

Remarks on Kick Butts Day in Woodbridge May 7, 1996

Thank you very much. Senator Lautenberg, thank you for your presence here and your tireless efforts to help protect young people from the dangers of smoking. Mayor McGreevey, thank you for your warm welcome and your strong leadership and the powerful statement that you made today. I hope all of the citizens who elected you were listening. And Jennifer Crea, thank you. Didn't she do a terrific job? Let's give her a hand. [*Applause*] I want to thank Bill Hait from the New Jersey Cancer Institute and Dave Brown and Harry Carson from the New York Giants for appearing here before me. I thank your superintendent, Lee Seitz, and your principal, Dave Peterson, for making me feel welcome here today.

I thank the band for being here today. And I want to thank Professor John Slade and your peer leader, Pam Chesky, and the students who met with me earlier to talk about their efforts to stem the tide of teen smoking. I want to thank all of you who came up with these signs; they're great. I love this—they're great signs.

In his absence, I also want to recognize one person who is not here, the public advocate for New York City, Mark Green, who came up with the idea for this National Kick Butts Day and organized it in cooperation with the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. He's been working on this now for about 6 years, and I really appreciate his commitment.

I want to talk to the young people here a little in the beginning about how this issue of young people smoking—or hopefully, young people not smoking—fits into my vision for your lives. There is a reason that I became the first President ever to take on this issue, and it's not a negative reason. It is true that previous Presidents have not done it, and it may be that the power of the lobbies on the other side had something to do with that. But I felt that we had no choice.

The Vice President lost a sister to lung cancer at a very early age whom he loved very much. My mother, who died of cancer at the age of 70, smoked two packs a day for most of her life till my 8-year-old daughter talked her out of it, much in the same way Senator Lautenberg's daughter talked him out of it. But beyond

that, I want you to understand that we are doing what we're doing because I feel we have no choice, and let me explain why.

I want all the young people here to grow up in an America that is stronger and more full of opportunity for you than any time in our history before. And I believe that in order for that to happen it is my responsibility, number one, to try to help provide opportunities for all those who are willing to work for them; number two, to try to help bring the American people together so that all this diversity—I look out here in this student body and I see the face of America—we have more racial and ethnic groups represented in our great, throbbing, thriving democracy than any democracy in human history. And if we can prove that we can all work together and help each other and respect each other, that will be an enormous asset in the global society of the 21st century. I want our country to be strong and to lead the world for peace and freedom.

And in order for all that to happen, we've got to have strong people. We have to give you the tools to make the most of your own lives. The first and most important of those is a good education. But you also need a clean environment and safe streets and communities that work and the opportunity to be supported in a strong family. All these things require a partnership between people in public life and private citizens.

But none of this will amount to anything, not the economic opportunities, not the opportunity for America to come together and bridge our differences and be a stronger community, not the strength of your country, not even the quality of the educational system or the fact that we got the crime rate going down and we're continuing to fight for a clean environment, unless you—unless you—make the decision to make the most of your own life.

And it starts with the decision to respect who you are, to respect the resources that God gave you, and to make the most of them. That's what this anti-teen smoking campaign is all about. We now know what the health dangers are. We now know that, advertising notwithstanding, it

is not a glamorous thing to risk your health and your life.

The students that I just met with from Woodbridge showed me an incredible collection of tobacco ads and trinkets, T-shirts, hats and other giveaways, and tobacco products, all of which were found right here in your community, and all of which your fellow students thought were enticing young people to smoke. Now, you've got a group of students here, and we recently—just before I came out, I talked with students in 11 cities throughout the country, all of whom are committed to turning this around. And I know that in many ways the influence of young people on their peers is far greater than the influence of older people, even the President—maybe especially the President. [Laughter]

So this is very hopeful. But our administration has issued a challenge to people all across America and especially to our young people to create a groundswell of involvement to protect our children from the dangers of tobacco.

Those of you who are volunteering in this effort are collecting information about advertising and availability of cigarettes, which can help to save lives. It can certainly help to influence business owners to be more vigilant in checking the age of tobacco customers. You may even do something like young people did in Santa Ana, California, when they got billboard companies to remove cigarette billboards located close to schools. You can help encourage people to stay away from tobacco, and you can take on the message of the advertising.

Now, all of these things are profoundly important. You've heard all the statistics, but let me just tell you the one that grips me the most: 3,000 people under the age of 18 start smoking every day, and 1,000 of those 3,000 will die sooner because of it. Oh, maybe they'll die at 60 instead of 65. That may seem a long way away to you when you're 18; it seems right around the corner to me. [Laughter] And those 5 years get a lot more important to you as you go along. Not only that, you want to be healthy while you're living them if you can.

Now, we can't control our genetic makeup; we can't control what may happen to us in an unfortunate accident. Some of us will, it's terrible to say, may even become victims of crime. That is no reason for giving up. We should control those things which we can control about our lives. Our obligation is to live as long and

as well as we can, to do as much as we can with whatever lot we get in life. We should not be self-destructive; we should do no harm.

That's what this whole thing is about: 3,000 kids start smoking every day; 1,000 will die sooner because of it. All the other facts are not nearly as compelling as that. Do you want to take a one in three chance that you're going to shorten your life?

Let me tell you something. This is hard for you to believe, but I can actually remember when I was in high school. [Laughter] I have never missed one of my high school reunions, never, not a one. Every 5 years I show up, every 5 years. I have followed the lives of my classmates, and I am telling you, there are consequences to all the decisions we make.

Your country needs you. We need you to be well-educated. We need you to be able to raise strong families. We need you to be able to raise good kids yourselves. We need you to be able to make contributions to communities like this one. We need you to prove all the cynics wrong when they say we can't adjust to this new society in which we're living, and no country can be a democracy with as much diversity as we have. We need you for all those reasons.

But you deserve the life you are going to be given. Do not throw it away. One in three chance that you will end your life sooner—that is a lousy bargain for no benefit. Don't do it.

I'll tell you something else we know, and it's already been said today, but I want to say it again. About 90 percent of all new smokers are young people under the age of 18. Almost a hundred percent of people who are actually addicted to smoking start when they're under 18. You know, occasionally somebody will try it when they're 21 or 22 or 25. Almost never does anybody become a regular, addicted smoker if they don't start when they're young.

That's an important thing to know. I want to say to all of you, I know you can't do this alone. I'm gratified at the willingness of the adults I met today to support you. I'm encouraged by the statements of the political leaders here today in support of this endeavor. I know that there are things that we have to do as well, but I also want to encourage more people in this community to help. Our religious institutions, our churches, our synagogues in America, increasingly our temples and our mosques—people imparting values to young people to stand up and make the most of their own lives and

to say no. And again I say, we need you young people to influence one another.

We have, as you know, proposed ways to crack down on advertising—Senator Lautenberg referred to it—that make—advertising that makes young people think smoking is cool. Last August I announced the Food and Drug Administration’s proposed regulations to make it harder for minors to buy cigarettes by reducing their access to vending machines and free samples and by limiting ads that appeal to young people.

In January we issued the Synar regulation, named for the late former Congressman from Oklahoma, Mike Synar, to demand that in return for the Federal money they get, States must do more to enforce their own laws. The amazing thing is that it is illegal for children to smoke in every State in America right now, but the laws are not being enforced. Now we say if you want the Federal money, enforce your own laws and do the right thing.

In March of this year we had a meeting at the White House with over a hundred leaders in the areas of health, religion, sports, business, education, and other services to children to highlight what they are now doing to help prevent young people from starting to smoke and to pledge an even more intense, unified effort. We know businesses have a special role, and I want to talk about this a moment. Businesses, of course, have the legal right to sell cigarettes to adults, but they also have a legal and moral responsibility to prevent the sale to minors.

I met with a number of your students, as I said before. Three of them told me they went out to see if they could buy cigarettes. Two were 16. One tried 10 times; the other tried 5. They were 15 for 15 in buying cigarettes and not even being carded—15 for 15. One was 13, and smiled in a way that said “I know I look 13, not 18.” He was 3 for 8. And none of those 3 people that sold him those cigarettes thought he was 18 years of age, not a single one. So there’s a responsibility on the part of business to do better.

I was proud to announce at the White House in March that the chairman of the A&P super-market chain will recommend to his board this summer that the whole chain discontinue the use of cigarette vending machines by the end of the year. And you may have heard that just last week, the 3M Company and the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility reached an agreement that 3M would no longer accept to-

bacco advertising for its billboards, and good for them. This is the first major national media company to take this step. I want to commend Livio DeSimone, the chairman and CEO of 3M, and Reverend Michael Crosby of the Interfaith Center for this remarkable accomplishment.

And finally, I’d like to say something to the tobacco companies. Of course, the students have to do their part, and ultimately, the decision is theirs. Of course, the rest of us have to do our part. But you in the tobacco business now surely see the clear emerging consensus in America that advertising, billboards, and promotions should not appeal to the children of this country.

And so I urge you, be responsible. Do not stay outside of and apart from this debate. Do not engage in practices the American people have rejected. Agree to the commonsense restrictions proposed by the FDA last year on advertising that affects children. Join with us. Do the right thing. Don’t do the wrong thing. Do the right thing. Do it now and help us. Play your role in stopping this problem before it starts for millions and millions and millions of young Americans.

I say again to you in closing, the young people here in this auditorium and throughout this country, those of us who are my age and older, we’ve lived most of our lives. Whatever happens to us, we probably have more yesterdays than tomorrows. This is about you. It’s about your future. It’s about the kind of America you will live in. It’s the kind of America you will leave for your children. We are moving into this era of absolutely unimaginable possibilities, in which, if my generation does its job right, we will leave to you more security from being destroyed from without, more harmony of people working together in this country, and more opportunity than any generation of Americans has ever known.

But you have to take advantage of the opportunity. And that means you need a good education. It means you’re entitled to good schools and safe streets and a clean environment. But first, it means you have to decide to do no harm to yourself. Begin with that.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2 p.m. in the gymnasium at Woodbridge High School. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor James E. McGreevey of Woodbridge; student Jennifer Crea, who intro-

May 7 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1996

duced the President; William Hait, director, Cancer Institute of New Jersey; New York Giants football player Dave Brown and former New York Gi-

ants football player Harry Carson; and John Slade, professor, Rutgers University Medical School.

Remarks at a Democratic Dinner in Jersey City, New Jersey May 7, 1996

Thank you very much. Thank you so much. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the warm New Jersey welcome. Whoopi Goldberg, thank you for what you said and what you've done and for all the time you have given and the time you're willing to give because you never forgot where you came from and never stopped caring about how other people are doing who aren't as fortunate as you are. Thank you, and God bless you.

I want to thank all the dinner chairs and Chairman Fowler and your State chairman, Tom Byrne, and my former colleagues Jim Florio and Brendan Byrne, and Peter Duchin, who I've been enjoying for a year or two now, since I was a younger man. I want to say a special word of appreciation to Ray Lesniak because it's his birthday tonight, so I know we're all glad—[*applause*].

I want to thank Senator Lautenberg for what he said and for what he's done in Washington, for standing up especially for the environment under a period of incredibly intense assault from the majority in Congress. [*Applause*] Yes, you ought to clap for him because he did that.

And as he leaves the United States Senate, I'd like to thank Senator Bradley for his 18 years of service to New Jersey and to America, for many, many years of friendship, counsel, and advice to me, and for the support that he gave this administration in the last 3½ years. I know we all wish him well, and we know that the next chapter of his life will doubtless be just as exciting as the ones that have gone before. Thank you very much, Bill, and God bless you.

You know, there have been a lot of sort of asides tonight about why Congressman Torricelli is not here. I think he is here for you, because he's down there voting on something you care about. And I have a message for those—if there was some designed effort to keep him from coming up here tonight, guess what? He's still going to get the contributions, and we still know

where he is, and we know what's at stake, and we're going to elect him in November, so it doesn't make any difference.

One thing you know about Bob Torricelli is that he will stand up and fight for you with every fiber of his being. He doesn't do anything halfway; he is full of passion. He will fight for the water you drink, the land you live on, the air you breathe, the education of your children, the safety of your streets, and the example of your country as a beacon of freedom and democracy.

He's been leading the fight to protect Sterling Forest here, the watershed for most of northern New Jersey. He wrote a section of the Superfund act that is focused on the chemical sites that are polluted here, something I am determined to see us finish the work on and another reason I don't want to see any further attempts to erode our investment in environmental protection. Bob Torricelli will protect all that.

So I ask you to do what you can for the next 6 months to send Bob Torricelli to the United States Senate. Bill Bradley's shoes may be impossible to fill, but the people of New Jersey deserve someone fighting for them who is on their side and fighting for their future, not someone in the grip of an ideological theory that will only undermine our ability to go forward together. So I ask you again, do what you can, send him to the Senate. Do what you can for yourselves and your children and your future. We need Bob Torricelli, and I'm going to depend on you to deliver New Jersey for us.

Ladies and gentlemen, I don't want to keep you a long time tonight, but I want to just give a speech that in some ways is not particularly political. And after, I'm going to ask you to do something that is intensely political. Usually these fundraisers—we all know that our political system wouldn't work without them, but