NATIONAL POLICE WEEK MEMORIAL SPEECH

FOR

MARK CASTEEL

Hello everyone and thank you for being here today to share this year’s Police Memorial Service. To all of you here today; current and retired members of our force, families of fallen officers, local elected officials, media, distinguished guests, thank you all for your expression of respect and remembrance for our brave defenders. Citizens all around the country are commemorating the lives of their fallen police officers as we are doing, and throughout the country we can all feel a heavy sigh of grief as we remember those brave people we have lost throughout the years-people who have selflessly devoted their very existence to insure the safety of their neighbors, community and country. We must never forget the lives given for the good of others. We can also never forget their families-their mothers, fathers, spouses and children, friends, colleagues and co-workers who are faced with life without their anchors. Every year we memorialize these heroes. Every year we come together to remember them, and we will continue to do the same. **We will not forget**.

Someone once said, “A ship is a safe harbor, but that is not what ships are for.” Last year we spoke of the lives and tragic deaths of three of our own, Marshal Richard Mark Clapp, Marshal Lesley Dale Oaks, and Lt. Russell Baldwin. All three of these men could have easily remained in his safe harbor, but that was not who they were. They lived to protect and defend-that was what they truly believed was their purpose in life. They each left behind family, friends and a police force that will never be the same without their loyal and immeasurable contributions.

The purpose of a service like this is, of course to remember, but it is also an opportunity to provide support and a sense of community to the survivors of our heroes. We all know that time heals, but today gives us a tangible moment to express our sorrow, our concern for the families, and a chance to express our gratitude and appreciation for those who are here with us, serving us every day and not remaining in their “safe harbors.”

It’s been almost 9 years since Aaron Clapp lost his father, Richard Mark. Aaron was by his father’s side that fateful day in 2003, and he continues to live his life honoring his father’s memory. It’s been 30 years since the death of Marshal Lesley Oaks and Lt. Russell Baldwin was killed 8 years before that. Generations have passed since 2 of these tragedies. What have we learned? We’ve learned that these men and all law enforcement agents are an inspiration. We’ve learned to treasure life and respect the living-who knows what might be waiting for any one of us around the next corner? We’ve learned that although we have the benefit of modern technology to make our lives “easier,” that is not necessarily the case, and even though we live in a more advanced society, nothing replaces the human connection and the need to feel safe and protected by our police force.

Remember the words of U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer. She said, “Law enforcement officers are never ‘off duty.’ They are dedicated public servants who are sworn to protect public safety at any time and place that the peace is threatened. They need all the help they can get.” Now, more than ever, that quote rings true. We all live in a different world since 9/11. Hopefully we’ve learned from that tragedy as well. Hopefully we’ve learned to really feel and think and act as a united community, one that respects each other and values the law enforcement officials who never rest to make sure our constituents are protected.

With that in mind, we say thank you to our police force. Thank you for not resting, for always being on call, and for placing our well being before your own. We say thank you to the families of our police force-they’ve given us their most precious gift-their loved ones. We say thank you to the families of the fallen and, once again, we promise you, **we will never forget**.

Thank you all for sharing this moment with us.