

EDITORIAL: Fresno CHP officers died trying to keep us safe

By The Bee Editorial Board

Fresno

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If your car has ever broken down on a state highway in the middle of the night, perhaps you already know the relief you feel when those blue flashing lights appear and a dark sedan pulls in behind you. Not only has help arrived, but you've been transported from that dark, dangerous, lonely place to a place of relative safety.

That's part of what the California Highway Patrol officers do for us. They make us feel safe.

Tragically, that dedication to our safety can sometimes come at a terrible, terrible cost.

Two young highway patrol officers — Juan Gonzalez and Brian Law — lost their lives Monday morning trying to keep Californians safe. They were responding to a report of an accident on Highway 99 in Kingsburg.

In the darkness, they swerved to avoid a pedestrian who had been involved in the accident, CHP Capt. Dave Paris told the Associated Press. They lost control of their cruiser and went into a guardrail and highway sign.

Gonzalez was 33 and single. Law, 34, was married and had three children. They had been in the same California Highway Patrol Academy class, became friends, and then were partnered in the CHP Fresno office. They were the first Fresno CHP officers to die in the line of duty in more than 50 years. Their names were added to a sad list of officers who have died in the line of duty that has now grown to 229.

They were the 25th and 26th officers to die during the month of February, making it the deadliest month for CHP officers. It was also the seventh time partners had been killed in the line of duty. The last time two officers died on the same day was in June, 2010, but they were killed in separate incidents. This appears to be the first time that two CHP officers died in what could be classified as an automobile accident.

CHP, along with all law enforcement officers, go into each and every day knowing there are risks on the highway or in the air. Anything can happen. They can be shot, their vehicles can crash, they can be intentionally run down, out-of-control drunks can plow into them, the road can give way beneath their vehicles. All of these things have cost CHP officers their lives.

For most of us, the sight of a CHP patrol cruiser pulling into view is rarely a cause for concern. We might check our speedometers, but usually we're happy that they've got other things to do. Often, those "other things" involve helping someone in need. Occasionally, those other things are difficult and dangerous.

The deaths of officers Gonzalez and Law dramatically illustrate how dangerous it can be.

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