

The President's Radio Address *April 23, 1994*

Good morning. I'm happy to report to you today that we're closing in on a top priority for the American people: winning a crime bill that will make our homes, our schools, and our streets safer.

This week the House followed the Senate and passed a comprehensive crime bill. We can thank the leadership of Speaker Tom Foley who, true to his word, put this legislation on the front burner. In doing that, he's helping to break almost 5 years of partisan gridlock over this crime bill as Democrats and Republicans join to pass it by an overwhelming majority.

But the hard work isn't over, not yet. The leaders in the House and the Senate now must hammer out their differences. This is their top priority. On that I have their pledge. And as soon as they produce a bill that the American people deserve, I'll sign it, and then we'll implement it quickly and well. That's my pledge.

While I congratulate the Congress, the real credit for forcing this legislation along must go to you, the American people. It was you who sounded the alarm over crime, you who told your lawmakers that the greatest nation on Earth should not also be the place where 90 percent of all youth homicides are committed, should not be a place where one in 20 teenagers carry a gun to school, should not be a place where gang members are often better armed than the police. In short, the greatest nation on Earth should not also be the most violent.

And Washington finally got the message. It heard the anguish of the American people over the fate of young Polly Klaas, who was abducted and murdered by a repeat violent offender; and over James Jordan, the father of Michael Jordan, killed in a robbery; and over mass murderers with assault weapons in an office building in San Francisco, on a train in Long Island, at a fast-food restaurant outside Chicago. Each time they were visited by this kind of violence, Americans felt a sense of common civility, security, and humanity wither just a little more.

But now we're on the verge of doing something concrete to change it, and we can't waste a minute. The leadership of the House and the Senate have agreed to work toward getting a bill to my desk by Memorial Day. I want that

bill to have the best from both the House and the Senate, and that means more police, more punishment, and more prevention.

I want 100,000 more police officers for community policing. The House voted for 50,000 but that's not enough. As we've seen in cities from Los Angeles to Houston, putting more officers on the street, working with people in their communities prevents crime and lowers the crime rate. I want the House to join the Senate to ban the weapons of war that plague our streets: assault weapons. I want both Houses to tailor a provision to put away repeat violent offenders and put them away for good, "three strikes and they're out."

Earlier I mentioned Polly Klaas, a tragic reminder of how overdue this law is. Her father, Marc Klaas, is here with me today, and he's been a strong leader in the effort to get this "three strikes" law on the books. I know he would join me in saying, we need it, we'll fight for it, and the Congress has to pass it.

I also want to help the States to build the prisons they'll need to close the revolving door and stop letting criminals go free after serving, on average, less than half their sentence time. The legislation I sign will fight crime against women, and it will take on youth crime. It will institute boot camps to shake up the first-time offenders and give them another chance at life before going to prison. It will set up drug courts to get drug abusers treatment so they won't be repeat criminals. And it will give young people something to say yes to: more constructive recreational activity, things like midnight basketball, and more job programs in areas where the teenage unemployment rate is often 50 or 60 percent. We need to give young people who want to play by the rules the chance to get ahead.

This is the most sweeping crime bill ever, the first to put extra police on the street, the first to include crime prevention. On this we cannot cut corners, and we don't have to. We will pay for it through a violent crime reduction trust fund. This fund will cut the Federal bureaucracy by 252,000 positions over the next 5 years and use all the savings to fight crime.

I think that's a good trade for the American people.

I'm asking Congress to move quickly on this. And if it does, I'll cut through the red-tape and put the first 20,000 extra police officers on the street within a year. Americans are weary of picking up the paper and reading about attacks like the one that occurred just this week in Norristown, Pennsylvania, a working-class community outside Philadelphia: A 12-year-old girl shot in the face with a semiautomatic handgun in broad daylight as she was getting off the school bus, surrounded by classmates. The person arrested for the crime was 13 years old.

Americans have the right to know that when their child goes to school, the other children

are packing books, not guns. Our legislation bans juvenile ownership of handguns.

We are a country with the greatest freedoms on the face of the Earth. But we must accept that with those freedoms come greater personal responsibilities. And our common responsibility now is to reclaim a part of America where freedoms do not trample on our greater liberties. We can never be free if we live in fear.

This is not a time for partisanship, for politics, or for posturing. It's a time to do what's right by America by passing this crime bill.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 4:08 p.m. on April 22 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on April 23.

Remarks at the White House Correspondents Dinner *April 23, 1994*

Thank you very much, George. And to you and Ken Walsh, I've had a wonderful evening sitting with you both and looking out at your wonderful families and cheerleaders. I want to congratulate tonight's award recipients and thank you all for another chance to be with you.

I'd like to begin with a couple of serious remarks. It's easy for us, when we fight in Washington, to forget how much we have in common. And sometimes, I think we have to have these dinners where we can laugh at ourselves and at one another to fulfill the admonition of Proverbs that a happy heart doeth good like medicine, and a broken spirit dryeth the bones. Sometimes I think we forget that. And we can too easily get carried away with our honest differences, doing our honest jobs, so that we lose the fundamental humanity of people who are at odds with us. I have been thinking about this a lot in the last 24 hours as I have reflected on the death of President Nixon and the life that he lived after he left the White House and in particular the rather unusual but, for me, a prized relationship that I enjoyed over these last 15 or 16 months.

The thing that impressed me about him was that he had a tenacious refusal to give up on his own involvement in this country and the

world and his hopes for this country and the world. And he continued it right down to the very end, writing me a letter a month to the day before he died about his recent trip to Russia and his analysis of other places in that part of the world.

I say that because I think we should all try to remember, when we are tempted to write off anybody because of our differences with them, that we share a common humanity and we all have the capacity of doing better and doing more.

Tonight in this audience there is a wonderful poet, Maya Angelou, who wrote a wonderful poem for my Inauguration. She wrote profoundly about this subject when she said, "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived and, if faced with courage, need not be lived again."

Tonight I know that our thoughts and prayers are with President Nixon's family. And many of us, each in our own way, have relived as many of his 50 years in public life as we also experienced, some of us in opposition, some of us in support. But it is worth remembering what binds us together as Americans and as people.

Now, having said that, I liked Garrison Keillor a lot better than Al Franken. [Laughter] There