

Jan. 11 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1997

America's top priority in the fight for law and order over the next 4 years. I pledge it will be mine.

We must help parents protect their children and bring order and discipline to their lives. That's why I support school uniforms and community-based curfews. That's why we made zero tolerance for guns in schools the law of the land and passed Megan's Law to demand that States tell a community whenever a dangerous sexual predator enters its midst. Now we must do more to give young people something to say yes to, after school, on weekends, and in the summer. And we must finish the job of putting 100,000 police on our streets.

At the same time, young people must understand that if they break the law, they will be punished, and if they commit violent crimes, they will be punished severely. I am determined to break the backs of criminal gangs that have ruined too many lives and stolen too many futures by bringing the full force of the law against them.

One of the most difficult problems facing law enforcement in this fight is the power of gang members to thwart the criminal justice system by threatening and intimidating the witnesses against them. Too many people in too many communities will not testify about gang crimes because they are afraid of violent reprisal. We must not allow the voice of justice to be frightened into silence by the violent threats of gangs.

Today the Justice Department is releasing a report called "Preventing Gang and Drug-Related Witness Intimidation." This report is a handbook for police officers, prosecutors, and judges to help them overcome the dangerous obstacle

witness intimidation poses to the steady march of justice. It details the problems they face and helps to provide a blueprint for them to follow that will significantly help State and local gang investigation and prosecution. Starting today, the Justice Department will distribute this report to thousands of police departments, prosecutors, and judges across America.

In the coming weeks, I will submit to Congress comprehensive legislation to combat youth violence and drug abuse. Together with all our other efforts against youth violence, this will be the top crime fighting priority of my second term. I've asked the Attorney General to closely examine the growing threat of witness intimidation by gangs and to recommend strong measures to stop it that can be included in this legislation. We must not allow the very gangs we're fighting to grind the wheels of justice to a halt.

Over the past 4 years we've shown that we can roll back crime and violence. Now is no time to let up. There is still too much of it. But if we continue to work together, to stand up for what is right, to work with our community police officers, to take responsibility for ourselves and our families and the other children in our communities who need a guiding hand and an encouraging word, if we'll do all these things, we can keep the crime rate coming down and we can build the future our children deserve.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 4:55 p.m. on January 10 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on January 11.

Remarks on Presenting the Congressional Medal of Honor to African-American Heroes of World War II

January 13, 1997

The President. Secretary Perry, Secretary Brown, other members of the administration, General Shalikashvili and the members of the Joint Chiefs, General Powell, Senator Craig, Senator Kempthorne, Congressman Miller, the members of the families and friends of the medal recipients, and Mr. Vernon Baker. I'd like to begin by thanking Shaw University; its

president, Talbert Shaw; and all the authors of the Shaw study on the nomination of outstanding African-American soldiers for the Medal of Honor in the United States Army during World War II.

I also want to commend the Department of the Army officials, former and present, who

commissioned this study and saw it through. Together, your support and painstaking research made this day possible. Without it, we would not be able to meet our obligation as a people to an extraordinary group of soldiers to whom we owe the greatest debt. Because of the hard work you have done, history has been made whole today and our Nation is bestowing honor on those who have long deserved it.

Fifty-two years ago on an August day, Harry Truman stood where I stand now and awarded 28 Medals of Honor to veterans of World War II in the largest such ceremony ever held. President Truman described those medal recipients as a great cross-section of the United States. "These men love peace but are able to adjust themselves to the necessity of war," he said.

I believe Harry Truman was one of our greatest Presidents. He had not a shred of discrimination in his bones. He integrated the Armed Forces. But that day, something was missing from his cross-section of America. No African-American who deserved the Medal of Honor for his service in World War II received it. Today we fill the gap in that picture and give a group of heroes, who also love peace but adapted themselves to war, the tribute that has always been their due. Now and forever, the truth will be known about these African-Americans who gave so much that the rest of us might be free.

Today we recognize seven men as being among the bravest of the brave. Each of them distinguished himself with extraordinary valor in the famous words, "at the risk of his life, above and beyond the call of duty." In the greatest struggle in human history, they helped to lead the forces of freedom to victory. Their deeds remind us anew of the indomitable power of the human spirit. And they always will be remembered by men and women who cherish liberty.

As recipients of the Medal of Honor, their names join the roles of America's heroes, along with Sergeant York, Eddie Rickenbacker, Jimmy Doolittle, Audie Murphy, General Robert Foley and Senator Bob Kerrey, and only some 3,400 Americans in the entire history of the United States.

For these men, heroism was a habit. Ruben Rivers of Oklahoma was awarded a Silver Star while fighting in France in late 1944. A week later he was terribly wounded when his tank hit a mine. Refusing an order to withdraw, Ser-

geant Rivers took command of another tank. He radioed in, "I see him. We'll fight him." And he kept on fighting until his second tank was hit and he was killed.

Edward Carter, the son of missionaries, was crossing an open field in Germany when he was wounded five times. But Staff Sergeant Carter continued to advance, and when eight of the enemy tried to capture him, he killed six, took two prisoner, and brought them back for interrogation.

In the face of overwhelming danger, they never wavered. As he led a task force in France, Lieutenant Charles Thomas was wounded by intense fire. While helping others to find cover, he was wounded again and again and again. But he refused evacuation until he had made sure that his forces could return fire effectively.

While scouting a forward position, Private First Class Willy James was pinned down for an hour. But he made his way back to his platoon, planned a counterattack, and volunteered to lead the assault and then was killed going to the aid of his wounded platoon leader.

They were selfless. When Private George Watson's ship was attacked by enemy bombers, over and over and over again he helped others to make it to liferafts so that they might live, until he himself was so exhausted, he was pulled down by the tow of the sinking ship.

When the enemy surged into a town in Italy and drove out our forces, Lieutenant John Fox volunteered to remain behind in an observation force post. He directed defensive artillery fire, and eventually he insisted that that artillery fire be aimed at his own position. He said, "There are more of them than there are of us." The barrage he so bravely ordered killed him. And when our forces recovered the position, they found his riddled body among that of 100 German soldiers.

One of these heroes is here today. In an assault on a mountain stronghold in Italy, Lieutenant Vernon Baker wiped out three enemy machine gun nests, an observer post, and a dug-out. I must say that Mr. Baker has not quite abandoned doing the impossible. I learned before this ceremony that he is now 77 years young, but last year he got the better of a mountain lion that was stalking him. [Laughter] I was also very moved, as I'm sure many of you were, by the comments quoted in today's Washington Post—or last weekend—about Mr. Baker's creed in life. He was asked how he

bore up under the lack of respect and dignity and honor after all these years. And he said, "Give respect before you expect it, treat people the way you want to be treated, remember the mission, set the example, keep going." Those are words for all of us.

When Vernon Baker's commanding officer first wrote his award recommendation, he observed that Lieutenant Baker "desperately wanted the men of his company to hold their ground and was willing to sacrifice his own life in an effort to win our battle." That passage was never forwarded. When Ruben Rivers died, no award recommendation was made for the deeds we remember today. It was felt that the Silver Star he had already been—he had been given already was reward enough for a black man.

But when victory was complete in World War II, our Government made a pledge to correct cases in which Medals of Honor were deserved but not awarded. Today America honors that pledge. On behalf of the United States Congress, I award the Medal of Honor, our Nation's highest military award, to Vernon Baker; Edward Carter, Jr.; John Fox; Willy F. James, Jr.; Ruben Rivers; Charles Thomas; and George Watson.

A soldier who receives the Medal of Honor usually needs no further description. But we must remember something else here today. These heroes distinguish themselves in another almost unique way. In the tradition of African-Americans who have fought for our Nation as far back as Bunker Hill, they were prepared to sacrifice everything for freedom even though freedom's fullness was denied to them.

We remember Edward Carter, who unsuccessfully requested combat duty for 3 years, because until 1944 African-Americans were not allowed into action. When his request was finally granted, it was at the cost of his sergeant's stripes, because an African-American was not allowed to command white troops. Now those injustices are past.

Our military is among the most integrated institutions in America, a beacon to society, and among the most successful, for America is stronger than ever. In the service of General Colin Powell, General Benjamin Davis, General

Chappie James, and countless other outstanding African-Americans, we see the enormous strength that America's diversity has given us. The men we honor here today help to make their historic progress possible. They were denied their Nation's highest honor, but their deeds could not be denied, and they cleared the way to a better world.

Today, America is profoundly thankful for the patriotism and the nobility of these men and for the example they set, which helped us to find the way to become a more just, more free nation. They helped America to become more worthy of them and more true to its ideals.

To the families of the recipients who are gone, may you take comfort in the honor that has finally been done to your loved ones. And may God embrace their souls. And God bless you, Vernon Baker, and God bless America.

Commander, post the orders.

[At this point, Comdr. John Richardson, USN, read the citations, and Lt. Col. Michael G. Mudd, USA, assisted the President in presenting the medals.]

The President. I think it might be an appropriate way to close to say that when I gave Mr. Watson's medal to the Sergeant Major of the Army, he looked at it and smiled and he said, "This is indicative of the type of soldiers we have today, a group of people in our military, men and women, that really do reflect the vast and rich texture of our Nation."

As we adjourn, I would like to pay special respect to the other African-Americans who are here who are now or have been in uniform, to the other Medal of Honor winners who are here, and to all of you who have worked so that this day might become a reality. And to all of you again I say, your Nation thanks you, and God bless you.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:12 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. Colin L. Powell, USA (ret.), former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Sergeant Major of the Army Gene C. McKinney.

Statement on Multiparty Talks on the Future of Northern Ireland *January 13, 1997*

I welcome the resumption of the multiparty talks on the future of Northern Ireland in Belfast today. As the new year begins, I urge the British and Irish Governments and the leaders of Northern Ireland's political parties to press forward with their efforts to achieve a lasting settlement that will ensure peace, justice, prosperity, and opportunity for the people they represent. I am proud of the contribution that Senator George Mitchell and his two cochairmen are making to these important negotiations.

I am deeply outraged by the end of the IRA cease-fire, which threatens to plunge Northern Ireland into a senseless spiral of violence. As we start a new year, I call again on the IRA to restore its cease-fire immediately. I have always believed that the Belfast talks will have a better chance of success if all the elected parties, including Sinn Fein, are at the table, but that can only happen if the IRA declares and implements a cease-fire in both words and deeds. I remain convinced that if such an action

is taken, substantive and inclusive talks would soon follow.

As I saw during my visit to Northern Ireland just over a year ago, the overwhelming majority of the people yearn for a just and lasting settlement and an end to the conflict that has divided them for so long. I am committed to supporting the courageous people of both traditions who are working toward that goal. And I urge the loyalists to maintain their cease-fire and refrain from descending into a cycle of escalating violence.

Sadly, sectarian clashes during the summer revealed again the depth of suspicion and animosity between the two communities of Northern Ireland. When we look back in another year's time, I pray that we will call to mind images of hope and promise, reconciliation and peace in Northern Ireland. My administration remains committed to supporting the British and Irish Governments, the political leaders, and the people of Northern Ireland as they work to reach a just and lasting settlement.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting a Report on the Intelligence Community Budget *January 13, 1997*

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As required by section 501 of the Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997, I transmit herewith the Report on Executive Branch Oversight of the Intelligence Community Budget. This report describes actions taken to ensure adequate oversight by the executive branch of the budget of the National Reconnaissance Office and the budgets of other elements of the intelligence community within the Department of Defense.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Larry Combest, chairman, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence; Floyd Spence, chairman, House Committee on National Security; Arlen Specter, chairman, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence; and Strom Thurmond, chairman, Senate Committee on Armed Services. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 14.