



International Brotherhood of Police Officers

A DIVISION OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

July 23, 2009

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am deeply disturbed by your comments on national television Wednesday night relating to the Cambridge police and the incident with Harvard scholar Dr. Henry L. Gates Jr. I encourage you to clarify how the “Cambridge police acted stupidly....”

Your campaign for the presidency tried to transcend race relations in America and claimed to support a new America based on equality. We learn early in life that calling anyone stupid is an exercise in poor judgment, but when you said the “Cambridge police acted stupidly...,” you not only used poor judgment in your choice of words, you indicted all members of the Cambridge police department and public safety officers across the country.

None of us knows the facts of the incident, which is true. “Skip” Gates is your friend, which is true. But are you asking us to believe that the police officer’s account of the incident is wrong because Mr. Gates is your friend – and a Harvard professor – while the other party to this story from your eyes is merely a working class police officer?

There is always a sharp contrast between reality and actuality. Reality brings each of our prior perceptions and biases into any event or encounter. I am sure that the life experiences of Dr. Henry L. Gates Jr. and the police officer who responded to the call vary greatly. Actuality is what happened, without the perceptions and biases, and something none of us will ever truly know.

Do you have any idea what it is like to be a police officer on the streets, especially during these trying economic times? The police officer involved has an impeccable professional reputation and is an outstanding member of his community.

I am president of a labor organization, SEIU/NAGE, and through our affiliate, the International Brotherhood of Police Officers, we represent rank and file officers from Atlanta, Georgia, Tennessee, Texas, North Carolina and Virginia in the South, California, Colorado, and Idaho in the West, and throughout New England.

If the Cambridge officer on duty did not respond to the call, it could be alleged that Cambridge police do not treat seriously the property rights of African-Americans. If the officer’s account of the story is accurate, it could be alleged that famous people who live in expensive homes receive different treatment under the law.


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Ironically, the biggest mistake made here, in my opinion, has been made by you when you used your cult of personality status on national television to unleash a vicious attack on law enforcement officers; not only in Cambridge, but also through the audience you reach across America.

As an aside, your comments on this matter were contrary to the goal of your press conference: getting the American public's attention to stand behind you for health care reform. Instead, an incident in Massachusetts involving your friend took predominance over changing the status quo on health care.

Please reconsider the statement you made Wednesday night because of the tenor it sets towards law enforcement officers; and since the facts will always be open to debate, please apologize to people in this country who merely are trying to do their jobs during tough times.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David J. Holway". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

David J. Holway
National President