

February 2005 - Honoring the Life of Greenwood County Sheriff Matt Samuels

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By Congressman Jerry Moran

February 16, 2005

Mr. Speaker, Congressman Tiahrt and I join together today to honor the life of fallen Greenwood County Sheriff, Matt Samuels. On Wednesday, January 19, Sheriff Matt Samuels was shot while serving a search warrant and an arrest warrant near Virgil, Kansas. He died in the line of duty while serving his community.

Protecting and serving was in Matt's nature. His father had served as county sheriff before him, so he grew up around the principles of law and justice. As a second-generation sheriff, Matt took service beyond just his job. He was seen as a leader, involved in the Special Olympics and serving as President of the local Kiwanis Club.

Sheriff Samuels was devoted to law enforcement, but more than that, he was devoted to the people of Greenwood County. While still in high school, Samuels began working as a part-time jailer. After graduation, he married Tamara Bechtle, then attended the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center. He was elected to his first term as sheriff in 2000.

1979 to 2005. That's twenty-six years of public service. As Sheriff Samuels was only 42 years old at his death, it means he spent over half of his life serving the citizens of Greenwood County.

As his friend, John Lehnherr said, "Matt lived to be a sheriff, and he died being a sheriff."

Hundreds of law enforcement officers from across Kansas turned out on Sunday, January 23, for Sheriff Samuels's funeral. The service was held in the local junior-senior high school gymnasium, and it was standing room only—plus an additional packed room, where the crowd watched the service on television.

It was fitting that Sheriff Samuels's casket traveled its route from the memorial service to his final resting place in a white pickup truck owned by the sheriff's department. The motorcade following that white truck included government and law enforcement vehicles of all kinds, from all over the area. It took half an hour for the entire procession to pass by.

People like Matt Samuels put on their uniforms every day and go out to try and make their communities better and safer. They know, whenever they wear their badges, that they may face danger. But they take that risk. For us. For our children and our families. For all of us.

Matt Samuels made the ultimate sacrifice. At first glance, it seems unfair that Matt met his end while delivering warrants. After all, he was just doing his job. Who knew that gunfire would erupt and a daylong standoff would ensue? Who knew that anyone would be hurt, much less killed? Let us all remember that Sheriff Samuels did not die a senseless death. His job — even the routine duties — all of his duties carried great importance.

Those questions are the key to what makes us call law enforcement officers brave. No one knows what will happen when an officer confronts a suspect, whether that confrontation occurs at a house in the country or in the middle of a burglary. Law enforcement officers face the unknown. They apprehend suspects, for the good of their fellow citizens, despite the danger, despite the possibility of being injured, or even killed.

Being killed in the line of duty carries with it a certain nobility. But all the nobility and honor in the world can't ease the pain of losing Matt Samuels. His wife, son, and daughter are in pain. His community grieves. Rare are men like Matt Samuels, and we all feel he was taken too soon.

Congressman Tiahrt and I pray for the Samuels family. We pray for Eureka, Kansas, and for Greenwood County. We mourn the death of Matt Samuels and know he will be missed.