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## **The White House**

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

May 15, 2015

# Remarks by the President at National Peace Officers Memorial

11:16 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you so much. (Applause.) Please be seated. Thank you, Chuck, for that kind introduction, for your years of proud service, not only as a police officer but for all the advocacy that you do on behalf of law enforcement and their families. I want to thank the entire Fraternal Order of Police and its leadership, including Jim Pasco and Linda Hennie, for everything that you do to support those who protect and serve.

Let me also say that as we gather here today, our prayers remain with the families of our Marines and two Nepalese soldiers, now that the wreckage of their helicopter has been found in a remote part of Nepal. They went to that remote land to help people who suffered devastating losses in a terrible earthquake. They represent a truth that guides our work around the world -- when our friends are in need, America helps.

Sometimes those in uniform get attention only when there's a battle. But they do so much more than that, looking out for folks who are vulnerable or having a tough time, experienced a disaster. And it can involve great risk, great sacrifice. And we give thanks to all our fellow Americans, military and civilian, who reflect the very best of American leadership around the world. The world is better for them.

We are here to honor heroes who lost their lives in the line of duty -- men and women who put themselves in the way of danger, so that the rest of us could live in safety. They were beat cops, deputies, detectives, correctional and forest service officers, federal agents and tribal police. But to many here today, they went by different titles: caring husband, loving wife, my son, my daughter, Mom, Dad.

And so, to all the families here today, whose loved one did not come home at the end of a shift, please know how deeply sorry we are for the loss that you've endured. Know how deeply grateful we are for your loved one's sacrifice.

We hold them up as heroes because that's what they are. It takes a special kind of courage to be a peace officer. To be the one people turn to in their most desperate moments. To be willing to run into a dangerous situation, when everyone else is running the other way. Scripture tells us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves -- but only a special few take that commandment so deeply to heart that they are willing to risk their lives so that others -- often total strangers -- can know peace and security. And that's what peace officers do. And today, we honor 131 who made that ultimate sacrifice.

Officer Kevin Jordan was a member of the police department of Griffin, Georgia. Husband to Tammy. Father to seven children. Army veteran. His daughter Deborah says, "We were his platoon." And Kevin deployed his own training to raise his young platoon, leading them in cadences - "How motivated are you?" (Family responds.) They were motivated. (Applause.) Highly motivated.

He drilled them with the basics -- to study hard, and to push yourself, and to take care of each other. And everywhere he went, he made friends. In Tammy's words, "He never met a stranger." To help make ends meet, Kevin took a night shift as a security guard at a Waffle House. And one night, some customers got rowdy, and as Kevin was placing one of the troublemakers under arrest, he was shot and killed. He was just 43 years old. One week later, Kevin's son, Hezekiah, graduated from Griffin High. And there to cheer him on were over a hundred of Kevin's fellow officers. And today, Hezekiah is in the Army, training to be an MP -- and wants to be in law enforcement, just like his dad.

Senior Deputy Jessica Hollis started out as an EMT in San Antonio, Texas. She and her husband, Ricky, applied to the Austin Police Academy together, were accepted together, graduated together -- just the second married couple in Austin to do that. Jessica eventually joined the Travis County Sheriff's Office, where she became a senior deputy and member of the prestigious dive team. She was a fierce animal lover -- if she drove by a turtle trying to cross a road, she'd slam on the brakes and carry it gently on to the other side. She took her son Mason on special vacations -- to the family lake house, New Orleans, on diving trips -- just the two of them.

And last September, after heavy rains, Jessica went out to check for civilians trapped in rising water. It was around two o'clock in the morning when she radioed for help. Her car was being swept away by the floodwater. Minutes later, she was missing. Dozens of officers came out to join the search, but by the time they found her, it was too late.

More than one thousand people attended Senior Deputy Hollis's funeral. And there, Travis County Sheriff Greg Hamilton made sure to tell all his officers that he never had the chance to say something to Jessica -- "I love each and every one of you. And I'll do anything for you."

Officer Roberto Sanchez's parents brought him to California from Mexico when he was just four years old. It was his first trip on an airplane -- and that airplane is what brought him to America. So he began to collect model airplanes. He took his high school sweetheart Sonia on "plane spotting" dates, even worked as a freight carrier at Orange County's John Wayne Airport.

But he always had one big dream -- to be a police officer. When he joined the LAPD, friends say it was one of the happiest days of his life. He lived within walking distance of his parents. He volunteered at the school where his niece teaches kindergarten. He married Sonia, his high school sweetheart. And his partner on the force was his best friend. So life was good.

One night, Officer Sanchez was in pursuit of a speeding vehicle when someone intentionally crashed into his patrol car. He was the third Los Angeles police officer killed in a crash in just two months.

Your jobs are inherently dangerous. The reminders are too common. Just a few days ago, two police officers were killed in the line of duty in Mississippi. A week before that, an officer was killed in the line of duty in Queens. A few months before that, two of his fellow officers in the NYPD were killed as well.

We cannot erase every darkness or danger from the duty that you've chosen. We can offer you the support you need to be safer. We can make the communities you care about and protect safer, as well. We can make sure that you have the resources you need to do your job. We can do everything we have to do to combat the poverty that plagues too many communities in which you have to serve.

We can work harder, as a nation, to heal the rifts that still exist in some places between law enforcement and the people you risk your lives to protect. We owe it to all of you who wear the badge with honor. And we owe it to your fellow officers who gave their last full measure of devotion. Most of all, we can say thank you. We can say we appreciate you and we're grateful for the work that you do each and every day. And we can thank the families who bear the burden alongside you.

On behalf of the American people, I offer the families, friends, and fellow officers of those we've lost my prayers and my deepest thanks. We could not be prouder of them, more grateful for their service. We could not be prouder of you and all who work so hard to keep us safe.

May God bless and keep the fallen. May He comfort the mourning. May He protect the peacemakers. And may He bless the United States of America. (Applause.)

END

11:27 A.M. EDT

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