

Remarks on Signing Megan's Law and an Exchange With Reporters May 17, 1996

Good morning. I want to welcome Senator Grams and Congressman Zimmer, Congresswoman Lofgren, Bonnie Campbell from the Justice Department.

This has been a week in which our country is moving to combat crime and violence. A couple of days ago we awarded over 9,000 new police officers to some 2,500 communities. That brings us to 43,000 police officers in 20 months along the road to our goal of 100,000. We're ahead of schedule and under budget.

But today the valiant presence of five American parents reminds us that this fight against crime is so much more a fight for peace and for safety for our people and especially for our children. Richard and Maureen Kanka, Patty Wetterling, Marc Klaas, and John Walsh have suffered more than any parent should ever have to suffer. They have lived through the greatest pain a parent can know, a child brutally ripped from a parent's love. And somehow they found within themselves the strength to bear a further burden. They took up the parents' concerns for all children's safety and dedicated themselves to answering that concern.

Each of you deserves the fullest measure of your country's thanks. Because of you, steps have already been taken to help families protect their children. Study after study has shown us that sex offenders commit crime after crime. So 2 years ago we gave every State the power to notify communities about child sex offenders and violent sex offenders who move into their neighborhoods. We're fighting now to uphold these laws in courts all across the country, and we will fight to uphold them all the way to the Supreme Court.

Today we are taking the next step. From now on, every State in the country will be required by law to tell a community when a dangerous sexual predator enters its midst. We respect people's rights, but today America proclaims there is no greater right than a parent's right to raise a child in safety and love. Today America warns: If you dare to prey on our children, the law will follow you wherever you go, State to State, town to town. Today America circles the wagon around our children. Megan's Law will protect tens of millions of families from the dread of

what they do not know. It will give more peace of mind to our parents.

To understand what this law really means, never forget its name, the name of a 7-year-old girl taken wrongly in the beginning of her life. The law that bears a name of one child is now for every child, for every parent and every family. It is for Polly and Jacob and Adam, and, above all, for Megan.

I thank the Congress for passing it. I thank those who led the fight. And I thank these families more than anything else. God bless you all.

[At this point, the President signed the legislation.]

Thank you.

Q. Mr. President, you said here that studies have shown sex offenders commit crime after crime. But apparently the courts, especially on the State level, don't seem to recognize that fact. What makes you think that all the way up to the Supreme Court they are going to change that opinion?

The President. First of all, I hope that this law will be upheld if it is challenged. I believe it will be. And before we went forward with this, in consultation with the Congress, including the leaders of Congress who are here now, we did a great deal of legal research on it. And we felt that we could defend it, and we felt that it was right.

And Congress has done its job. And now it is our job to get out there and defend this law, and we intend to do it if it's challenged. And in the meanwhile, we intend to enforce it.

Death of Admiral Jeremy M. Boorda

Q. Have you talked to Mrs. Boorda?

The President. Excuse me?

Q. Have you talked with Mrs. Boorda?

The President. I have not because yesterday—I intend to call her as soon as this is over. But yesterday I asked the Secretary of Defense to determine the family's wishes, and they wanted a day alone, and I understood that. But I intend to speak with her this morning as soon as this is over.

Pennsylvania Avenue

Q. Mr. President, Pennsylvania Avenue has been closed for a year now, and it hasn't exactly become the urban parklike setting that was planned when it was closed. And it is frequently, in fact, cut off from tourist and pedestrian use. What would you like to see?

The President. Well, I would like—if it is the judgment of the Secret Service and the other security people that we should keep it closed, I would like to see it fixed as it was intended in that plan that was developed about 30 years or so ago and turned into a genuine park so it can be made available to all the many people

who live in and around Washington and all those who come here to visit. It's quite a nice space, and with a little investment, it could be made, I think, quite attractive. Right now the skateboarders and the rollerbladers seem to like it, but I'd like to see it made more helpful to more people.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:50 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Polly Klaas, Jacob Wetterling, Adam Walsh, and Megan Kanka, child crime victims; and Bettie Boorda, widow of Adm. Jeremy M. Boorda. H.R. 2137, approved May 17, was assigned Public Law No. 104-145.

Remarks at Webster Groves High School in Webster Groves, Missouri
May 17, 1996

Thank you very much. Let me say, first, thank you for this very warm welcome. Congressman Gephardt and Mrs. Gephardt and I were talking on the way in—it may be too hot for you, but we have just been through the bitterest winter we can remember in Washington, DC, and it's very comfortable for me. I'll never complain about the heat again. We're delighted to be here.

Mayor Williams; Superintendent Gussner; your principal, Patricia Voss; the police chief, Gene Young; let me thank all of you. Let me thank Mr. Johnson and the Jazz Ensemble One for playing here. I used to play in a group like that, and I liked every day of it. I want to thank Mrs. Genovese and the students who did all the banners and the signs. They're just terrific. Thank you.

I came down here with a lot of people today, but one of the staff members that I brought, someone who works for our Secretary of Labor, Bob Reich, is an alumni of Webster Groves, Catherine Jayne. She came down here with me, and I wanted to mention that, just so you'll know your influence is being felt in Washington.

And I want to say a special word of thanks to the young lady who introduced me, Jocelyn Grant. She did a good job, didn't she? Give her another hand. [*Applause*] I know something of her activities, and I want to thank her not only for the introduction, but for being a very

good model of what good citizenship and personal responsibility can mean in a school and a community.

I came here with Congressman Gephardt today to Webster Groves to talk to you about one of the greatest challenges we face as a Nation, the rising tide of violence among our young people. I'm here because this community has worked together to reduce that tide of violence and because we have to work together as a country if we expect your future to be what it ought to be.

You will live most of your lives in the 21st century. It will be an age of unparalleled possibility, the possibility to do things for a living that are more various and more exciting than any generation of Americans has ever known, the possibility to bring this country together across the lines of race and income that divide us, the possibility to live in a world that is more peaceful and free and prosperous and secure than any the world has ever known.

But all those are just possibilities, not guarantees. If you want that kind of country for your future, you'll have to work for it. We'll have to work to make sure that every American, without regard to their station in life, has a chance to live out their dreams. We'll have to work to bridge the differences that still divide too many of our people and make sure that we treat our diversity as a precious asset and that