

Mar. 19 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999

plundered there. That's what your country stands for.

The First Lady's not here tonight because she's in the Vice President's home State, at a dedication of Alex Haley's farm, to remember the roots of 30 million African-Americans.

Why do I say this? Because when you go home, and people ask you why you're a Democrat, I want you to tell them that you're a Democrat because you believe that every responsible person in this country should have opportunity, the chance to develop, the chance to grow, the chance to live out their dreams, and because you believe that every individual can only achieve it if we are committed to doing it for each other together. That we believe in a profound way in the idea of community—not some sappy, purely altruistic idea, but that we ourselves cannot have the lives we want unless we give our brothers and sisters around this country, and like-minded people all around the world, the same opportunity.

I am so grateful that I have had 6 years, and have nearly 2 more, to fight for those opportunities and to fight for that idea of community. That is what distinguishes the Democratic Party. It is what has made America great. In some ways, it is what makes us today not only the party—as I have repeatedly said—of Jefferson and Jackson and Roosevelt and Kennedy and Johnson but also the party, today, of Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt. We embody the best in America and in America's future.

So go home full of energy. Have a great meeting tomorrow. Have your uncontested election. And then go home and find Democrats

who will contest the elections of 2000. Go home and tell people we mean to do what we said in 1998, and the Democratic Party is in Washington fighting to save Social Security and Medicare, to pay the debt down, to keep the economy going, and to take everybody into the 21st century. And go home and tell them you're proud to be a part of the oldest party in the entire world, because it believes in opportunity for all and a community in which we all help each other to be what God meant us to be.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:25 p.m. in a pavilion on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to the following Democratic National Committee officials: Steve Grossman, national chair, and his wife, Barbara; former Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado, general chair; Mayor Dennis W. Archer of Detroit, MI, general cochair-designate; Representative Loretta Sanchez, general cochair-designate; Carol Pensky, treasurer; Leonard Barrack, national finance chair; Joseph J. Andrew, national chair-designate; Andy Tobias, treasurer-designate; Beth Dozoretz, national finance chair-designate; and Los Angeles County Supervisor Gloria Molina, Lottie Shackelford, and Linda Chavez-Thompson, vice chairs. The President also referred to Massachusetts State Democratic Party Chair Joan M. Menard, president, Association of State Democratic Chairs; Senator Evan Bayh, former Governor of Indiana; former Senator George J. Mitchell, who chaired the multi-party talks in Northern Ireland; and Leah Rabin, widow of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel, her daughter, Dahlia Rabin-Pelossof, and her granddaughter, Noa Pelossof.

The President's Radio Address

March 20, 1999

Good morning. Today I want to talk with you about the next important steps we can take to rid our streets of gun violence and to make our communities even safer for our families. I'm proud to be joined today in the Oval Office by Attorney General Janet Reno, Treasury Under Secretary Jim Johnson, ATF Director John Magaw, Mayor Kurt Schmoke of Baltimore, Police Chief Jerry Oliver of Richmond,

and Chief Robert Olson of Minneapolis, Congressman Anthony Weiner, as well as four of our United States attorneys who are leading this fight across America.

Over the last 6 years we've worked hard to fight crime, putting in place a strategy of more prevention, stricter enforcement, tougher punishment. We funded more than 92,000 police officers for 11,000 communities, taken more

criminals and deadly assault weapons off the street, and with Brady background checks, stopped more than a quarter of a million handguns from falling into the hands of convicted felons and other prohibited persons.

As a result, the crime rate has dropped by more than 20 percent, to the lowest level in a generation. Gun crimes have declined by more than 25 percent. Gun murders have fallen by a third. Slowly but surely, neighborhoods once abandoned at the crack of gunfire and the wail of ambulance sirens are coming alive with the sounds of children playing freely in the streets.

This is indeed encouraging news. But we must do more. In 1997, 14,000 people were murdered by guns. While the numbers are declining, any child caught in the crossfire of a gang shootout, or a police officer struck down by a criminal's bullet, or a store clerk murdered in a robbery is one tragedy too many.

That is why today I'm directing Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin and Attorney General Reno to use every available tool to increase the prosecution of gun criminals and shut down illegal gun markets. I'm asking them to work closely with local, State, and Federal law enforcement officials and to report back to me with a plan to reduce gun violence by applying proven local strategies to fight gun crime nationwide.

Look at what Federal prosecutors and the ATF are doing in Richmond, Virginia, in an effort they call Project Exile. Under the leadership of U.S. Attorney Helen Fahey, Project Exile has used the threat of tough Federal statutes—statutes that require stiff sentences and deny bail to offenders—to reduce gun crime and take

serious gun criminals off the street. And gun murders are down in Richmond by a remarkable 41 percent.

My balanced budget will help to hire more Federal prosecutors and ATF agents so we can crack down on even more gun criminals and illegal gun trafficking all across America.

After 6 years of hard work, America is winning the war against crime. But we're a long way from declaring victory. We must keep even more guns from falling into the wrong hands by requiring background checks at gun shows and banning violent juvenile offenders from owning guns for life. And I ask you to support our 21st century policing initiative to give law enforcement the manpower, the high-tech tools, and the prevention strategies they need to keep us safe.

Unfortunately, the Republicans in Congress have proposed a budget that would dramatically cut back our investment in community policing, just when we're trying to increase it. That would be a big mistake. We must move forward in our fight for safer streets and safer families.

Over the years, the proliferation of guns in our streets, of criminals packing pistols instead of switchblades, have made crime deadlier than ever. Guns have magnified the malevolence of crime. That is why disarming criminals has been and must continue to be a top crime-fighting priority. Let none of us rest until every American is safe from gun violence.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.

Memorandum on Deterring and Reducing Gun Crime

March 20, 1999

*Memorandum for the Secretary of the Treasury,
the Attorney General*

Subject: Deterring and Reducing Gun Crime

Since the start of my Administration, we have developed and implemented a number of effective national strategies to reduce crime. We have provided funds to over 11,000 communities to hire and deploy more than 92,000 local law enforcement officers; we have prevented more

than a quarter of a million illegal handgun sales through Brady background checks; and we have developed a coordinated attack on the illegal sources of guns used in crime. Dozens of other smart, tough, crime-fighting strategies have been put in place throughout the country through the leadership and dedicated efforts of State and local police and prosecutors, Mayors, U.S. Attorneys, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF), and community leaders.