

derived from an Administration proposal, ensures that the value of these well-deserved benefits will keep pace with increases in consumer prices.

As a country, we must remember those veterans who gave of themselves to assure the continued protection of this great Nation. The freedoms and liberty that we enjoy as citizens depend on the men and women in our Armed Forces. In a tangible way, this legislation ex-

presses the gratitude of the Nation for the sacrifices our veterans have unselfishly endured.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
November 30, 1999.

NOTE: H.R. 2280, approved November 30, was assigned Public Law No. 106-118.

Message on the Observance of Hanukkah, 1999

November 30, 1999

Warm greetings to everyone celebrating Hanukkah.

This joyous Festival of Lights commemorates the rededication of the Jews' Holy Temple by the Maccabees after their victory over oppression and the rekindling of the Temple's sacred oil lamp. That victory, recounted in ancient Jewish writings, is one of history's earliest recorded battles for religious freedom. More than two thousand years have passed since Judah the Maccabee and his courageous followers refused to reject their faith in God, their customs, and their religious traditions; but today people across

the globe still struggle for the freedom to worship according to their own conscience.

As Jews throughout America and around the world gather with family and friends to light the menorah and remember the miracle of God's presence in our lives and history, let us all give thanks for the blessed light of religious freedom in our nation. And let us be mindful, in our thoughts, prayers, and actions, of those who still must live in the shadow of oppression.

Hillary joins me in extending best wishes to all for a memorable Hanukkah observance and for peace and joy in the coming year.

BILL CLINTON

Remarks at a "Stop the Violence" Benefit in Beverly Hills, California

November 30, 1999

Thank you very much. We can pass laws, but we can't fix this podium here. *[Laughter]* Maybe I'll stand up on it. How's that? *[Laughter]*

I love Whoopi Goldberg. The greatest thing about being President is that nearly anybody will come talk to you. *[Laughter]* Some will talk for you; some will talk against you; some will talk at you, but nearly anybody will come talk to you. And so I've had the honor of meeting all kinds of people from all walks of life.

But when I met Whoopi Goldberg—and I was already sort of a big fan, you know—but I looked at her, and I thought, now, there is a woman who will be my friend. *[Laughter]* You know, there have been times when I'm

sure my friendship has been somewhat embarrassing to her. *[Laughter]* And times when her jokes have caused me some discomfort in public. *[Laughter]* But I'm not a hypocrite about that. I'm with her through thick and thin. *[Laughter]* And she has certainly been with me though thick and thin.

Of all the people that I know, I continue to be amazed by how generous truly busy and successful people are. But Whoopi, you have been so generous to me and to my family and our administration, and in so doing, you've been generous to America. And I thank you for that.

I thank Beau Bridges for being here and for his leadership and for telling his story; for portraying everyone from Jim Brady to P.T. Barnum. [Laughter] Sarah, when you get home, you tell Jim I said that I thought he was just playing the same role twice. [Laughter]

I thank Steve Sposato for being here and being so faithful to this call. I have on the wall of my private office, which is just off the Oval Office, a picture of Steve and Megan Sposato, which he gave me shortly after I signed the assault weapons ban. I see it every day still, and every day it is an inspiration to me to continue to work on the issues we come here tonight to support.

And I thank Sarah Brady for being my friend and my guiding light. I thank Representatives Sherman and Berman and Becerra, who are here; and Senator Dianne Feinstein, who isn't, and Senator Barbara Boxer, who flew out to California with me today, they have both been terrific on all these issues.

I talked to Governor Davis a couple of hours before I got here, and he said to tell you all hello, and he is justifiably proud of the record he established in this recent session of the legislature.

And let me, lastly, by way of introduction, congratulate this year's "Pete" Shields Award-winner, Gregory Peck, for sharing his many gifts with the world. And Veronique, thank you.

You know, we meet in this wonderful old, historic Hollywood home tonight, and it gives me the opportunity to say once again that I have been, since I was a small child, an ardent movie fan. I don't know how many Gregory Peck movies I have seen and enjoyed. But I think that his remarkable performance as Atticus Finch, of all the roles that he played, probably was closer to the person Gregory Peck really is.

There is a wonderful moment in Harper Lee's classic when Atticus sits down to talk with his children about courage. He says, "I want you to know that real courage isn't a man with a gun. It's when the odds are against you, but you begin anyway, and you see it through no matter what." Steve Sposato, you have done that. Sarah, you and Jim have done that. And we thank you.

I am honored to be here tonight. I have come to California many times pursuing the work of this administration. Often I have come to this town that has been so wonderful to Hillary and

me and asked for funds to continue our campaigns or our work. Tonight the main reason I'm here is to say a simple thank you. Thank you for what you're doing to support the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence; for supporting its groundbreaking research, its public education, its coalition building, its leading light to protect families from gun violence.

Thank you for all you've done year after year to support our administration's initiatives to build safer streets and stronger communities. Thank you for championing the Brady bill; as Sarah said, I signed it into law 6 years ago today. Thank you for supporting the assault weapons ban. Thank you for supporting the 100,000 community police officers on our streets and programs to help keep our children out of trouble. It is working. Today—[applause]—yes, you can clap for that.

Today in America the crime rate is at a 25-year low; the murder rate at a 31-year low; violent crime down 35 percent since 1992, with the longest continuous decline in the crime rate in our Nation's history. On this 6th anniversary of the Brady bill, I want you to know that the latest figures are in and the Brady bill has now helped to block more than 470,000 gun sales by licensed gun dealers to felons, fugitives, and stalkers—470,000. And in the last year alone, the national instant criminal background check system has blocked gun sales to more than 160,000 people.

Now these are more than numbers. Remember Steve's story. These are 470,000 acts of community conscience and common mercy. They have saved lives, avoided injuries, averted tragedies. Yesterday I signed the new budget bill. And I want to thank the Member of Congress here who stood with me to make sure this budget will begin putting up 50,000 more community police officers on top of the 100,000 we've already funded, targeted to the most dangerous streets left in our country; provide new crime-fighting technology to police; and more than double after-school programs to keep more kids out of trouble and in safe environments.

I want to also thank you for being a source of strength and courage to all of us in our larger administration family, to Hillary, who urged me every step of the way to push for the Brady bill, to push for the assault weapons ban, to continue to push and take on this issue; who reminded me that because I grew up in the South and first shot a .22 when I was 12 and

understood the mind set of the people, the good people, who uncritically followed the NRA into the voting booth year-in and year-out, that I had a special responsibility to deal with this issue.

And she asked me to tell you hello. I just talked to her about 30 minutes ago, and I thank you for that.

I want to thank you on behalf of Vice President Gore, who cast the tie-breaking vote in the bill to close the gun show loophole that passed the Senate. And I want to thank you on behalf of Tipper Gore, who has done so much to see that Americans with mental illness get treatment and not more handguns.

But I didn't just come to say thanks, because we have a lot more to do. When the Brady bill finally passed Congress and was signed, rather than vetoed, by me—[laughter]—someone asked Sarah, "Well, what are you going to do now?" And without missing a beat she said, "I'm going to keep fighting."

So I come here to tell you, you have to keep fighting. Because even though America is safer from Columbine High School to the Jewish community center in Grenada Hills to the Wedgewood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, and every community in between and beyond, no one believes America is as safe as it should be or can be.

Still, 12 children die every day from gun violence. And America is not acceptably safe when the rate of children under 15 killed accidentally by guns—listen to this—the rate of children under 15 killed accidentally by guns is 9 times higher than the rate of the 25 next biggest industrial nations combined. Now, what do we have to keep fighting for? For what works.

Seven years ago a lot of people did not believe we could get the crime rate down. And when the Brady bill came up again in Congress they said—I remember what they said—they said, "Oh, this Brady bill will not make a difference because criminals and kooks don't buy guns at gun stores." Do you remember that? That's what they said. And we said, "Well, we think it will. And besides that, it's not that big an inconvenience to have everybody go through the background check." Well, 470,000 rejections later we know it did make a difference. The same people, I might add, said that if we put 100,000 community police out there, it wouldn't make a difference; if we passed the assault

weapons ban, it wouldn't make a difference. Well, they were wrong. They were just wrong.

Now, I come here to suggest that the time has come to set a different goal. Let me just sort of parenthesis a minute. I want you all to think about this as citizens in the context of gun violence and every other thing America needs to do.

In my lifetime—a 6-year-old boy asked me this weekend, who was visiting my family on Thanksgiving, he said, "How old are you?" And I said, "I'm 53." And he said, "That's a lot." [Laughter] Well, I guess so. [Laughter]

But in my lifetime—and that's a lot—[laughter]—there has never been a time ever, not even once, when our country had this remarkable combination of economic prosperity, social progress, self-confidence, and the absence of external threat and internal crisis, so that we are freer than we have ever been in my lifetime as a people to shape the future of our dreams for our children.

And the great question before the American people is not whether we'll change it, as how we will change and whether we will do that. And I'll bet you everybody here can remember an instance in your personal life, in your family life, and in your work life when you squandered a terrific opportunity because things were going so well, you thought you could relax; and you got diverted; you got divided; you got distracted. You just blew it. And countries are no different than people, families, and enterprises. That's what countries are.

So the great question before us as a people is, what are we going to make of this magic moment to deal with the challenge of educating all our children, to deal with the challenge of the aging of America, to deal with the challenge of getting poor people an opportunity to be part of our prosperity, to deal with the challenge of environmental preservation? And I could go on and on.

Now, I have a modest proposal here that, if I had said it 7 years ago when I was running for President, people would have said, "Well, he seems like a nice young man, but we ought to send him home because he's touched." [Laughter] But 7 years ago, people didn't believe we could get the crime rate down. Okay. We've got the lowest crime rate in 25 years and the lowest murder rate in 31 years, and there's not a single soul here who believes this country is as safe as it ought to be. So I say,

let's set a goal now that is really worth fighting for. Let's say we're not going to stop until the freest big country on Earth is the safest big country on Earth. [Applause]

Now, to achieve that, we just have to keep doing what we've been doing. We have to keep moving the ball forward and resisting the same old arguments in new guises. We have to pass the commonsense gun safety legislation Congress failed to pass last year in the aftermath of Columbine. We have to, one, build on the success of the Brady bill by closing the gun show loophole.

Now, let me remind you—I don't know how many of you have ever been to a gun show, but I have been. That was sort of a mandatory stop when I was the Governor of my, what my distinguished opponent in 1992 said was a small southern State. [Laughter] I've been to these things, you know, down a country road, alley, pickups and cars on both sides, trunks up, guns in the trunk. The same crowd that said in 1993 when we were trying to pass the Brady bill—they said, "All these criminals, they don't buy guns at gun stores; they buy all their guns at flea markets and gun shows and all that. So this Brady bill won't do any good."

So we did the Brady bill, 470,000 rejections later they now say, "Oh, it won't do any good to close the gun show loophole." I wanted to go back and read them what they said in '93. That's sort of the just-say-no crowd. [Laughter] I'm telling you, we still have too many people getting guns at these gun shows and at urban flea markets, and there ought to be background checks. And it will make a difference. That's the first thing we have to do.

The second thing we have to do is build on the success of the assault weapons ban by closing the gaping loophole there which still allows the legal importation of large-capacity ammunition clips. They ought to be banned from import. We don't need them.

The third thing we ought to do—remember the statistic I gave you on accidental child deaths? We ought to require child safety trigger locks on the sale of all new handguns in this country.

Congress ought to follow the lead of California and pass my proposals to ban handgun sales to one a month, to limit them to one a month and once again to require the Brady waiting period to allow a cooling off period. Just because we've got the instant background

checks doesn't mean we still don't need the waiting period. The waiting period causes people who may not have a criminal background, and who may be in some frenzy, to wait a few days, calm down, and it will save lives. We need to reinstitute it on a national basis.

I also ask for your support for two non-gun-related initiatives, our national grassroots campaign against youth violence, headed by a California activist, Jeff Weiss, and our hate crimes legislation.

I want to make just two general points in closing. One of the previous speakers mentioned that I had stood up to the NRA. It made me rather unpopular with one member of this community out here. [Laughter] But I'll tell you a story.

I vetoed a bill—I think I was the only southern Governor that ever vetoed a bill passed by the NRA in the State legislature, and it was in the late 1980's. They were going around—this conservative group—you know conservative groups believe in limited national or State authority, maximum local authority. They had a bill they were trying to pass in every legislature in the country to prohibit local governments from having gun laws more stringent than State government. There was a reason for that. State governments tend to be dominated by rural legislators, whereas local urban governments tend to be more interested in keeping cop-killer bullets out of guns that can kill police officers wearing bullet-proof vests, for example.

So they thought this was a big threat to the Constitution and our individual liberty, so they wanted to stop all these local governments from doing this. And they passed such a bill in my legislature, and I vetoed it. And my legislature was really good. They knew that they didn't want to be in a position of overriding my veto, but they didn't want to be in the position of having the NRA go after them in the election. And so they waited until late in the session to pass it, and they were gone when I vetoed it, so they didn't have to face the fact whether they would override it or not. It was a great deal.

So then 1990 comes along—this is a true story, I want you all to remember this. I never will forget this. This not a joke, and I'm glad we're laughing because otherwise we would be crying about this.

So 1990 comes along and the NRA comes up with this bill again. And they send a lobbyist

from Washington to Little Rock to lobby for the bill. I'll never forget this guy. He was a real big, fine looking young man, a couple inches taller than me, very well dressed. One day he came up to me in the rotunda of our State capitol, which is sort of a miniversion of the National Rotunda, you know, and everything echoes.

And this young man came up to me, and it was like the E.F. Hutton ad, you know, everybody got really silent. [Laughter] And this guy says, "Now, Governor, Governor," he says, "I want you to just let this bill become law without your signature. You don't have to do anything." I said, "I can't do that. I think your bill stinks." He said, "All right, Governor, it's this way. I think you're going to run for President, and when you do, if you veto this bill, we're going to beat your brains out in the Texas primary." And all of a sudden everybody got real quiet. There must have been 50 of my legislators standing there. And I said, "Young man, you just don't understand, do you? I think your bill stinks." And I said, "Not only that, you know this is a conservative State. You know we're not going to pass any sweeping gun control legislation here. You know that we've got this big influx of gang warfare in a couple of our areas. And it won't hurt anybody if the local government here in Little Rock decides to ban cop-killer bullets. The reason you're trying to pass this bill is back in Washington, in your national headquarters, there's a big chart on the wall, and this bill is at the top of the chart, and all the States are listed down the side, and you want to be able to put a little check by Arkansas." I said, "This doesn't have anything to do with the safety of our children or the freedom of people to hunt." And I said, "If that's the way you feel, you just get your gun, and I'll get mine, and I'll meet you in Texas." [Laughter] So, anyway, we lost Texas in the general election by a few points—[laughter]—but got 67 percent there in the Democratic primary in 1992. So it didn't work very well.

So anyway, so then we go in 1993, and we got the Brady bill. In 1994 we got the assault weapons ban. And it was very difficult for a lot of our people. That's what I want to tell you. We're all here, preaching to the saved, patting each other on the back. Let me tell you something. When these votes are cast in the State legislature and the Congress, there are people who put their seats on the line to

do this because not everybody has the same views that you do and not everybody has had the chance to talk about this.

And one of the reasons there is a Republican majority in the House of Representatives today is that I got them to vote on both the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban in my first 2 years as President. And there were a lot of people, I want you to know, there were a lot of people who laid their seats in Congress down so that there would be fewer people like Jim and Sarah Brady and Steve and Megan Spasato. They lost their seats in Congress to do that.

I never will forget, in 1996 I went back to New Hampshire. We had one Democratic Congressman and one Republican Congressman when I became President, and they beat the Democrat, largely because he voted for these bills. And I went back to Manchester, and I went there, and as I remember, it was on a weekend morning. I went to it, and I said, "I want to get with a bunch of guys that I know go deer hunting and that I know are big sportsmen and that I know are mad about all this." And I had carried—Al Gore and I carried New Hampshire in '92, which is very rare because it is basically a Republican State in the Presidential election.

And so I got all these guys together, and I said, "Let me tell you something. I know you beat your Congressman in 1994 in part because he voted for the assault weapons ban and the Brady bill. And I want you to know he did it because I asked him to. So if there is a living soul here who has been inconvenienced one iota in your hunting season because of what we did, then I want you to vote against me, too. But if you haven't been, they lied to you and you need to get even." [Laughter]

We got, in a three-way race in 1996, a majority of the vote in the State of New Hampshire. I say that not to be self-congratulatory but to say the answer here is not to shrivel up, turn aside, or ignore the obligation to communicate with people who are not in this tent tonight. We have to continue to broaden the base.

Look, this is about—it's fought on these two competing views of what liberty is. The view espoused by the NRA and others is that guns don't kill people, people do. That may be true, but people without guns don't kill as many people as people with guns.

So the issue is—go back to what Whoopi said about us all being connected. We've got to go

out to people who may live in very rural areas and say, "Look if you carry this argument to its ultimate conclusion, we'll be in total anarchy." We've got a lot of people being killed by—you know these poor people in the Middle West, the former basketball coach at Northwestern, an African-American, killed by the same guy; then he turns around and kills a young Korean Christian walking out of his church, and kills two or three other people, and he says he belongs to a church that doesn't believe in God but does believe in white supremacy. And I could go on and on and on. You know all these stories.

Now their answer is, well, that we need a concealed weapons law and every law-abiding person needs to carry a weapon. And if you take it to an extreme—I saw—I get my hometown paper still at the White House—I saw—we have a State legislator at home that says the answer to all these school shootings may be to have all the teachers go to the law enforcement academy and get trained to start carrying guns to school. [Laughter]

Now you laugh about that, but that is the ultimate extension of the argument that, you know, we're all these sort of isolated individuals, and the last thing we can do is to have some common set of rules that we all follow.

Now, we don't do that in other ways. We all give up a little of our liberty in theory when we walk through those airport metal detectors. Why? Well, we know we can't all pilot our own airplanes. And it's a matter of inconvenience to go take off your brass belt buckle or take your metal money clip out of your pocket and go through there again for the security of knowing that there is no terrorist on the plane. So you never hear anybody gripe about that anymore, do you?

This is the same principle. You cannot be in a society where you are really free, unless your freedom is designed to enhance the freedom of all people in the community. And if you're not safe, you're not free. And we need to leave here tonight with a clear commitment to continue to take this debate to people and places—who are good people, who still don't accept this argument, because we have a lot more to do.

You clapped when I said we ought to make this the safest big country in the world. We can do it and still have a vibrant hunting and sporting culture. But we cannot do it if we labor

under the illusion that we have no responsibilities to one another that require us to show mutual restraint when it comes to this gun issue. And therefore, we have to continue to work on this. This is a huge, huge issue that will go a long way to defining what kind of country we are.

And it goes to this whole hate crimes issue, and I will just close with this. I think it is really ironic that on the edge of a new millennium when we are—we've got now 90 percent of our schools connected to the Internet; when we're unlocking the mysteries of the human genome; in a few years, we'll know what is in the black holes in space; when we'll be able to have little computer chips, before you know it, that we can insert into broken parts of people's bodies, including nerve centers in the spine and elsewhere and restore normal movement; when we are thinking about all of these marvelous things that are going to happen, it is amazing that the biggest problem we face as a society is perhaps the oldest demon of human society, the fear and hatred of people who are different from us: They are a different race; they're a different religion; they're gay; they're whatever. And this whole issue of gun violence and how we handle it as a community and how we approach people who are different from us are related.

I've been working for years on this Irish peace process. It looks like we're going to make it. One of the provisions of the Irish peace agreement is its paramilitary groups should lay down their weapons of war. In the Middle East, one of the provisions of the Wye peace agreement and the modified version that Prime Minister Barak and Mr. Arafat agreed to is that there should be some laying down of the weapons of war. In Bosnia, where I just was, looking at children who got to go home and were uprooted and driven out and seeing them back in their schools and trying to get people to lay down their hatreds and say, "Look, I know you can't lay down your hatreds tomorrow, although you ought to try, but, meanwhile, you've got to lay down your weapons of war."

And so it's all about how you really define community, as just a label, or do we have some mutual responsibilities here? And I say to you, if I could have sort of one wish for America, if somebody said to me, "You don't have another year. You've got to go tomorrow, but you're like a genie, you get to give America one wish."

I'd make this country one America. I would have our people understanding that our diversity is our strength because our common humanity is more important, and that imposes on us common responsibilities.

I wish that we had done more in gun safety than we have. I know we can do more, as I said, and still leave all those people that I grew up with and that I represented and that I love, the right to their hunting and sporting past times. It's a big part of our culture. But we should not tolerate a society where people can still readily get these horrible weapons of destruction for no other purpose than to kill other people. It should be much, much harder for profoundly disturbed children, like those kids at Columbine, to get the kind of weapons they got. We can do better.

Yes, I'm very grateful that I've been privileged to work with Sarah and Steve and Senator Feinstein and Senator Boxer and the Representatives still here to do what we've done. But if you really want to make the most of this moment, you've got to keep going until we make America the world's safest big country. And if you want to do that, you have to reach out beyond those of us in this tent to the heart and soul of America and say, "Listen, we are blessed, but we have a lot to do and we have

responsibilities to one another we have not fulfilled. And as we do that we will become more free, not less free."

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:07 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to comedian Whoopi Goldberg; actor Beau Bridges; former White House Press Secretary James S. Brady, who was wounded in the 1981 assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan, and his wife, Sarah, chair, Handgun Control, Inc.; Steven Sposato, whose wife, Megan, was killed by a gunman in a San Francisco law office; Gov. Gray Davis of California; actor Gregory Peck and his wife, Veronique; Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel; and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. The President also referred to the Public Safety and Recreational Firearms Use Protection Act, subtitle A of title XI of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (Public Law No. 103-322); the Brady Handgun and Violence Prevention Act (Public Law No. 103-159); and H.R. 3194, consolidated appropriations legislation for fiscal year 2000, approved November 29, assigned Public Law No. 106-113. The benefit was sponsored by the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence.

Remarks at a Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project Reception in Beverly Hills

November 30, 1999

Thank you very much, Antonio. I am delighted to be here. I know that all of you have come in support of the Southwest Voter Education Project. But I want to thank especially my good friend Gloria Molina; and Henry Cisneros; Assembly Speaker Villaraigosa—I see him over there; we've been making the rounds tonight—Congressman Becerra; and I think Lydia Camarillo, our DNC CEO, is here. I know this is a nonpartisan event, but I wanted to acknowledge her presence there. Thank you, Lydia.

I have known about the Southwest Voter Education Project a long time, from the beginning. And one of the great honors I had as President was to award the Medal of Freedom

to Willie Velasquez posthumously in 1995. The Southwest Voter Education Project has now registered, I believe, over 2 million Latino voters and well over 2,000 voter education drives.

And what I would—I just want to say a couple of things briefly tonight. Yesterday I signed the budget that we passed in the Congress right before they went home, the first budget of the 21st century. It contained the second year's funding for our Hispanic education project, which is designed to reduce the gap in high school graduation rates between Hispanics and other children and to increase the college going rate. And I just give you that as one little example, although it is a very big thing—I think this is going to have a huge impact over the