

**Remarks Honoring the National Association of Police Organizations' "Top Cops"**

*October 9, 1997*

Thank you very much. Good morning, Madam Attorney General, Tom Scotto, Bob Scully, the executive director of NAPO, and the other officers—Ray Kelly, and Mr. Feldman and the other members of your organization who are here. I want to thank the previous speakers for their comments and, more importantly, for the work they have done to bring us to this day.

I'm delighted to welcome you to the White House to once again honor our Nation's courageous "Top Cops" and to emphasize the importance of the breakthrough we are announcing today in our efforts to protect children from gun violence.

Four and a half years ago, we committed ourselves, as an administration, to take back our streets from crime and violence. We put in place a comprehensive plan based on what law enforcement officers were already trying to do in communities all across America—to put 100,000 new community police officers on our streets, to put tough new penalties on our books, to steer our young people away from crime and gangs and guns, and to keep guns out of the hands of criminals.

We've made real progress. Just last week, as the Attorney General said, we learned our Nation's murder rate has fallen to the lowest point in more than a generation. And for the 5th year in a row, violent crime and property crime have dropped nationwide. These are encouraging trends, and it is clear what is working. One big reason we're turning back the tide of crime is because we're blessed with the kind of outstanding police officers who are standing with me today.

Every year, I look forward to meeting with the winners of the Nation's "Top Cop" awards. NAPO does a great job in picking these people for what they have done. It's an honor to shake hands and look into the eyes of true American heroes. Nominated by their fellow officers, selected from among hundreds of worthy nominees, the "Top Cops" assembled here today represent America's finest.

To say that their courage and devotion has gone beyond the call of duty is indeed an understatement. From rescuing wounded detention officers during a brutal prison riot, to saving hundreds of plant workers under threat from a deranged sniper, you have risked your lives to protect ours. On behalf of a grateful and admiring Nation, I say thank you and congratulations to our "Top Cops" and to their families.

During my time in office, one of the things we've tried to do to work with law enforcement is to help to protect our children from the horror of accidental deaths from unlocked guns. Communities all across our Nation have suffered devastating losses when a child playing with a parent's gun accidentally takes the life of a brother, a sister, or a playmate. According to a recent study released by the Justice Department, 22 million privately owned handguns are kept both loaded and unlocked, which helps to explain why every year about 1,500 children are treated in hospital emergency rooms for unintentional gun injuries. In 1994 alone nearly 200 children died from accidental gunshot wounds.

In March I directed that guns issued to all Federal law enforcement officials, including the FBI, the ATF, the DEA, and Customs agents, be equipped with child safety locks. And by next week, every agency will have fully complied. When I announced this policy, I said if it's good enough for law enforcement, it should be good enough for all our citizens. Today, because of the voluntary action of the firearms industry, millions of our citizens will receive this protection. I'm pleased to announce that eight of the largest handgun manufacturers will now provide child safety devices with every new handgun they sell. This will affect 8 of 10 handguns made in America, and it will save many young lives.

We have today with us leaders of these eight companies: Smith and Wesson, Glock, Beretta, Taurus Firearms, Heckler & Koch, H & R 1871, SigArms, and O.F. Mossberg & Sons. I'd like to ask them to stand so that we can thank them for their commitment. Please stand up. [*Applause*] Thank you very much for your example and your leadership.

I hope soon our other handgun makers will follow your lead.

As is well known, this administration and the gun industry from time to time have stood on different sides of various issues—the Brady law, the assault weapons ban—and there may be other disagreements in the future. But today, as has already been said by your representative, today we stand together and stand with the law enforcement community to do what we all know is right for our children.

I should add, as the Attorney General has already said, there are many Members of Congress who have worked with us to advance this issue of child safety locks, and I want to thank them as well.

Now we must work together to do more to protect our children from the scourge of violent crime and especially from crimes committed by other young people. This is now my highest law enforcement priority. We must provide for more prosecutors and probation officers, tougher penalties, and also better gang prevention efforts, including after-school programs, so that these young people have something to say yes to and some way of staying out of trouble. And we should prohibit violent teenagers from buying guns once they become adults. The same proscriptions of the Brady law should apply to them.

We also, of course, will never be able to supplant the work that must be done by parents in working hard to teach their children that no matter how hard it is, they must do the right thing and reject the wrong course.

For too many years, our people feared that crime would always grow and grow, that nothing could be done to stem lawlessness and violence. But working together—police and parents, public officials and responsible industry leaders—we are making a difference in the lives of our families.

I especially want to thank, again, the “Top Cops” for their truly heroic contributions. And through them, I thank all the others who might well have been here today but who still do their jobs every day and also deserve our thanks, in every community in this country. Because of that kind of bravery every day, America is moving forward into a new

century with safer streets and much, much greater peace of mind.

Thank you very much, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Thomas J. Scotto, president, and Robert T. Scully, executive director, National Association of Police Organizations; Raymond W. Kelly, Under Secretary (Enforcement), Department of the Treasury; and Richard Feldman, executive director, American Shooting Sports Council.

### **Statement on Signing the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997**

*October 9, 1997*

I am pleased to sign today H.R. 1420, the “National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997.” This Act will strengthen and improve our National Wildlife Refuge System as we enter the 21st century. It embodies the principle that whether they cast a line, pitch a decoy, or click a shutter, the 30 million Americans who annually visit and enjoy our refuges have one common and enduring interest—the conservation of fish, wildlife, and their habitat. That is what the National Wildlife Refuge System is about and that is what this Act will promote and ensure.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world’s greatest system of lands dedicated to the conservation of fish and wildlife. It is a system founded in faith; a belief that in a country as bountiful and diverse as ours, there ought to be special places that are set aside exclusively for the conservation of fish and wildlife resources. These special places are National Wildlife Refuges where the conservation needs of wildlife are paramount.

Key provisions of H.R. 1420 mirror those of Executive Order 12996, Management and General Public Use of the National Wildlife Refuge System, which I signed in March 1996. These provisions include the mission statement for the Refuge System, the designation of priority public uses, and a requirement that the environmental health of the Refuge System be maintained.

The bill maintains the crucial distinction clearly set forth in my Executive order between wildlife conservation as the dominant