

U.S. Attorney's Report to the District

Fifty years ago this month, President Kennedy proclaimed May 15th as National Peace Officers Memorial Day, and the week in which it falls National Police Week. Numerous events during mid-May pay special tribute to those law enforcement officers who have lost their lives in the line of duty.

On May 7, I attended the California Peace Officers' Memorial Ceremony in Sacramento, when the names of officers who died in the line of duty are added to the state peace officers' memorial monument. The names of eight officers killed in 2011, and those of several others who died in prior years, were added to the memorial. For me, the most moving part of the ceremony was watching grieving spouses and children approach the monument to lay roses over the names of the fallen officers. One of those to whom we paid homage was Officer James L. Capoot of the Vallejo Police Department, shot and killed November 17, 2011, during a foot pursuit of armed bank robbery suspects. Officer Capoot, a 19-year veteran of the Vallejo Police Department, leaves behind a wife and three daughters.

Sadly, the gun violence that took Officer Capoot's life has become far too common. Although violent crime nationally has been declining, officer deaths from firearms have increased in each of the past three years. In 2011, for the first time in 14 years, more officers died from gunfire in this country – 68 -- than from traffic-related incidents. This year has brought more evidence of this trend. In April another officer from our district, Stanislaus County Deputy Sheriff Robert Paris, was shot and killed while serving an eviction notice in Modesto. This month, a CHP officer in Kern County was shot twice but survived, likely thanks to his bulletproof vest.

In response to this increasing threat to officer safety, last year U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder launched the Law Enforcement Safety Initiative, which includes a focus on increasing federal prosecutions of dangerous armed felons, and assisting local law enforcement in various ways, including a national training initiative to improve officer safety; support for a program to provide federal funds to local law enforcement agencies to purchase bulletproof vests; and dissemination of information on officer safety resources.

Real public safety requires effective partnerships between federal, state, and local law enforcement, and here in the Eastern District of California we are doing all we can to promote officer safety. We have provided information concerning federal resources to local law enforcement agencies in the district, and have dramatically ramped up prosecutions of dangerous armed felons. Our filings of illegal firearms prosecutions increased in each of the last three years. In fiscal year 2011 we doubled the number of defendants charged in 2010, and we are on pace in 2012 to exceed last year's impressive record.

As we strive to reduce future officer shootings, however, National Police Week is an appropriate time to remember those officers who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of

duty, and to thank those men and women in law enforcement who protect us all and who risk their lives every day.

If you would like to communicate with our office, contact the main number in Sacramento, or submit a suggestion by clicking on the button below. Thank you.

United States Attorney

Benjamin B. Wagner