



Fraternal Order of Police **FLORIDA STATE LODGE**



**President James Preston's address at the 26th Annual
Florida Law Enforcement Memorial Service
Tallahassee Capitol
May 5, 2008**

“Our empty feeling of loss is experienced the same”

Good morning, I am James Preston, President of the Florida Fraternal Order of Police. Welcome to the 26th Annual Law Enforcement Memorial Service. Thank you for joining with me here before the Florida Law Enforcement Memorial Monument as we gather to honor the lives and memories of our fallen heroes. I am especially honored to share this day with the families and friends. You are our honored guests and we gather to embrace you and to let you know you do not grieve alone. We stand together with you to help share the heavy burden of loss you have come to know. As you look upon the many officers gathered here today, recognize this is a part your law enforcement family.

The year 2007 became one of the most tragic in decades. After declining in recent years, law enforcement deaths soared during 2007. 191 Officer's names will be added to the National Law Enforcement Memorial Monument in Washington, D.C. this year.

Our state, Florida, has the unwelcome distinction of being second in the nation with 16 of our bravest, our finest brothers and sisters in law enforcement having their names added to this Memorial Monument. This represents a 56% increase in Florida over the previous year.

Not since the 1970's have we seen such a dramatic increase in the number of officers down. This alarming trend of assaults and deaths upon the guardians of public safety must be reversed.

Today, our officers are smarter, better skilled, better equipped and better trained than at any point in time. While, the demands placed upon them are greater than ever and continue to grow. They are taxed to their limit on a daily basis, tasked to do more with less. Yet, each officer chooses to become a sentinel of peace and to serve the communities in which they also live. It takes a special kind of courage to become a police officer or deputy or trooper willing to face the inherent dangers of the profession. Proudly, they put on the uniform, proudly they wear the badge and with this same pride they go about their daily duties facing the next call for service, facing the next danger and with compassion gently holding the next child victim or offering kind words of assurance to the injured, empathizing with the victims and placing themselves in harm's way to protect those they serve. We know the danger the next "routine" call may bring and must remain vigilant and never allow complacency. Sadly, some lay down their very lives in the line of duty.

Today, we are gathered to honor the lives of our fallen and pay our respects to the families. Little does it matter, their department, their age or rank, *our empty feeling of loss is experienced the same.*

Here at the Law Enforcement Memorial Monument we engrave their names upon the granite walls as a permanent reminder for all Floridians of the ultimate sacrifice of these brave heroes. Behind every name lies a story of courage and devotion to duty. Each name represents a life cut short. They were mothers, fathers, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, friends and coworkers. They had such high hopes and aspirations for their families. These 16, these heroes, were united in life by their common bond of service as a law enforcement officer, together in death they will forever be united as our heroes and we pledge to “never forget” their service, their sacrifice.

We shall forever be known by the memory we leave behind. So, tell those you love everyday just how much they mean to you. Your voice is silenced by the grave. Tell them now while you can. So long as our memory remains in the hearts of those we love, we shall not die. If you think some praise is due him, now’s the time to tell it to him – he cannot read his tombstone once he is gone nor see the tears being shed or see the long line of police cars and motorcycles in tribute. Tell them now.

At the funeral of Deputy Paul Rein, I was approached by two reporters gathering information for their story. They were going among the thousands of mourners asking “why are you here?” “did you know him?” “what was he like?” I had never had the honor or privilege of meeting Paul but I knew him, the same way as I knew Nick Sottile or Danta Manuel, or Joe Bill Galloway or Robin Tanner. We had never met but they were my brothers and sisters. They were cops, and I - just as each of you here today, mourn their loss. Did I know him? I said, “We had never met but I knew him well”. He was part of the fabric that makes up the thin blue line. Perhaps you have to be one to fully understand the fraternity of brotherhood shared by law enforcement officers.

Today, we pay tribute to these brave men and women who have given of themselves so much.

Thank you for being here today. It means so much to the families to see the strong bond of the thin blue line. Yes, we knew them and Yes, we will never forget them.