

CALIFORNIA PEACE OFFICERS MEMORIAL SERVICE

SPEECH OF
ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

STATE CAPITOL
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

FRIDAY, MAY 17, 1996

P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Lieutenant Governor, and thank you, General, very much. I have been privileged to work with you. Today I have the solemn privilege of representing President Clinton and the Department of Justice in honoring the men and women of California law enforcement who gave their lives in this past year in the service of their communities and their nation and in the pursuit of

justice across this entire land.

I am so very proud to stand here with some of the finest men and women in this nation, law enforcement officers who put their lives on the line for us every day of the year, day in and day out, serving their communities, California's largest cities, its small towns, its rural counties, I am so proud to be here.

For I have walked the streets of some of your communities with your officers. I've seen you touch the lives of elderly people who were afraid to come out of their door six months before, but, because of your efforts they now feel safe. I've seen children pulled away from gangs because of your efforts. I've seen hardened criminals brought to justice for your efforts and I think you are among the heroes of this nation.

But most of all, I am so very proud to stand here today with those who live on. Those, who while your loved ones lived, waited, supported, cared and loved as families of law enforcement do around this nation, and they, as well, are our heroes and our heroines. But to the survivors, you touched the heart of this nation by your courage, by your example. The young people amongst you who have touched me today will go back to Washington with me as a remembrance of why it is so important never ever to give up, to constantly fight for the democracy we care about, so we can pass it on to them and to future generations.

I started this week on Monday in Washington at the National Memorial. The names of 253 men and women were added to the walls of that beautiful memorial. Among those names will be those enrolled here today. It is perhaps fitting that I end this week across America, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean at another solemn ceremony. For all across this nation law enforcement officers form the backbone of our communities and they maintain the foundations of all we hold dear in this country.

This memorial stands as a permanent reminder of the supreme sacrifice which too many of our officers are called to make as they protect this nation and the communities they love. They are an

everlasting part of a government of the people, by the people and for the people, and for 200 years people, law enforcement officers who cared and who were willing to lay down their lives, have given us a nation that has greater freedom and greater opportunity than any nation in the history of the world. These officers whom we honor today, have contributed to that foundation, have contributed to that greatness.

We are quick to honor those who fall in the line of duty. I see that support at the funerals of the fallen. I see that support in the media coverage of the heart-wrenching day when the officer is laid to rest. Yet, too often when the funeral service is over and the television cameras leave and the flowers wilt, the family of law enforcement across this nation is left alone.

We must honor, protect and support our police officers and their families every day of the year. We must try to understand the true weight of law enforcement officers' burdens. We must support the families who wait anxiously each night for their loved ones to return home. We must try to protect them from the hazards they face as they protect us from lawlessness and disorder. We, the American people, owe the nation's police officers our deepest gratitude, our best efforts and our strong support, for they have done so much for us against such great odds.

We must prevent not only physical attacks but unjust verbal attacks as well. There are those who profess to support law enforcement but who have attempted to undermine the efforts of hard-working officers who make difficult decisions. We need to stand behind law enforcement officers and support the officer in that rural community, the officer on the street, the officer who puts his life there to protect us.

We must provide our officers with the personnel, the tools and the training to perform their jobs and to pursue justice, and that is the reason I am so proud of watching as the President and Congress join together in a bipartisan effort to pass the 1994

Violent Crime Control Act, which we are now in the process of implementing, to put 100,000 officers on the streets where they can count and where they can support our loved ones. It passed with bipartisan support and, most importantly, the assault weapons ban in that act was passed and it is working to save law enforcement lives every day. Over one-third of all law enforcement officers killed with a fire arm are killed with an assault weapon which is now banned and should stay banned.

The Brady Act is working to protect our officers. Last year through the work of law enforcement almost 60,000 people who attempted to purchase hand guns, but who were convicted felons, fugitives, military deserters or otherwise prohibited from having fire arms were identified and prevented from buying that fire arm. The laws work to protect the men and women of law enforcement. We should be grateful for them and we should make sure those laws are carried out.

With so much hard work accomplished we cannot afford to turn back. Let us honor the service of the fallen and recall their efforts to provide security and justice in this land. Let us resolve to continue their efforts by working together with law enforcement to keep our neighborhoods and our children safe from harm and to rededicate ourselves to restoring that line between right and wrong. Our greatest tribute to those wonderful people we honor today would be to secure the future about which they dreamed.

God bless you all.

(Applause.)

