AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

Remarks at a Memorial Day Ceremony in Arlington, Virginia
May 27, 1996

Thank you. General Foley, Chaplain O'Keefe——

[*At this point, a car alarm sounded.*]

That's a new form of honors there. [*Laughter*] Secretary Brown, Deputy Secretary White, General Ralston, the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Let me say a special word of thanks to Mr. Jack Metzler for all the work he has done on this magnificent cemetery and for the work that he and others have done to get the amphitheater ready again this year for a reopening. It is an extraordinarily beautiful place of honor for those who have served in our Armed Forces.

To all the members of the Armed Forces who are here, to the distinguished leaders of our veterans organizations, to all of you who are veterans and your families, my fellow Americans: We come together this morning, as we do every year, to honor those who gave their lives so that future generations of Americans might live in freedom. All across our wonderful country, in crowded cities and country towns, America bows its head today in thanks to our fallen heroes. With flags at half-mast, with flowers on a grave, with colorful parades, with quiet prayers, we take this time to remember their achievements and renew our commitment to their ideals.

Here on this peaceful hillside, the silent rows of headstones tell tales of service and sacrifice that are so much the story of our Nation. Here lies the spirit that has guided our country for more than 200 years now, nurses and drummer boys, scouts and engineers, warriors and peacemakers, joined by a shared devotion to defend our Nation, protect our freedom, keep America strong and proud.

As we honor the brave sacrifices in battle that grace our Nation's history, let us also remember to honor those who served in times of peace, who preserve the peace, protect our interests, and project our values. Though they are the best trained, best equipped military in the world, they, too, face their share of dangers.

Less than 3 weeks ago, two Marine Corps helicopters collided at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Fourteen fine young Americans were killed, one from the Army, one from the Navy, 12 from the Marine Corps. We have lost more than 200 of our service men and women in training accidents or in the course of regular duty since last Memorial Day. And though we work hard on safety, the work they do defending us has inherent dangers, and about that many Americans in uniform give their lives for our freedom every single year. These sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, they are American heroes too, and we are all in their debt.

On this special day, we pay our respects to all who gave their lives for America. We know our country is strong and great today because of them. We know to honor their truly extraordinary sacrifice, we must all resolve to keep the United States the world's leading force for peace and security, for prosperity and freedom. And we know that now, as ever, the burden of doing this job weighs heavily upon our men and women in uniform.

All around the world, from Korea to the Central African Republic, from the shores of Liberia to the skies over Iraq, our troops are standing watch on liberty's front lines. Their strength and skill gave the people of Haiti a chance to reclaim their democracy and their dreams. They stopped the slaughter of innocents in Bosnia and now are giving people exhausted by war the chance to create a lasting peace there for themselves, to restore stability to Europe, and in so doing, to make the future more secure for all the rest of us as well.

On this Memorial Day, let us draw inspiration from the spirit that surrounds us, to give those who still defend our freedom and security in the military today the support they need and deserve to fulfill their important mission. And let us remember, as we stand on the eve of a bright new century, the origins of this commemoration. The practice of honoring America's fallen began near the close of the Civil War, the deadliest and most divisive conflict our Nation has ever known. Today is a time to remember what joins us as one America.

Consider the service of just five brave Americans who have recently been buried in this hallowed ground: Marine Corporal Erik Kirkland, who dreamed of becoming an officer and was

killed in a helicopter accident earlier this month at Camp Lejeune; a brilliant member of my staff, Air Force Colonel Nelson Drew, who perished in Bosnia last August while working to end the suffering and the slaughter; a proud Army veteran, our Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, who was taken from us last month on a foggy mountainside in Croatia as he was leading a mission of peace and hope to restore a broken land; and in that terrible crash, we also lost Tech Sergeant Cheryl Ann Turnage, a member of the Air Force crew who hoped to pursue a career in law; and just last week, we said goodbye to the Navy's fiercest champion and most beloved sailor, Admiral Mike Boorda. These five were very different in their backgrounds and in their service. But they were joined in their love for America. Their lives reflect the spirit of our democracy, the strength of our diversity, the energy and opportunity that make our country so great.

We are descendants of a common creed, one Nation, under God; partners with a common purpose, to keep our Nation free and strong, a force for peace and progress, a place where people who work hard and take responsibility have the chance to make the most of their own lives, build good, strong families, and live out their dreams in dignity and peace.

May God bless the souls of our departed and always bless the country they gave everything to serve.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:31 a.m. in the amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery. In his remarks, he referred to Maj. Gen. Robert F. Foley, USA, Commanding General, and Lt. Col. Joseph L. O'Keefe, USA, Deputy Command Chaplain, U.S. Army Military District of Washington; Gen. Joseph W. Ralston, USAF, Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; and John Metzler, Superintendent, Arlington National Cemetery. The Memorial Day proclamation of May 24 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks Announcing Agent Orange-Related Disability Benefits for Vietnam Veterans and an Exchange With Reporters

May 28, 1996

Mr. Vice President, thank you very much for your very moving remarks and your support of this endeavor. Secretary Brown, thank you for your service to our country in so many ways and especially for your work at the Veterans Administration, along with Deputy Secretary Hershel Gober and the others who are here. Senator Robb, Congressman Evans, and to Members of Congress who are not here, including Senator Daschle who worked so hard on this issue; to the Vietnam veterans who are here and all others who are concerned about this matter:

This is an important day for the United States to take further steps to ease the suffering our Nation unintentionally caused its own sons and daughters by exposing them to Agent Orange in Vietnam. For over two decades Vietnam veterans made the case that exposure to Agent Orange was injuring and killing them long before they left the field of battle, even damaging their children.

For years, the Government did not listen. With steps taken since 1993, and the important step we are taking today, we are showing that America can listen and act. I'm announcing that Vietnam veterans with prostate cancer and the neurological disorder peripheral neuropathy are entitled to disability payments based upon their exposure to Agent Orange. Our administration will also propose legislation to meet the needs of veterans' children afflicted with the birth defect spina bifida—the first time the offspring of American soldiers will receive benefits for combat-related health problems.

From the outset, we have pressed hard for answers about the effects of Agent Orange and other chemicals used to kill vegetation during the war in Vietnam. Once we had those answers, we've looked for practical ways to ease the pain of Americans who have already sacrificed so much for their country.

Soon after I took office, the National Academy of Sciences completed a study on the long-