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The President's Radio Address

January 18, 1997

Good morning. Today I want to talk with you about the progress we have made in response to last year's disturbing rash of arsons and other destructive acts directed at houses of worship throughout our country. But before I do, I want to condemn another act of violent terror, the recent bombing of the women's health center in Atlanta. That, too, is wrong, and we also must stop it.

Now, in the aftermath of these terrible crimes against the houses of worship, many of us ask ourselves, why? Were these fires fueled by a sudden upsurge in racial and religious hostility? Were they set for personal gain or revenge? Or were they merely random acts of violence? Whatever the causes of the crimes, they offended every citizen who cherishes America's proud heritage of religious and ethnic diversity, every citizen who remembers that religious freedom, justice, and equality are the founding principles of our great democracy.

As one who was raised in the church and who continues to be guided by the enduring lessons I learned there, I joined with all Americans of conscience in demanding swift action to combat these crimes, to help the churches rebuild and to prevent anymore fires.

Seven months ago, I established the National Church Arson Task Force to coordinate the efforts of more than 200 FBI and ATF agents deployed to work with local and State law enforcement agencies, churches, and citizens to catch and prosecute those responsible for these crimes. This week, the task force released its first interim report. The report shows that we have been remarkably successful in solving the crimes. Since January 1995, 143 suspects have been arrested in connection with 107 fires at churches and other houses of worship. This rate of arrest is double the general rate of arrest for arsons, and three-quarters of these arrests occurred during the 7 months following the formation of the task force. So far, 48 defendants have been convicted on Federal and State charges in connection with 43 fires.

This work has been supported by $3 million in Justice Department grants to help local communities intensify their enforcement and surveillance efforts. In addition, Congress authorized the Department of Housing to administer a $10 million loan guarantee to assist with the rebuilding of churches. And the Federal Emergency Management Agency continues to work with communities to increase awareness and help build local arson prevention coalitions. This Federal effort must continue until all those responsible are bought to justice and no more fires burn.

But even more impressive than our Government effort has been the tremendous outpouring of assistance that has flowed from every corner of our country in response to these crimes. People have crossed lines of faith and race and region to link arms in a united effort to rebuild and protect our houses of worship. And by doing so, they have shown us that America is still a country that cares about its neighbors, a country that comes together in the face of common threats to defend the common ground of our values. I am reminded of what Joseph said in Genesis when he met up with the brothers who sold him into slavery: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."

I saw this up close this past August when Hillary and I, along with the Vice President and Tipper Gore, picked up paint brushes and hammers to help rebuild Salem Baptist Church in Fruitland, Tennessee. One of the earliest supporters of the rebuilding of this tiny black church was the congregation of a white church 3 miles down the road that also had suffered a suspicious fire.

On a national level, we saw groups like the National Council of Churches, the Anti-Defamation League, the Southern Christian Leadership Council, the National Association of Evangelicals, and the NAACP come together as one to tackle this problem. And we received strong bipartisan support from Congress for our work. The insurance indus-

try, at the urging of the Vice President, also became a partner in the rebuilding effort. These groups, and others of good will all over America, stepped forward to live out the lesson of the man whose birthday celebration this year coincides with my second Inauguration on Monday.

Thirty-four years ago, in his famous speech on The Mall in Washington, Dr. Martin Luther King recognized the need for biracial cooperation. In talking of his fellow Americans who stood with him in the civil rights struggle, he said, "Their destiny is tied up with our destiny, and they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone."

My fellow citizens, we must not walk alone into the 21st century. This next week as we focus on the inauguration and the future of our great country, my greatest hope is that we as Americans will continue to find strength in our diversity, that the world will always look to us as a champion of racial and religious liberty, that we will have the wisdom to heal our divisions and walk together into a bright new day.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 12:03 p.m. on January 17 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on January 18.

Statement on the Death of Paul Tsongas

January 18, 1997

Paul Tsongas was a great American. He cared deeply about his beloved State of Massachusetts and about our country and its future. In a life devoted to public service, he set an unparalleled example of integrity, candor, and commitment. On behalf of the entire Nation, Hillary and I extend to his family our deepest sympathy and our profound gratitude for his life and work.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Brunch

January 19, 1997

Thank you very much. Thank you. When I see all of you here with your enthusiasm—this is actually the first event I have attended—and I see the pictures of all the thousands and thousands of people in the shivering cold who were out on The Mall yesterday, all the children taking in the exhibits, and I sense the freedom and the feeling and the enthusiasm on the streets as I—maybe this will be better the second time around. It's pretty good. I like this.

I want to thank my friend Alan Solomont for taking on this immense responsibility. And obviously, I'm indebted to my longtime friend Governor Roy Romer and to Steve Grossman and to Carol Pensky. I'll have more to say about all that the day after tomorrow. I thank Don Fowler and Chris Dodd and Marvin and Scott and everybody else that helped us so much in the last 4 years. And I ask you only to think about this—I have to be very careful because I've been thinking about nothing but my Inaugural Address; if I'm not careful I'll give you half of it right here. [*Laughter*] How can I say this differently?

I actually, in the darkest days of 1994 and '95, always believed that we would be doing this on this day. But it didn't have so much to do with me or even our wonderful Vice President, but what I think about the American people, what makes us tick, where we are in history, and where we have to go. And I ask you to think about that, because we've come a long way here in building a party that is true to the internal principles of the Democratic Party but geared to the challenges of the present and the future.

And I've run my last race, but we haven't done all the work we need to do for our country for the 21st century. And we have to maintain both the commitment to progress and a commitment to community. That's what's unique about us, we believe that we'll all do better if we all do better. That's what's unique about the Democratic Party.

And so, with a heart full of gratitude for all that has been done for me, I ask you to redouble your efforts and to renew your commitment and not to grow exhausted from doing so in the next few years. Because we've only begun to scratch the surface of what can be done to mobilize younger people, what can be done to mobilize people who have never been active in political affairs before