

training for, the day when just doing your job and being a hero are exactly the same thing. For the men and women standing behind me, America's TOP COPS, that day came. And when it did, they were ready. They didn't flinch. They didn't back off. There are people who are alive today only because of their courage.

I had a chance to just shake each one of these individuals' hands and express my appreciation to them personally. They're a pretty humble group. Some of them will tell you they don't deserve to be called heroes; they're entitled to their opinion. *[Laughter]* I disagree with them. I think they are. What else do you call a team that takes down a deranged gunman and saves countless lives? Or a unit that flies a helicopter into dangerous winds and pulls off a daring nighttime rescue? Or an officer who, after being shot three times, switches her gun from her right hand to her left, so that she can return fire until backup arrives?

I guarantee you that when the bullets were flying, when lives were on the line, these men and women weren't thinking about bravery. They weren't thinking of themselves. Instead, they were looking out for their fellow officers and for the civilians that they swore to protect. And when they return home, they'll go back to being just another member of the team.

But they've earned this moment. Today we celebrate 34 extraordinary individuals, and we recognize the sacrifices they and their fellow officers make. Some of our TOP COPS are still recovering from gunshot wounds. I'm sure that many are, even now, thinking of a partner or a teammate who fell in the line of duty.

So we honor their memories today. We honor all those who have put their lives on the line in order to protect their fellow citizens, even if they were complete strangers. I hope that we also pledge to learn something from the exam-

ple that they set. Because while most of us will never be asked to run straight into a hail of bullets or chase down an armed suspect on foot, we also have responsibilities to meet.

For those of us in elected office, that includes helping States and cities to keep first-responders on the job. It includes supporting cutting-edge tools they need, from a high-speed public safety broadband network to a new generation of mobile apps.

Even as we do everything we can to support men and women like our TOP COPS, and to make police work safer and more effective, we do have to recognize that one thing will never change. Our safety will always depend on the quiet heroism of ordinary Americans, like the ones that we recognize today. We will be forever in debt to those who wear the badge, to men and women with a deep sense of duty and a willingness to serve and sacrifice on our behalf. And I think these individuals don't mind me saying that they are representative of the sacrifices and that quiet courage that exists among law enforcement officers all across the country, and their families, because I know the strains of families in such a difficult job is significant as well. And those families, those of you who are here today, we want to say thank you to you as well.

So again, to the 2012 TOP COPS, thank you for everything you do. God bless you and your families, and God bless the United States of America. All right.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:13 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Vice President Joe Biden. The related proclamation of May 14 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Statement on the Security Transition in Afghanistan May 13, 2012

I welcome President Karzai's announcement today of the third tranche of areas to transition to Afghan security lead, which is an

important step forward in our effort to achieve our objectives in Afghanistan. As transition proceeds in these areas, nearly 75 percent of

the population of Afghanistan will be living in provinces, districts, and villages where Afghan forces are leading. The Afghan National Security Forces are strengthening their capacity as we remain on track to meet our goal of having the Afghan Government fully responsible for security across the country by the end of 2014.

A week from now, world leaders will gather at the NATO summit in Chicago to discuss

how we can effectively advance the transition process as our forces move from combat to a support role and demonstrate our enduring support for the Afghan Government and Afghan National Security Forces. I look forward to meeting with President Karzai and my fellow leaders in Chicago to discuss these critical steps that will strengthen Afghan sovereignty while responsibly winding down the war.

Commencement Address at Barnard College in New York City May 14, 2012

The President. Please, please have a seat. Thank you. Thank you, President Spar, trustees, President Bollinger. Hello, class of 2012! Congratulations on reaching this day. Thank you for the honor of being able to be a part of it.

There are so many people who are proud of you—your parents, family, faculty, friends—all who share in this achievement. So please give them a big round of applause. To all the moms who are here today, you could not ask for a better Mother's Day gift than to see all of these folks graduate.

I have to say, though, whenever I come to these things, I start thinking about Malia and Sasha graduating, and I start tearing up and—[laughter]—it's terrible. I don't know how you guys are holding it together. [Laughter]

I will begin by telling a hard truth: I'm a Columbia College graduate. [Laughter] I know there can be a little bit of a sibling rivalry here. [Laughter] But I'm honored nevertheless to be your commencement speaker today, although I've got to say, you set a pretty high bar, given the past 3 years. Hillary Clinton, Meryl Streep, Sheryl Sandberg, these are not easy acts to follow.

But I will point out Hillary is doing an extraordinary job as one of the finest Secretaries of State America has ever had. We gave Meryl the Presidential Medal of Arts and Humanities. Sheryl is not just a good friend, she's also one of our economic advisers. So it's like the old saying goes: Keep your friends close and your Barnard commencement speakers even closer. There's wisdom in that. [Laughter]

Now, the year I graduated—this area looks familiar—[laughter]—the year I graduated was 1983, the first year women were admitted to Columbia. Sally Ride was the first American woman in space. Music was all about Michael and the moonwalk. [Laughter] We had the Walkman—

Audience member. Do it! [Laughter]

The President. No, no moonwalking. [Laughter] No moonwalking today. [Laughter]

We had the Walkman, not iPods. Some of the streets around here were not quite so inviting. [Laughter] Times Square was not a family destination. [Laughter] So I know this is all ancient history. Nothing worse than commencement speakers droning on about bygone days. [Laughter] But for all the differences, the class of 1983 actually had a lot in common with all of you. For we too were heading out into a world at a moment when our country was still recovering from a particularly severe economic recession. It was a time of change. It was a time of uncertainty. It was a time of passionate political debates.

You can relate to this because just as you were starting out finding your way around this campus, an economic crisis struck that would claim more than 5 million jobs before the end of your freshman year. Since then, some of you have probably seen parents put off retirement, friends struggle to find work. And you may be looking toward the future with that same sense of concern that my generation did when we were sitting where you are now.

Of course, as young women, you're also going to grapple with some unique challenges,