



[Briefing Room](#)

[Your Weekly Address](#)

[Speeches & Remarks](#)

[Press Briefings](#)

[Statements & Releases](#)

[White House Schedule](#)

[Presidential Actions](#)

[Executive Orders](#)

[Presidential Memoranda](#)

[Proclamations](#)

[Legislation](#)

[Pending Legislation](#)

[Signed Legislation](#)

[Vetoed Legislation](#)

[Nominations & Appointments](#)

[Disclosures](#)

The White House

Office of the Vice President

For Immediate Release

December 27, 2014

Remarks by Vice President Biden at a Service for NYPD Officer Rafael Ramos

Christ Tabernacle
Glendale, New York

10:18 A.M. EST

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Governor Cuomo, Mayor de Blasio, Commissioner Bratton, Pastor, thank you for allowing me to be here today and according me the privilege of expressing the condolences of Jill and my whole family to the Ramos family. What handsome boys.

I remember a similar occasion a long time ago. And, Mom, I assure you those boys will get you through all of this.

I'm sure I speak for the whole nation, Maritza, when I say to you that our hearts ache for you. I know from personal experience that there is little anyone can say or do at this moment to ease the pain, that sense of loss, that sense of loneliness.

But I do hope you take some solace from the fact that as reported by the press there's over 25,000 members of the same fraternity and sorority as your husband who stand and will stand with you the rest of your life -- and they will. It's an uncommon fraternity.

Justin, and Jayden, you've shown tremendous courage and character in these past few days. You are your father's sons. And he was so, so very proud of you from everything that I have heard. And just know, as hard as it is to believe, he will be part of your life the entirety of your life.

Mom, no child should predecease a parent. My heart aches for you.

And, Maritza, I know from experience there are no words that I can offer to ease that profound sense of loneliness and loss you're feeling right now.

But I also know from experience that the time will come -- the time will come when Rafael's memory will bring a smile to your lips before it brings a tear to your eyes. That's when you know it's going to be okay. I know it's hard to believe it will happen, but I promise you it will happen. And my prayer for you is it will come sooner rather than later.

There's a headstone in Ireland that reads:

Death leaves a heartache no one can heal.

Love leaves a memory that no one can steal.

Just sitting here for a few moments looking at the screens, no one had to know your husband to not know how desperately he cared about his family, how close he was to all of you.

I didn't know your husband and I didn't know his partner, who were keeping watch at Myrtle and Tompkins Avenue on that terrible afternoon, but I do know why they were there. They were there to protect and defend, as they always are. Sometimes fearful, but always watchful.

I knew them. They're the guy I grew up with in Scranton and Claymont, Delaware, the boy with the most courage and the most compassion; the man with a brave heart and a generous soul; a brother who always looked out for his sister; a father whose words were always encouraging to you boys with a touch that could soothe away the fear; and a son who made his mother proud every time he turned and smiled at her; and a husband with a gentle hand who could soothe away the concerns, who you knew would always be there.

A former school safety officer, who became a cop at age 37; an active member of his church, studying to become a chaplain; a father, a husband, a son; a seven-year veteran on the force. A son of a Chinese immigrant, his partner, conversant in several dialects; a newlywed. Both -- confident, committed, passionate and vigilant.

Being a cop was not what they did, it was who they were; like every man and woman in uniform here today. It's who you are. And they like every one of you in uniform inside this church and outside, you all joined for essentially the same reason. There was something about you that made you think you could help, that you should serve, that you had a duty.

I have spoken at too many funerals for too many peace officers, too many funerals for brave women and men who kept us safe and watched their families grieve. And I've observed one thing that unfortunately, it's only when a tragedy like this occurs that all their friends, neighbors, and people who didn't even know them become aware of and reminded of the sacrifices they make every single, solitary day to make our lives better.

Today we pay tribute to Officer Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu. We pay tribute to their families. Because every day when a police officer pins on that shield and walks out the door, the officer's wife, husband, mother, father, brother, sister, children -- they know anything could happen. The fear of that call at 3:00 a.m. in the morning, the relief of hearing the voice of the door opened, says, I'm home.

There's a line from the English poet, John Milton. He said, "They also serve who only stand and wait." Thousands upon thousands upon thousands of American families stand and wait so their husbands and wives, fathers and sons can serve the rest of us. Police officers and police families are a different breed -- thank God for them. Thank God for them.

And your husband, Maritza, and his partner, they were a part of New York's Finest. And that's not an idle phrase. This is probably the finest police department in the world -- the finest police department

in the world. They earn that praise. (Applause.)

It's a sacred trust they took on when they kiss their children's forehead as they sleep, and head out on a night shift to watch over all of the children of this great city, treating and protecting each of them as if they were their own.

When you patrol the streets of New York, you circle the Earth; a six-story walk-up, apartment towers, aromas of a million kitchens continuing thousands of traditions; streets full of silence, streets bursting with hundreds languages -- whispering. Laughing. Shouting.

An intimidating city. A city of others. A city of labels and borders and seemingly unbridgeable gaps, a city constantly grappling with issues as old as the nation and as new as the morning headlines.

Yet in every neighborhood in this great city, this most alive of all cities, this chaotic miracle stands as a beacon to the world in no small part because of the sacrifices that the New York Police Department makes every single day.

So when an assassin's bullet targeted two officers, it targeted this city and it touched the soul of the entire nation -- a city where the son of a Chinese immigrant shared a patrol with a Hispanic minister in training; a city where a single ride on a subway brings you into contact with more people, more lives than many people in this country will encounter in an entire lifetime; a city that educated a young college student with a mother from Kansas, and a father from Kenya who would one day stand before the nation and declare: This is not a black America or a white America or a Latino America or an Asian America; this is the United States of America. (Applause.)

And for those of us who are not New Yorkers, we look at you in awe because this is the united city of New York as well; a city that rose as one to confront two of the greatest disasters of this century -- one from the evils of terrorism on 9/11 and one from the fury of nature in Superstorm Sandy.

This is a city of courage and character, having faced and overcome the toughest challenges and I'm absolutely confident as you are that spirit is still alive and well in this city. And I'm absolutely confident it will guide you in the days and weeks ahead.

I believe that this great police force, and this incredibly diverse city can and will show the nation how to bridge any divide. You've done it before. And you will do it again. Because, to paraphrase the words of William Allen White, you are not afraid of tomorrow, because you've seen yesterday and because you love today.

To the Ramos family, we were all lucky to have Rafael. He didn't just have a bible in his locker, he lived it in his heart. He was a cop for all the right reasons.

Mom, we owe you for nurturing him. And, Maritza, we owe you for supporting him. And, Justin and Jayden, know that although your father is gone, you have inherited an entire family, the men and women of the New York Police Department will always be there as long as you are alive. They never - they never -- never forget.

There's a communion hymn in my church that has a stanza that goes like this:

May he raise you up on eagle's wings

And bear you on the breath of dawn.

And make the sun to shine on you.

That's what your father wished for, for both you boys. That's what your father wished for, for this city. And it will happen.

May God bless your family and the family of his partner and may God protect the 84th Precinct and every police officer throughout this great country and keep them safe while they stand on watch for us. God bless you all. (Applause.)

END

10:32 A.M. EST

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