

Remarks to the Community in St. Louis, Missouri September 28, 1992

Thank you very much for that kind introduction, Chief Harmon. Let me say that I've heard a good deal about the work of this chief and of this police force. And I salute every man and woman who's out there in the St. Louis police force laying their lives on the line for us every single day of their life. We ought to be grateful to those who wear the uniform, and I'm certainly grateful to this group.

And may I salute our great Governor, John Ashcroft, and fantastic Senator, Senator Jack Danforth. It's delightful to be in Fox Park, St. Louis, a friendly city. Actually, my mother grew up here. My brother lives here, cousin lives here. And I love that heartbeat of St. Louis. So thank you for this welcome.

A word to those in this parish. I want to apologize to everyone who was counting on the usual Sunday bingo game last night. I hear that the Secret Service spoiled your fun when they had to check out the building. I'm sorry you missed the game. It was smart, though, to stay away. Believe me, you don't want to be jumping up suddenly and yelling "Bingo!" around these Secret Service guys.

This has all the earmarks of a political gathering, but I really want to talk to you today about what I consider a foremost, a first and most basic function of Government: to protect every American citizen from violence, at home and on the streets. Now, there's nothing new about that. Security is one big reason Government was created in the very first place. But what is new are the terrible forms that violence has taken recently, beyond anything our Founding Fathers could have imagined.

A whole generation has grown up with the threat of nuclear terror hanging like a sword over its head. And it's been horrible. Our kids had nightmares. It seemed like it would never end. Well, it did end. And today I can stand up here and say something that no other President could ever say before: the cold war is over. Freedom finished first.

Now, we must win the peace right here

at home, in the streets of Fox Park. In too many places, our grandparents and grandchildren lock themselves behind the bars on their windows, afraid to come out from a jail called home. This simply must end.

We've made progress against violent crime. We've slowed it dramatically the past 12 years. And we're beginning to turn the tide on the drugs that so often fuel it. But we got soft on crime way back in the sixties, and we paid for it. Then by the time we cracked down again in the eighties, violent crime had gone up 400 percent in 20 years. Since we cracked down, it's gone up just 27 percent in a little over 10 years, and the overall crime index is actually down.

So we've stemmed the tide, in a sense, prevented millions of crimes. But of course, that is simply not enough. It's never enough. The face of crime is changing fast, and we need our laws to react just as quickly, so that we can beat it.

Let me give you a timely example. Carjacking: a brandnew word for a brandnew crime. Someone figured out it's easy to steal a car when it's already running, with the keys in the ignition. Of course, the owner's behind the wheel. So the criminal uses a gun. I want to tell you a story that literally sickens me, as I'm sure it will you, but describes what we're up against.

Just a few weeks ago, in a nice neighborhood near Baltimore, a woman was sitting in her car at a stop sign. In broad daylight, two men forced her out of her car and drove off. But she was tangled in the seatbelt, trying desperately to save her baby. The mother was dragged for almost 2 miles. The thieves tried to knock her off by banging into a fence, and tragically, she died. And you know what they did with her little baby? They tossed her out of the car like a piece of trash. Miraculously, that baby survived.

And you know what? America is going to survive, too. We cannot put up with this kind of animal behavior. These people have no place in a decent society. And as far as

this President's concerned, they can go to jail, and they can stay in jail, and they can rot in jail for crimes like that. For that to happen, we need tough laws that don't bend over backwards protecting the criminal while saying to the victim, "Tough luck, buddy."

Let's look for a minute at the Arkansas record and see where Governor Clinton stands. The average inmate in Arkansas served less than one-fifth of his sentence last year. Most Federal inmates serve at least 85 percent of their full sentence. Violent crimes in that State, in Arkansas, went up almost 60 percent in the eighties, over twice the national average. Arkansas had the Nation's biggest increase in overall crime and the third-biggest in violent crime.

This kind of record is not right for Arkansas, and it is not right for America. If you don't believe me, just ask the Fraternal Order of Police in Little Rock, Arkansas. They know Governor Clinton's record best, and they're endorsing me for President of the United States. The police know better than anyone that we're all vulnerable: men, women, children; white, black, brown; young, old; rich and poor. To a bullet or a blade we all look just the same.

Americans deserve a Government that goes after the problem, that prevents and punishes crime and helps the victims, lifts up the victims of crime. That's why I want to see America make a move at the Federal level to step forward and support State and local police around the country in real, concrete ways. We need to help them fight.

That's why 1,201 days ago, on June 5, 1989 [June 15, 1989]¹—the same day Mikhail Gorbachev first hinted that the Berlin Wall might someday fall—I sent a comprehensive crime bill to Capitol Hill. I offered the hand of partnership to Congress and asked it to help me fight crime on a national level.

Listen to this: Since I first sent that bill to the Hill in 1989, here in the United States, we've had almost 60,000 murders, 260,000 rapes, 1,600,000 robberies, and 2,600,000 assaults. By the way, 506 of those violent crimes took place right here in Fox Park. Think about that. Across America

that's enough assault victims to fill the city of St. Louis more than six times over, victims brutalized while that bill languished on Capitol Hill.

Now, I know the numbers are staggering. I know that Americans sit down in front of their TV's at night, watch the news, and say: Why doesn't somebody do something about this incredible mess? People are dying in the streets, for heaven's sake. Well, 1,201 days later, Congress still has not acted on my crime bill. I think if they had a glacier on Capitol Hill, they'd name it Speedy. You ought to try and get something done there.

But frustrating as this crime bill has been, it's still my job as President to get results. There are good people on both sides of the issue, working in good faith for a compromise. And I will not rest until this matter is settled.

This very week, we are now finally close to an agreement on a bill the Congress could send me, and I'll sign. The compromise bill could include, for example, a workable death penalty for horrible murders, committed by terrorists, assassins, and drug lords. It should target the shocking violence we see on television: the drive-by shootings and gang turf wars. This deadly behavior deserves deadly punishment. It should include provisions recommended by former Supreme Court Justice Powell to short-circuit an endless process of appeals that make a mockery of justice. There are other items prompting strong feelings on all sides, but we're making a good faith effort to reach a compromise.

So I want you to know what's on my crime agenda. I'm not asking for anything but common sense and reasonable justice, especially for women, children, and the elderly victims of crime. I think I can get some of these items this year. Then, I'll come back to get more of them next year.

Let me click off about eight key points here. First, apprehend and severely punish these carjackers, like the ones I just described. I want to make carjacking a Federal offense with harsh penalties. And I want thugs who take cars at gunpoint to stay in a

¹ *White House correction*

cell so long that when they get out they're too old to drive.

Second, I keep talking about strengthening the family, well, here's one for you: Call the deadbeat dads onto the carpet. Right now, a single mother here in Missouri can be struggling to keep the kids fed and clothed on her small salary, while their father's up in Chicago somewhere, picking out a new Chevy truck with terrycloth pom-poms and a gunrack. Now, he could be way behind in child support, but no one can touch him because he's across the State lines. Well, I think that's a disgrace, and it's about time the long arm of the law reaches out over that State line, taps that deadbeat dad on the shoulder, and says loud and clear: time to pay up; cough up the cash or go to jail.

The third, strengthen the laws dealing with sexual and domestic violence. For starters, we need to protect the victim. It is bad enough a rape victim is attacked in the first place. Then she takes the stand, and then she gets worked over and attacked by the rapist's lawyers. I say that makes two too many attacks.

And I want repeat sex and domestic violence offenders behind bars until trial. Today, even a repeat offender can get arrested, be out on bond hours later, stalking his next victim or beating his wife and kids for turning him in. I want him detained until trial, and I want the prosecution to be able to use past convictions against him. Any of you law enforcement officers knows this, but right now, certain details can't even be mentioned in court, so-called little details like the fact that everyone and their dog within a country mile knows the guy acts this way regularly. And that's wrong. Let him pay for what he's done.

Fourth, crack down on gang violence. I want gangs to be treated like the criminal enterprises they are. That way, we can go after the leaders, and we can deal harshly with them, and we can untie the hands of good cops so they can clean up decent neighborhoods. I also want to toughen the penalties for using juveniles in crimes. Some of the gangs right now can send underage kids out to do their dirty work because they're minors and they'll get off if they're caught. I think the older gang members should be punished harshly for treating

these little kids like bullet fodder.

Fifth, protection for the elderly. It is absurd that the folks who have contributed to this society all through their lives have to live in terror when they're old and frail just because some young punks see them as an easy target. They're as low as the thugs who pick on children. I want to beef up the laws that put these thugs behind bars.

Sixth, the habeas corpus reform. Habeas corpus is supposed to protect the innocent, but it's turned into a ridiculous perversion of the law. Can you believe that a lot of these petitions drag on for more than a decade? Criminal lawyers use it to postpone justice. A guilty verdict can mean seemingly endless appeals that choke our courts and delay justice. It's about time we put a stop to this travesty. Let them have one habeas corpus petition and be done with it. And that's what I'm trying to do in that crime bill right now.

The seventh, a Federal death penalty. I think certain acts of violence deserve the ultimate penalty. I'm talking about assassinations, murder for hire, terrorism, and other depraved acts. Add to that the new urban violence we see with gangs, drive-by shootings, random violence, gang massacres. These people are merchants of death, who trade in death. The death penalty is warranted in these cases. And I wish Congress would move and do something about it.

And eighth—and this one's short—firearms. I want much tougher penalties for criminal use of firearms, period. Tighten up the law, and take the risk away from these law enforcement officers.

Now, I'm not saying that tougher laws are going to fix absolutely everything. I'm a firm believer in justice, but I think punishment is only part of the solution. The other part has a more human face. Tomorrow's criminals are still just kids today. And while I believe in resources for law enforcement and in reform for law enforcement, I also believe that at some point early in life, a youngster at a critical juncture can be steered to a life of right or a life of terrible wrong. It all depends on the kind of soil you plant these kids in and how you nourish them. I just had a wonderful briefing up-

stairs by the chief and some of our community leaders, including the pastor of this church, and what impressed me is what the community is doing to help these kids before they get caught up in this wave of criminality.

All of this is why I believe that our “Weed and Seed” program, the Federal program, is so very crucial. “Weed and Seed,” that means going into a rough neighborhood, eradicating the “weeds” of violent crime that can choke a young life and then replacing them with “seeds” of social opportunity and reform. That’s what Operation Crack-down in St. Louis is all about: the Federal Government, working with local law enforcement, reclaiming crack houses and giving them back to the community. And that’s what your—the chief talked about your COPS program, here in Fox Park, is all about, too, on a local level. Real people making real changes in your own neighborhood.

You know, just the other day, only a few blocks from here, police officers raided a crack house on Ohio Avenue. And as those officers came out of the house with those drug dealers handcuffed, the neighbors—maybe some of you all were there—came out to their porches and gave those police a standing ovation and a cheer. That’s what this country is hungry for. Americans want to take crime out of their neighborhoods and put the neighbors back. And we’ve got to weed the poison growth from the soil, and in its place, plant the seeds of hope.

I know there’s a craving. I know you just want to be able to walk down to Worth’s Market or down to Fox Park here for a stroll or over to Bartlett’s Grocery Store for a newspaper or Mary’s Restaurant for a cup of coffee, even if she is a Democrat—*[laughter]*—and you want to do it knowing you’re safe in your own neighborhood that you’ve helped build and kept alive.

I think John Mirgoux said it best. He lives in this neighborhood and knows about that old crack house over on Ohio. He said he and his wife, Eleanor, had been thinking about selling their house and just moving out, moving away from the drugs and all the ugly crime. But you know, he’s lived in Fox Hill his whole life. It’s his neighborhood. And after the raid, he and Eleanor did some thinking. And he put it this way. He said, “You know, I’ve been waiting for this to happen. Now we’re going to make a stand.”

Please join us. Join John and Eleanor and Ohio Avenue and Fox Park and St. Louis and Missouri and this whole United States and make a stand against crime today, because the people deserve it.

Thank you all so very much for listening. May God bless Fox Park, Missouri. And God bless the United States of America. Thank you all very, very much.

Note: The President spoke at 10:21 a.m. in the parish hall at St. Francis de Sales Roman Catholic Church.

Remarks at the East Dallas Renaissance Neighborhood Project in Dallas, Texas

September 28, 1992

The President. Thank you so much. I love what Michael Fells said about his house. That’s the way we all ought to feel about our homes. And I was very proud of that.

Thanks to all of you for this great Dallas welcome. May I salute your wonderful Mayor, an old friend of mine and Barbara’s, Steve Bartlett, doing an outstanding job for this wonderful area, this wonderful city.

Also I want to salute Judge Lee Jackson and your Congressman, a Congressman, not this district but right next door, Sam Johnson, doing a fine job for Dallas. May I salute our sheriff, Sheriff Bowles, and our new police chief from Dallas, been here a while, doing a great job with the law enforcement community, Chief Bill Rathburn over here.

While I’m in the neighborhood, I want to