Police Chief, Charlie Beck, and we were asked a question about this issue, of tensions and the feeling in minority communities that sometimes law enforcement isn't applied fairly. And I repeated what I've said before, which is that there were times when I was younger and maybe even as I got a little older, but before I had a motorcade—[*laughter*]—where I got pulled over. And I confessed—I told Chief Beck—most of the time I got a ticket, I deserved it. I knew why I was pulled over. But there were times where I didn't.

And as a report that came out just this week reminded us, there are a lot of African Americans—not just me—who have that same kind of story of being pulled over or frisked or something. And the data shows that this is not an aberration. It doesn't mean each case is a problem. It means that when you aggregate all the cases and you look at it, you've got to say that there's some racial bias in the system.

Now, problems of racial justice or injustice have been running themes throughout this country's history in every institution—in every institution. And by the way, bias and stereotypes oftentimes go both ways. So eliminating bias is not something that falls on the police alone.

The good news is, our divides are not as deep as some would suggest. I will tell you I don't know anybody in the minority community that does not want strong, effective law enforcement. I don't know anybody who doesn't want their kids to be safe when they're walking to school or playing in a playground. Everybody should understand that police officers do a dangerous job. Nobody wants to see police officers hurt.

The question then is how do we bridge these issues: concern about fairness and a concern about effectiveness in making sure that police officers get the support they need. That's why I set up a Task Force on 21st-Century Policing last year that came up with detailed recommendations that departments and officers can implement to keep building trust. And I appreciate all the members of the IACP who joined fellow officers and community activists and young people as part of that Task Force. I would urge all the chiefs here and all of you who are interested in this to look at the Task Force recommendations, because it was really interesting. You had people who were protesters at Ferguson sitting with police officers and police chiefs, and they came up with some shared recommendations.

It talked about having open data and independent investigations to make sure the system isn't—was fair. It talked about helping law enforcement work with schools and businesses and youth groups so that kids who want to make a difference in their communities say, "When I grow up, I want to be a cop."

Right here in Chicago, Mayor Emanuel and the Chicago PD have spent the past few years working to build on this philosophy, forming new partnerships with ministers, putting more officers on bikes and on foot so they can talk with residents. Earlier this year I went to Camden, New Jersey, where they used to have complete mistrust between the department and local residents and where the crime rate was sky high. And they're now using community policing and data to drive down crime. They've got a war room with cameras trained on hotspots around the city. And they've got software that lets community residents direct those cameras on where drug dealers or gangs are congregating. And that way, local residents feel that they're not just being spied on, they're partners with the police.

The police chief there trained their officers from the very first day—the officers would just be dropped off in the neighborhoods they were going to be serving—and said, you're spending all day here without a car, figure it out, which meant that if they'd even just wanted to go to the restroom, they'd have to get to know the local business. And they started meeting parents and communities. And that way they were—because they knew the communities they were serving, they were able to distinguish between the drug dealer and the good kid, even if both of them were wearing a hoodie.

The police even bought two ice cream trucks with drug forfeiture money and, in the summer, drove them into some neighborhoods where gangs had taken over and drug dealers were peddling on the streets, and otherwise, the street was empty. They drove those ice cream trucks, planted them there, and had police officers giving out free ice cream. And suddenly, the community started coming out, and the drug dealers started fading away. All of a sudden, the street corners where criminals were dealing drugs had police officers dishing out free chocolate chip. [*Laughter*]

But in all of these efforts, the goal was to get the community involved before a crime takes place, to build trust before a crisis erupts. And

officers then feel more welcome to their communities, citizens are more likely to cooperate with the police. And that makes us all safer.

Now, look, I'm not naive. I'm not suggesting that any of this is easy. A lot of times, it means more resources for police departments because it's more labor intensive. If you want that kind of community policing, then you got to have enough police to be able to do that, because it takes time to do more than just respond to a call.

And I don't want to suggest that we're ever going to eliminate all misunderstandings or stereotypes between police officers and minority communities. It's certainly not going to happen overnight. And it's especially tough because there's more crime in these communities, which means that the police are interacting with them more than they are in some fancy neighborhoods.

Good community policing has to be a two-way street. The communities that desperately need effective policing have to give police officers the benefit of the doubt and have to work with the police department to make sure you've got the resources and support to effectively implement strategies that we know work.

And the flipside of it is, when an individual officer does display bias or excessive force, which is going to happen—just like there are going to be politicians who do stupid things or business leaders do something; there is no profession that doesn't have somebody who sometimes screws up—then we've got to have departments to honestly and fairly address it and not just simply close ranks or stand down.

So none of this is easy, but it can be done. And it has to be done. Because I refuse to believe that the only choice we have is to either ignore circumstances of racial bias or make it impossible for police officers to do their job. That can't be the choice that we've got. We've got to reject that false choice.

Third point, to make our communities safer and to make our officers safer, we've got to make it harder for criminals to cause chaos by getting their hands on deadly firearms.

Police officers see the toll that gun violence takes on our communities, not just when there's a mass shooting, but every single day. If you go to the South Side of Chicago or the West Side of Chicago and you walk around neighborhoods that now have big problems with violent crime and homicide and you talk to the folks who have lived there for a long time and they ask you what's changed, some of it they'll talk about in terms of, well, there used to be more jobs here; people could go over to the factory even if they didn't have a great education, could make a decent living; households were more intact. But a lot of what they'll say is, you know, it used to be if a kid or a group of kids was misbehaving, adults could say something to them. And now folks don't because you don't know if they're armed. [*Applause*] You don't know if they're armed.

So police officers don't have the luxury of seeing this issue in black and white terms. You know exactly why someone all too often should want to own a gun. It's a powerful instrument. It helps you do a dangerous job. It's something that has to be used with care. Many of you, like millions of law-abiding Americans, are sportsmen or hunters, or you've got a firearm in your home for protection. But you also know the fact is that it's too easy for criminals to buy guns, and that makes your already dangerous job far more dangerous than it should be.

And it makes the communities so fearful that it's harder for them to be a good partner with you, because the streets become abandoned and parents start not being as involved in monitoring what's taking place. You have a risk of being shot. It's risky enough responding to a domestic violence call or a burglary in progress without having to wonder if the suspect is armed to the teeth, maybe has better weapons than you do. And the fact is that in States with high gun ownership, police officers are three times more likely to be murdered than in States with low gun ownership. That is a fact. So you know that more guns on the streets do not make you or your communities safer.

Now, one of the benefits of being President is, you travel all around the country, and I do know that there is a difference in what firearms mean and how they are handled in rural

communities and in urban settings. And we've got to take into account some of the regional differences that are involved. But I do want to emphasize this is not just an issue for cities.

There are those who criticize any gun safety reforms by pointing to my hometown as an example. They say, well, look, Chicago had a spike in homicides this year, they've got gun safety laws, so this must be proof that tougher gun safety laws don't help, maybe make things worse. The problem with that argument, as the Chicago Police Department will tell you, is that 60 percent of guns recovered in crimes come from out of State. You've just got to hop across the border. As I said before, it is easier for a lot of young people in this city and in some of your communities to buy a gun than buy a book. It is easier in some communities to find a gun than it is to find some fresh vegetables at a supermarket. That's just a fact.

And that's why the IACP and the overwhelming majority of the American people—Democrat and Republican—believe we should require national criminal background checks for anybody who wants to purchase a gun. That's why the IACP believes we shouldn't sell military-style assault weapons to civilians. They don't need them. They don't need them to hunt a deer. Here—it's just a simple proposition: Cops should not be outarmed by the criminals that they're pursuing.

As I said, earlier this afternoon I met with families of police officers who gave their lives in the line of duty. And I met with families of children here in Chicago who were taken from us by gun violence. And I do this too often, meeting with grieving families. I'm proud to be able to express to them that the entire country cares about them and that they're in our thoughts and prayers and that we're sorry for their loss. But I have to tell you—and I know some of you have heard my frustration in the past here—when I meet with these families, I can't honestly tell them that our country has done everything we could to keep this from happening again: from seeing another officer shot down, from seeing another innocent bystander suffer from a gunshot wound. And that's a travesty.

Thirty-two cops have been shot and killed this year. At least a dozen children have been shot and killed this month. About 400,000 Americans have been shot and killed by guns since 9/11—400,000. Just to give you a sense of perspective, since 9/11, fewer than 100 Americans have been murdered by terrorists on American soil; 400,000 have been killed by gun violence. That's like losing the entire population of Cleveland or Minneapolis over the past 14 years.

And I refuse to accept the notion that we couldn't have prevented some of those murders, some of those suicides, kept more families whole, protected more officers if we had passed some commonsense laws.

So look, I understand we won't all agree on this issue. But it's time to be honest: Fewer gun safety laws don't mean more freedom, they mean more danger. Certainly, more danger to police, more fallen officers, more grieving families, more Americans terrified that they or their loved ones could be next. So I'm going to keep calling on the folks in Congress to change the way that they think about gun safety. And if they don't, I'm going to keep on calling on Americans to change the folks in Congress until they get it right.

And please do not—if some of you watching certain television stations or listening to certain radio programs, please do not believe this notion that somehow I'm out to take everybody's guns away. Every time a mass shooting happens, one of the saddest ironies is that suddenly, the purchase of firearms and ammunition jumps up because folks are scared into thinking that Obama is going to use this as an excuse to take away our Second Amendment rights. Nobody is doing that. We're talking about commonsense measures to make sure criminals don't get them; to make sure background checks work; to make sure that—to make sure that we're protecting ourselves.

So supporting law enforcement and having a budget that backs it up, not just—because talk is cheap, but actually following through to make sure you've got the resources you need: reforming our criminal justice system so it is smarter and we can reduce crime while still re-

ducing the incarceration rate; restoring trust between communities; refusing to give up on gun safety. We can take those steps. That's within our reach.

We can't stop every crime. We can't prevent every tragedy. There is evil in the world. There are just some bad people. You don't know why sometimes, they just—it just happens. You can't always make excuses for it; sometimes, you can't even understand it. That's why we need laws. That's why we need law enforcement. That's why your job is dangerous. So we can't eliminate all of that. But if we take some of the actions I just talked about, then we will be able to help you do what you do every day, which is save people's lives. We'll be able to make sure that the society is a partner with law enforcement, that we're not just sending you out there to do dirty work and then hanging you up to dry if it doesn't work out well, but that instead, we're all working together tackling these hard problems.

Because, after all, the goal that we share is not just a country with falling crime rates or a country where most of us are safe and all the crime is just in a few neighborhoods that we can avoid. Our goal is a country with rising opportunity and rising hopes and chances for everybody who is willing to make the effort. And I know that police officers so often see America at its worst. That's an unfortunate part of the job. But I want you to know that in you we often see America at its best. You don't just protect us from each other, you build a foundation so that we can trust each other and rely on each other. And that's what America's about: the idea that we're all in this together. That's the ideal. We don't always achieve it. I understand there's partisanship; there's racial division, and we've got a long history of stuff, and politicians oftentimes make it worse instead of making it better. But at our best, we're in this together.

In closing, you may have seen one of the videos of encounters with law enforcement that went viral last year. It was recorded in Tarrant, Alabama. You had a young officer named William Stacy who was called to apprehend a shoplifter at a Dollar General. Officer Stacy was White; the woman who admitted to stealing was Black. She stole three eggs, she said, because her grandchildren hadn't eaten in days. Officer Stacy ordered her to wait in the parking lot, and he went into the store. And the woman was sure she was going to jail. And then, Officer Stacy came out with a dozen eggs that he bought for her and her family.

And that's not just a testament to Officer Stacy, because when the video of the encounter went viral, folks across the country began calling the Tarrant Police Department, asking how they could help too. And the woman later said she had been blessed with "manna from heaven," all because of one officer's kindness. "He pushed my world in the right direction," the woman said, "and I will never forget it."

That's America at its best. That's some good police work. That's what so many of you represent. I thank you for the work you do. I thank you for your fellow officers. Let's keep pushing our world in the right direction towards fairness and justice and safety.

May God protect our cops. May God bless the United States of America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:18 p.m. at McCormick Place West. In his remarks, he referred to Richard Beary, president, International Association of Chiefs of Police, who introduced the President; Randolph Holder, Jr., a New York City police officer who was killed in pursuit of a robbery suspect on October 20, and his father Randolph Holder, Sr.; Tyrone Howard, who was charged with robbery and murder in the death of Officer Holder; Charles L. Beck, chief, Los Angeles Police Department; J. Scott Thompson, chief, Camden County Police Department; and Tarrant, AL, resident Helen Johnson. He also referred to H.R. 1314.