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Proclamation 7156—National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day, 1998

December 4, 1998

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Fifty-seven years ago, at 7:55 on Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, Imperial Japan launched a surprise attack on American forces at Pearl Harbor, thrusting the United States into the crucible of World War II. From the vantage point of history, we now know that the events of that day would transform our Nation and the course of world history.

Attacking in two waves, Japanese aircraft killed or wounded almost 3,600 Americans—over 1,000 of them aboard the battleship ARIZONA—sank or badly damaged most of our Pacific Fleet, and destroyed or damaged almost all U.S. aircraft in the area. In his historic speech to the Congress on the following day, President Franklin Roosevelt requested and the Congress approved a declaration of war against Japan. With characteristic optimism and confidence in the spirit of the American people, he predicted that ''No matter how long it may take us . . . the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory.''

President Roosevelt proved to be right, although he would not live to see the ultimate triumph of freedom. After almost 4 long years of struggle and sacrifice by the men and women of our Armed Forces, sustained by the prayers of their families and the efforts of determined working men and women throughout our land who built our Nation into the ''Arsenal of Democracy,'' the United States and our allies prevailed over the forces of fascism and oppression.

To understand and appreciate the magnitude of our victory in World War II, we have only to remember Pearl Harbor. We have only to remember the indomitable spirit of the American forces there who, despite the death and destruction engulfing them, individually and collectively responded with courage and selflessness. We remember the sailors who raced to their battle stations and opened fire on the attacking Japanese planes even as their ships were ablaze and sinking. We remember the small, valiant band of Army pilots who managed to take off during the second wave of bombing and, though hopelessly outnumbered, shot down several enemy aircraft. We remember the crew of the crippled OKLAHOMA cheering their comrades on the NEVADA as she made a desperate dash down the harbor channel to safety. These heroes of Pearl Harbor were an inspiration to our entire country—and they remain so today. It is fitting that each year, on this day, we remember them and give thanks for their courage, their sacrifice, and their refusal to be defeated. Because of them, and the millions of other Americans like them who have served our Nation in uniform, America is free, strong, and at peace.

To pay tribute to these heroes and to honor our solemn obligation to those who sacrificed their lives to defend our freedom that fateful Sunday morning, the Congress, by Public Law 103–308, has designated December 7, 1998, as ''National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day.''

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim December 7, 1998, as National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day. I urge all Americans to observe this day with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities in honor of the Americans who served at Pearl Harbor. I also ask all Federal departments and agencies, organizations, and individuals to fly the flag of the United States at half-staff on this day in honor of those Americans who died as a result of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this fourth day of December, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-third.

William J. Clinton

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The President's Radio Address

December 5, 1998

Good morning. In 1993 I took office determined to get our country moving again, to provide opportunity for all responsible, hard-working citizens, and to create the conditions of a genuine community in our country.

First, we had to get the economy going. Yesterday we got the good news that unemployment is down to 4.4 percent, the lowest in 28 years, with 17.3 million new jobs. But America needs more than jobs to really work. Our country also has to be safer. And we've worked very hard to make our streets, our schools, our neighborhoods safer places to live, work, and raise families. We've put in place a comprehensive strategy of more prevention, strong enforcement, tougher punishment. We've taken more guns and criminals off the street and put more police on the beat. Crime has dropped for 6 years in a row now, to a 25-year low.

This week America launched a new effort to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and make our streets safer. For the first time ever, the Justice Department, working with the States, conducted computerized background checks on all firearm purchases. In its first 4 days, the new national instant check system reviewed more than 100,000 prospective gun sales to make sure only law-abiding citizens took home new guns. And in just 4 days, we stopped more than 400 felons, fugitives, stalkers, and other prohibited purchasers from walking away with new guns. That's more than 100 illegal gun sales blocked each day. Who knows how many lives were saved.

But within just 24 hours after the instant checks went into effect, the National Rifle Association went to court to stop the new system. The gun lobby's goal is plain. As the NRA's executive director himself put it this week, they want to "scale back" the Brady law.

Five years ago, as the Brady bill was nearing passage in Congress, the gun lobby spent more than a million dollars in a desperate effort to kill it. Fortunately, the good sense of Congress and the will of the American people prevailed. The gun lobby lost. But the American people won. Unfortunately, as we saw this week, they'll stop at nothing to gut the Brady law and undermine our efforts to keep more guns from falling into the wrong hands, even though we now have 5 years of evidence that it works.

We can't turn back. In these last 5 years, Brady background checks have stopped nearly a quarter of a million illegal handgun sales. We can't go back to the days when dangerous criminals walked away from stores with new guns, no questions asked.

Police, prosecutors, and the American people they protect have made it clear they want to strengthen, not weaken, the Brady law. That's why, when the new Congress goes into session next month, one of my top priorities will be to pass legislation to require a minimum waiting period before a handgun sale becomes final. This "cooling off" period will help prevent rash acts of violence and give authorities more time to stop illegal gun purchases.

I also call on Congress to ban juveniles convicted of violent crimes from owning guns for life. There's no reason why young people convicted of violent crimes should be allowed to buy guns on their 21st birthday. And I want to thank Senator Bob Dole for his recent strong public support of this idea.

Finally, we must make sure that firearms sold at gun shows are not exempt from background checks, that gun shows do not circumvent our gun laws. Last month I asked Treasury Secretary Rubin and Attorney General Reno to find ways to close this loophole.

Reducing crime has been one of the American people's greatest achievements in recent