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Nixon-FBI 300

WASHINGTON AP -- Graduation ceremonies for the FBI National Academy were held at the White House Wednesday for the first time and President Nixon used the occasion to call on the nation to back up its law enforcement officers.

The President said he was not opposed to criticism when law enforcement agencies are in the wrong, because, he observed, that helps them to do a better job. But when they are right in their efforts to protect society, the President declared: "Let's back them up."

Nixon handed out diplomas to the 100 graduates of a 12-week FBI course. The graduates came from 44 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and four foreign countries.

Nixon said the FBI graduates stand for the type of strong, competent, efficient law enforcement agencies that deserve respect of the country.

The President called for better pay across the nation for law enforcement officers, but he pointed out that no matter how well they were paid they could not be effective unless they have respect from the community they are serving.

He said it has become fashionable to look on the law enforcement officers as "second class citizens" and to take the part of the person charged with breaking the law whenever there is a conflict. But, he declared there had to be respect for the men and women who are doing their best to enforce the laws.

The best assurance against a police state, Nixon said, "is competent, effective, just police forces throughout our nation."

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover gave Nixon a gold badge as an honorary FBI member and Nixon drew a burst of laughter and applause from the crowded East Room when he revealed that 32 years ago, graduating from law school, he had applied to work for the FBI "and I never heard anything."

He said years later when he became vice president he asked Hoover what happened to his application.

Hoover checked and reported "I had been approved as an agent of the FBI," Nixon said, "and would have been made a member of the FBI except Congress did not appropriate the necessary funds."

"That will never happen again," President Nixon promised.

rz60/ped may 28