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The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

October 28, 2013

Remarks by the President and FBI Director James Comey

12:34 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Thank you, FBI. (Applause.) Thank you so much. Please, everybody, be seated -- those of you who have seats. (Laughter.)

Well, good afternoon, everybody. I am so proud to be here and to stand once again with so many dedicated men and women of the FBI. You are the best of the best. Day in and day out, you work tirelessly to confront the most dangerous threats our nation faces. You serve with courage; you serve with integrity. You protect Americans at home and abroad. You lock up criminals. You secure the homeland against the threat of terrorism. Without a lot of fanfare, without seeking the spotlight, you do your jobs, all the while upholding our most cherished values and the rule of law.

Fidelity, Bravery, Integrity: That's your motto. And today, we're here to welcome a remarkable new leader for this remarkable institution, one who lives those principles out every single day: Mr. Jim Comey.

Before I get to Jim, I want to thank all the predecessors who are here today. We are grateful for your service. I have to give a special shout-out to Bob Mueller, who served longer than he was supposed to, but he was such an extraordinary leader through some of the most difficult times that we've had in national security. And I consider him a friend and I'm so grateful for him and Ann being here today. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

Now, Jim has dedicated his life to defending our laws -- to making sure that all Americans can trust our justice system to protect their rights and their well-being. He's the grandson of a beat cop. He's the prosecutor who helped bring down the Gambinos. He's the relentless attorney who fought to stem the bloody tide of gun violence, rub out white-collar crime, deliver justice to terrorists. It's just about impossible to find a matter of justice he has not tackled, and it's hard to imagine somebody who is not more uniquely qualified to lead a bureau that covers all of it -- traditional threats like violent and organized crime to the constantly changing threats like terrorism and cyber-security. So he's got the resume.

But, of course, Jim is also a famously cool character -- the calmest in the room during a crisis. Here's what a fellow former prosecutor said about him. He said, "You know that Rudyard Kipling line -- 'If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs' -- that's Jim."

There's also a story from the time during his prosecution of the Gambino crime family. One of the defendants was an alleged hit man named Lorenzo. And during the trial, Jim won an award from the

New York City Bar Association. When the court convened the next morning, everybody was buzzing about it, and suddenly, a note was passed down from the defendant's table, across the aisle to the prosecutor's table. It was handed to Jim, and it read: "Dear Jim, congratulations on your award. No one deserves it more than you. You're a true professional. Sincerely, Lorenzo." (Laughter.)

"Sincerely, Lorenzo." Now, we don't know how sincere he was. (Laughter.) We don't know whether this was a veiled threat, or a plea for leniency, or an honest compliment. But I think it is fair to say that Jim has won the respect of folks across the spectrum -- including Lorenzo. (Laughter.)

He's the perfect leader for an organization whose walls are graced by the words of a legendary former director: "The most effective weapon against crime is cooperation." Jim has worked with many of the more than 35,000 men and women of the FBI over the course of his long and distinguished career. And it's his admiration and respect for all of you, individually, his recognition of the hard work that you do every day -- sometimes under extraordinarily difficult circumstances -- not just the folks out in the field, but also folks working the back rooms, doing the hard work, out of sight -- his recognition that your mission is important is what compelled him to answer the call to serve his country again.

The FBI joins forces with our intelligence, our military, and homeland security professionals to break up all manner of threats -- from taking down drug rings to stopping those who prey on children, to breaking up al Qaeda cells to disrupting their activities, thwarting their plots. And your mission keeps expanding because the nature of the threats are always changing.

Unfortunately, the resources allotted to that mission has been reduced by sequestration. I'll keep fighting for those resources because our country asks and expects a lot from you, and we should make sure you've got the resources you need to do the job. Especially when many of your colleagues put their lives on the line on a daily basis, all to serve and protect our fellow citizens -- the least we can do is make sure you've got the resources for it and that your operations are not disrupted because of politics in this town. (Applause.)

Now the good news is things like courage, leadership, judgment, and compassion -- those resources are, potentially, at least, inexhaustible. That's why it's critical that we seek out the best people to serve -- folks who have earned the public trust; who have excellent judgment, even in the most difficult circumstances; those who possess not just a keen knowledge of the law, but also a moral compass that they -- and we -- can always count on.

And that's who we've got in Jim Comey. I'll tell you I interviewed a number of extraordinary candidates for this job, all with sterling credentials. But what gave me confidence that this was the right man for the job wasn't his degrees and it wasn't his resume; it was in talking to him and seeing his amazing

family, a sense that this somebody who knows what's right and what's wrong, and is willing to act on that basis every single day. And that's why I'm so grateful that he's signed up to serve again.

I will spare you yet another joke about how today, no one stands taller. (Laughter.) I simply want to thank Jim for accepting this role. I want to thank Patrice and the five remarkable children that they've got -- because jobs like this are a team effort, as you well know.

And I want to thank most all the men and women of the FBI. I'm proud of your work. I'm grateful for your service. I'm absolutely confident that this agency will continue to flourish with Jim at the helm. And if he gets lost in the building, I want you guys to help him out. (Laughter.) Because I guarantee you that he's going to have your back, make sure you've got his back as well.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. (Applause.)

MR. JOYCE: And now, ladies and gentlemen, it is my honor to introduce the seventh Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation -- James B. Comey. (Applause.)

MR. COMEY: Thank you, Sean. Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you so much for gracing us with your presence, for honoring us, and for speaking so eloquently about the mission of the FBI and its great people.

Thank you also to my friends and family who are gathered here today. My entire life is literally represented in this crowd, and it is a pretty picture. These are the people that I have known and loved literally my entire life and from whom I have learned so much.

I'm especially grateful that my dad and my sister and my brothers could be here today. I wish so much that Mom could be here to enjoy this amazing day. I can still hear ringing in my entire teenage years her voice as she snapped open the shades every single morning and said, "Rise and shine and show the world what you're made of." I found it less inspiring at the time -- (laughter) -- but it made us who we are. And I'll never forget that.

And to my five troops and my amazing bride, who talked me into being interviewed for this job -- of course, with the caveat that she'd be okay because the President would never pick me. (Laughter.) I got to tell you, this is your last chance to talk to him about it. (Laughter.)

Mr. President, I am so grateful for this honor and this opportunity to serve with the men and women of the FBI. They are standing all around this great courtyard, and standing on duty all around this country and around this world at this moment. I know already that this is the best job I have ever had and will ever have.

That's because I have a front row seat to watch the work of a remarkable group of people who serve this country, folks from all walks of life who joined the FBI for the same reason -- they were teachers and soldiers, and police officers and scholars, and software engineers, and people from all walks of life who wanted to do good for a living. They wanted jobs with moral content, and so they joined this great organization.

I thought about them as I stood in this courtyard just a week ago and showed a visiting foreign leader the statue that overlooks this ceremony. It's an artist's depiction of the words from our shield that the President mentioned: Fidelity, Bravery, and Integrity. And as I thought about that statue and those words and this ceremony, I thought I would take just a couple of minutes and tell you what those words mean and why I think they belong on our shield.

First, fidelity. The dictionary defines fidelity as a strict and continuing faithfulness to an obligation, trust, or duty. To my mind, that word on our shield reminds us that the FBI must abide two obligations at the same time. First, the FBI must be independent of all political forces or interests in this country. In a real sense, it must stand apart from other institutions in American life. But, second, at the same time, it must be part of the United States Department of Justice, and constrained by the rule of law and the checks and balances built into our brilliant design by our nation's founders.

There is a tension reflected in those two aspects of fidelity, those two values that I see in that word, and I think that tension is reflected in the 10-year term that I've just begun. The term is 10 years to ensure independence. But it is a fixed term of years to ensure that power does not become concentrated in one person and unconstrained. The need for reflection and restraint of power is what led Louis Freeh to order that all new agent classes visit the Holocaust Museum here in Washington so they could see and feel and hear in a palpable way the consequences of abuse of power on a massive almost unimaginable scale. Bob Mueller continued that practice. And I will again, when we have agents graduating from Quantico.

The balance reflected in my term is also a product of lessons hard learned from the history of this great institution. Our first half-century or so was a time of great progress and achievement for this country, and for the Bureau. But it also saw abuse and overreach -- most famously with respect to Martin Luther King and others, who were viewed as internal security threats.

As I think about the unique balance represented by fidelity to independence on the one hand, and the rule of law on the other, I think it also makes sense for me to offer those in training a reminder closer to our own history. I'm going to direct that all new agents and analysts also visit the Martin Luther King Memorial here in Washington. I think it will serve as a different kind of lesson -- (applause) -- one

more personal to the Bureau, of the dangers in becoming untethered to oversight and accountability.

That word fidelity belongs on our shield.

Next, bravery. We have perpetrated a myth in our society that being brave means not being afraid, but that's wrong. Mark Twain once said that bravery "is resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not absence of fear." If you've ever talked to a special agent that you know well and you ask he or she about a dangerous encounter they were involved in, they'll almost always give you the same answer, "yeah, I did it, but I was scared to heck the whole time." But that's the essence of bravery.

Only a crazy person wouldn't fear approaching a car with tinted windows during a late-night car stop, or pounding up a flight of stairs to execute a search warrant, or fast-roping from a helicopter down into hostile fire. Real agents, like real people, feel that fear in the pit of their stomachs. But you know the difference between them and most folks? They do it anyway, and they volunteer to do that for a living.

What makes the bravery of the men and women of the FBI so special is that they know exactly what they're in for. They spend weeks and weeks in an academy learning just how hard and dangerous this work is. Then they raise their right hands and take an oath, and do that work anyway. They have seen the Wall of Honor -- that I hope so much my friends and guests and family will get to see inside this building -- with pictures and links to the lives of those who gave the last full measure of devotion for their country as FBI employees.

Civil War General William Tecumseh Sherman said this: "I would define true courage to be a perfect sensibility of the measure of danger and a mental willingness to endure it."

I called a special agent a few weeks ago after he had been shot during an arrest. I knew before I called him that he had already been injured severely twice in his Bureau career, once in a terrorist bombing and once in a helicopter crash. Yet when I got him on the phone, I got the strong sense he couldn't wait to get me off the phone. He was embarrassed by my call. "Mr. Director, it was a through and through wound. No big deal." He was more worried about his Bureau car, which he had left at the scene of the shooting. (Laughter.) He felt okay, though, because his wife -- also a special agent -- was going to go get the car, so everything was fine. (Laughter.)

The men and women of this organization understand perfectly the danger they're in every day and choose to endure it because they believe in this mission. That's why bravery belongs on our shield.

And, finally, integrity. Integrity is derived from the Latin word "integer," meaning whole. A person of integrity is complete, undivided. Sincerity, decency, trustworthy are synonyms of integrity. It's on our

shield because it is the quality that makes possible all the good that we do. Because everything we do requires that we be believed, whether that's promising a source that we will protect her, telling a jury what we saw or heard, or telling a congressional oversight committee or the American people what we are doing with our power and our authorities. We must be believed.

Without integrity, all is lost. We cannot do the good that all of these amazing people signed up to do. The FBI's reputation for integrity is a gift given to every new employee by those who went before. But it is a gift that must be protected and earned every single day. We protect that gift by making mistakes and admitting them, by making promises and keeping them, and by realizing that nothing -- no case, no source, no fear of embarrassment -- is worth jeopardizing the gift of integrity. Integrity must be on the FBI shield.

So, you see, those three words -- Fidelity, Bravery, Integrity -- capture the essence of the FBI and its people. And they also explain why I am here. I wanted to be here to work alongside those people, to represent them, to help them accomplish their mission, and to just be their colleague.

It is an honor and a challenge beyond description. I will do my absolute best to be worthy of it. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

END

12:55 P.M.



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