

Week Ending Friday, May 5, 1995

The President's Radio Address

April 29, 1995

Good morning. America has been through a lot in the last week. But if anything good can come out of something as horrible as the Oklahoma City tragedy, it is that the American people have reaffirmed our commitment to putting our children, their well-being and their future, first in our lives.

In that light, I was terribly disappointed that this week the Supreme Court struck down a law passed by Congress under President Bush and sponsored by Senator Herb Kohl of Wisconsin, to keep guns away from schools. The law was a bipartisan approach to school safety based on common sense. Simply said, it was illegal to have a gun within 1,000 feet of a school.

We all know that guns simply don't belong in school. So Members of Congress of both parties passed the law. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court struck down the specific law. They said the Federal Government couldn't regulate that activity because it didn't have enough to do with interstate commerce.

Well, this Supreme Court decision could condemn more of our children to going to schools where there are guns. And our job is to help our children learn everything they need to get ahead, in safety, not to send them to school and put them in harm's way. I am determined to keep guns out of our schools. That's what the American people want, and it's the right thing to do.

Last year, I persuaded Congress to require States to pass a law that any student who brought a gun to school would be expelled for a year—no excuses, zero tolerance for guns in schools. But after Congress passed the law, I was worried that it would be hard to enforce. So I directed the Secretary of Education, Dick Riley, to withhold Federal aid from any State that did not comply with the law.

The Supreme Court has now ruled we can't directly ban guns around the school. Therefore, today, I am directing the Attorney General to come back to me within a week with what action I can take to keep guns away from schools. I want the action to be constitutional, but I am determined to keep guns away from schools.

For example, Congress could encourage States to ban guns from school zones by linking Federal funds to enactment of school zone gun bans. At least we could tie the money we have for safe schools to such a ban. At any rate, I am confident that the Attorney General will give me advice about what action I can take. We must reverse the practical impact of the Court's decision. If young people can't learn in safety, they can't learn at all.

Now, according to the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, violence threatens schools in communities of all shapes and sizes. They've identified 105 violent school-related deaths in just the last 2 years. And we know there are common elements to violent deaths among young people. Usually, the victim and the assailant know each other, the incident starts as an argument, and usually there is a firearm present.

Schoolyard fights have been around as long as schoolyards. But it used to be that when kids got in fights, they fought with their fists, adults broke them up, and the kids got punished. Today, there are guns on the playground, guns in the classrooms, guns on the bus.

In 1990, the CDC found that 1 in 24 students carried a gun in a 30-day period. By 1993, it was down to 1 in 12. The number of high school students carrying a gun doubled in only 3 years. This is certainly a national crisis, and we must have a national effort to fight it. We need a seamless web of safety that keeps guns out of the hands of our children and out of our schools. That's why we fought for the provision in last year's

crime bill which now makes it a Federal crime for a young person to carry a handgun, except when supervised by an adult. And that's why we must make sure that anyone who does bring a gun to school is severely disciplined. And that's why we're going to find a way to ban guns inside or near our schools.

I'm committed to doing everything in my power to make schools places where young people can be safe, where they can learn, where parents can be confident that discipline is enforced.

We all know that we have to work together to get this done. Principals and teachers must take the lead for safe schools and teaching good citizenship and good values. And parents have to recognize that discipline begins at home. The responsibility to raise children and to make them good citizens rests first on the shoulders of their parents, who must teach the children right from wrong and must get involved and stay involved in their children's education.

I pledge that we'll do our part to help make our schools safe and the neighborhoods around them safe. But in the end, we'll only succeed if we all work together.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 2:48 p.m. on April 28 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on April 29.

Remarks at the White House Correspondents Association Dinner April 29, 1995

Thank you very much, Ken. To all the members of the White House press who are here; to all the members of the White House staff and the administration who are here and who have to endure this every year with me. [Laughter] Let me say I have had a wonderful time tonight. I kind of hate to come up here; I'd rather listen to Conan talk to that worthless redneck on the screen—[laughter]—for another half an hour.

I identify with Conan O'Brien. Like me, he's a young man who came from obscurity—[laughter]—and chose a sidekick with more inside experience. And despite his many ac-

complishments, 250 million Americans never get to see him in prime time. [Laughter]

I feel your pain. [Laughter]

Speaking of young people, it was announced tonight, you know, that my Press Secretary, Mike McCurry, and his wife, Debra, just had their third child, Christopher. I want to make another announcement: Before my term is over, Christopher will become the youngest member of the White House Press Office—[laughter]—just barely younger than the rest who work there. [Laughter]

You know, I practiced for this night. I had all this humor and everything, but—and I really believe that you could tell I—I really liked that—whoever that awful person is that played me. [Laughter] I thought it was wonderful.

The Book of Proverbs says, "A happy heart doeth good like medicine, and a broken spirit drieth the bones." And I believe that. But I think you will all understand that—and I hope my wonderful comedy writers will understand—if I take a few moments tonight not to be too funny here at the end because of the tragedy in Oklahoma City, which has captured us all and which still is the focus of our efforts, for understandable reasons tonight, as the rescue workers are still laboring and as the law enforcement officers are still working.

Tonight, as Ken and I were sitting here, and he let me read his latest essay about the heroism of the people in Oklahoma City. And I want to say something personal to all of you. I know that for virtually everybody in the press in this room, this has been a very painful experience for all of you, too, who have covered it, and to have been Americans, to have been parents and children and brothers and sisters, and to have identified with the human tragedy on such a massive scale.

And what I want to do tonight is to tell you that I really appreciate the way this incident has been presented to the American people. I think you have made an extraordinary effort to capture both the horror and the humanity of the situation, to somehow grasp and communicate to your fellow citizens the incredible honor with which so many people have performed in these last difficult days.