

# Opening speech by Jan Berry, Chairman of the Police Federation of England and Wales

**Tuesday 15th May, 2007**

[Check against delivery]

May I take this opportunity to welcome everyone – colleagues and guests alike – to our annual conference here in Blackpool.

Some of you have travelled further than others, but you are all very welcome.

This year will again provide us all with the opportunity to use our experience as police officers to consider the many challenges facing the service, and to influence the future.

Before I highlight some parts of the agenda, let us first pay tribute to those colleagues who have paid the ultimate price during the last 12 months, and gave their lives in the line of duty.

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Since last conference eight colleagues have been killed on duty.

David Shreeve,  
Debbie Harman,  
Joe Carroll,  
Allan Shaw,  
Richard Gostage,  
Conal Hills,  
Stacey Pyke  
and Richard Gray.

Eight very different people, but eight people who shared that special something that made them want to serve the community; eight people proud to be police officers.

It was just 10 days ago that PC Richard Gray – or Ricky to his friends – was shot and killed in West Mercia.

I'd now like to invite Andy White, the Chairman of West Mercia Joint Branch Board, to say a few words.

**ANDY WHITE**

Thanks Andy.

Our thoughts and prayers are with Ricky's family and our colleagues in West Mercia, as they come to terms with their tragic loss.

The video you are about to see was made before Ricky's murder.

We will celebrate his life and service fully next year in Bournemouth.

This video is dedicated to the memory of all our fallen colleagues, lest we forget.

## **MEMORIAL DAY VIDEO**

My thanks to all who contributed.

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This will be our last conference in Blackpool ... for the foreseeable future.

Debates in this hall over the years not only tell the story of the Police Federation, but of the history of the service.

This hall has helped us hold the service and politicians to account.

And it is here where being the conscience of chief officers, home secretaries and prime ministers, has really come alive.

I've been doing my history homework and found it took an Act of Parliament, way back in 1960, for the Federation to even be allowed to hold a conference in Blackpool in May.

Funnily enough, much of the talk that year was about pay – although in contrast to this year it was because the Government had appointed a Royal Commission on the Police, which didn't report back until the following December.

A lesson perhaps for the current incumbents of the Home Office, Number 10 and for that matter Number 11 too?

This year is a particularly important one for the Federation as come November it will be our election time again.

Three years on from our Make a Difference campaign this is yet another opportunity to continue that good work.

It's important, not just because the more we mirror our membership, the more we'll be able to reflect their views, but because it will help make us a more influential organisation – to the benefit of the whole police service.

I never fail to remind Ministers that it is the Police Federation, and only the Police Federation, that represents every single police officer: be they male or female, straight or gay, black or white.

A fragmented or splintered police service is a weak police service.

Having had the privilege to serve as Chairman for the past five years I know that if I was sitting on the other side of the negotiating table, I'd much rather be facing a sea of different police organisations, each with their own individual agenda, than one united front.

We have to be that united front.

And in being that united front we have a special responsibility to understand and reflect the views of all officers, whatever their background, and encourage them to play an active role in the Police Federation.

So what does this mean in practice?

Well, we've got the next few months to encourage as wide a range of officers as possible, to get involved and put themselves forward for election.

Being a Fed rep can be hard-work.

Often a thankless task.

It takes moral courage to stand up for your colleagues and to be that social conscience.

But being the eyes, ears and voice of your colleagues is also very rewarding.

When I joined the police I'd never have imagined I'd be able to influence at the highest level.

Early on as a Federation rep, I soon realised the opportunities that presented themselves.

I well remember lobbying a certain Michael Howard in the nineties just before he became Home Secretary.

Along with Peter Harman [30 years today] we explained the benefits of the side-handled baton.

A couple of months later, following his appointment as Home Secretary, one of his first announcements was to agree to the introduction of side-handled batons.

What this demonstrates from a Federation perspective, is that lobbying at a local and national level works, and on this occasion secured improved protection for officers, enabling us to better control confrontational situations.

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It's not just the Federation holding elections.

In six weeks there'll be a new Home Secretary and a new Prime Minister – bar a massive surprise, one Gordon Brown.

Having had the best part of a decade to plan his premiership we can be sure he'll hit the ground running.

But to date Gordon Brown's views on policing are a mystery.

The critical thing for the Police Federation is to be able to articulate not just what is wrong with the service, but most important of all, workable solutions.

And that is what this year's conference agenda's all about: addressing the most important issues facing officers and the service.

Whenever I speak to colleagues their number one concern is the impact that sanction detections have on their work.

This afternoon we'll be debating the problems posed by performance targets and Penalty Notices and how we can restore discretion.

Demands on the police service and pressures on police officers have never been greater.

From neighbourhood policing, response policing and roads policing to human trafficking, terrorism and community relations.

All present us with a massive challenge.

We'll be considering all of these in one form or another over the course of the next few days.

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Tomorrow is of course Home Secretary day.

We've now had three different secretaries of state in six years, each serving less time than the last.

John Reid may only be in office for another six weeks but that won't stop us giving him some home truths about the state of the home office.

I'm not in the habit of giving civil servants a head-start to craft a response to what I'll say tomorrow in my keynote speech so I won't deliver it now.

But our message tomorrow to the Government, to Gordon Brown and to John Reid's successor – whoever that may be – will be loud and it will be clear.

They have a choice.

Start listening.

Start changing the way you do business.

Or get ready for a fight.

You can only push the police service and police officers so far.

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Aside from the Home Secretary session, in David Cameron and Ming Campbell, we'll have the opportunity to hear from, and put on the spot, two of the nation's most important agenda-setters.

In his very first speech on criminal justice David Cameron described the police service as the last great unreformed institution in the country.  
Well in my 30 odd years in policing we haven't stopped reforming.

He also seems to think that it's impossible to dismiss underperforming officers.

Yet in the last five years alone we've changed these rules three times!!

The LibDems, too, have had plenty to say on crime.

It was their number one priority at the council elections – demonstration enough that crime sparks public debate like no other issue.

Politicians being politicians I can't envisage us being treated to a discussion devoid of soundbites or spin, but this conference will be the closest thing to a proper debate on what they see the future of policing to be.

We need to use all the Q&A sessions to not only show them how passionate we are about policing, but to impress on them that this is a Police Federation, mature enough to change – but only, only, if the changes are for the good of the service, for the good of the public, and fair on police officers.

And with so many senior politicians, other guests and journalists attending this conference, let's make sure they go away with the memory that this Police Federation is a force of persuasion; that, yes, we ask tough questions, but we win the debates through the strength of our arguments – and the strength of our arguments alone.

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Before moving to our forum debates we'll first take a few minutes to update on last years conference.

That will be followed by a short presentation from John Coppen and Kevin Huish on the latest situation with custody officers, and a presentation by Nick Hardwick, Chairman of the IPCC, which will no doubt also double-up as his annual PDR.

### **Conclusion**

I can't recall a time when it was more important to give chief officers and politicians a reality-check.

So let's make the most of these three days.

And let's make this the best conference we've ever had in Blackpool.

Enjoy conference

**[Ends]**