Police Memorial Speech
May 9, 2013

We gather today in memory of those who have fallen while protecting our community and our great land. We gather to pay tribute to law enforcement and corrections officers who died in the line of duty.

We gather as witnesses when words like ‘courage’ and ‘sacrifice’ no longer are abstract ideals but instead hardened realities that leave a lifetime loss on families and a permanent mark on our community. We gather to honor the fallen and to publicly acknowledge their last full measure of devotion.

There are many ways we recognize the value of public safety in our community. We see police cars on patrol and know that an officer is inside … and we slow down. We see detention officers escorting dangerous criminals that we see from the comforts of home on the evening news. We drive down 6th Street or 8th Avenue and see the building of a building for police … and we know it costs a lot of money.

As I said, there are many ways we recognize the presence of law enforcement. But the Police Memorial is where we acknowledge the ultimate sacrifice - the unanticipated and unwelcomed End of Watch. Gainesville and Alachua County have seen their share of these losses, and a grateful community is one that never forgets.

Across the country there were 120 line of duty deaths in 2012. This year - a year not yet half-over - there have been 41 line of duty deaths, which is a 21 percent increase over the first five months of last year.

The fallen include both men and women whose average age was just 43 and who had dedicated more than 13 years to law enforcement.

There are faces to these numbers. These are men and women who will no longer return home to a loved one, no longer join family at a Thanksgiving dinner, and no longer tuck a child into bed at night and whisper a quiet prayer for their protection.

As the memorial poem says, “I never dreamed it would be me/ and with heavy heart and bended knee/ I ask for all here from the past/ Dear God, let my name be the last.”

Sadly, we know it will not be the last. We know this because we know we live in a dangerous world. That is why people like me - someone not in law enforcement - have
such a deep and abiding respect for those who are sworn to protect and serve.

For the vast majority of people, it's almost an intuitive instinct. You see it first in young children - a sense they have that things will be okay now because people like you are present. It's a sense of safety, obviously. But also a sense of order. A sense of calm.

It's because, also, intuitively and instinctively, we know that the natural state of affairs is not calm … is not ordered … and most certainly is not safe. When we gather to memorialize these fallen heroes, we publicly confess to the fallen nature of man and the tragic core of civilization.

This tragedy I speak of lies in the fact that despite our incredible advances in so many areas of life that hold such promise, there are still barbarians at the gate.

This society we made - one based on the consent of the governed, the rule of law, and the God-given rights of individuals - is always threatened by people who scheme to exploit the innocent and to visit violence on the weak.

Even though we live in an era that is being defined by the iPad, Facebook, and Netflix, we still have among us those who prefer a more primitive era defined by the club, the stick, and the spear. They will always be with us.

That is why we need men and women who choose the career of law enforcement, who choose to be police and detention officers. We need law enforcement to stand in the breach and keep our community safe.

So we gather today to comfort the family and friends of the fallen, to memorialize their sacrifice, and to publicly acknowledge that they will never be forgotten.

I am both honored and humbled to have been asked to speak to you today. Thank you.