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Remarks Announcing the Project Safe Neighborhoods Initiative in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

May 14, 2001

Thank you. You're still the man, Mr. Mayor. [*Laughter*] It's an honor to be introduced by the mayor. One of the reasons why I asked him to sit next to Laura during my State of the Union Address—or State of the Budget Address, I guess—is because of the fantastic work the mayor has done with faith-based programs in Philadelphia. He understands that government is limited. We can spend money, but what government cannot do is put hope into hearts of our fellow citizens. And Mr. Mayor, I appreciate your leadership, and I'm honored that you would welcome me to this great city.

I was thinking coming in that, had things worked out differently, Philadelphia could have been the Nation's Capital. And I would have been calling you, neighbor. And we would have had a baseball team in the Nation's Capital, and it would have been a pretty good one, too. [*Laughter*]

I'm honored to be traveling with the Attorney General, who I'll introduce in a minute. It's a great honor to be with the senior Senator from the State of Pennsylvania—that's Arlen Specter—as well as the junior Senator, Rick Santorum. Thank you both for being here.

And we've got members of the congressional delegation here, as well: Weldon, Hoeffel, and Toomey. I want to thank you guys for coming. We're flying back on Air Force One; I look forward to listening to what you need to tell me. I probably won't do it, but nevertheless, I look forward to listening. [*Laughter*]

I'm honored to be here with the Lieutenant Governor and the attorney general of the great State of Pennsylvania. I'm sorry my close friend the Governor, who's not here, but I understand he's trying to drum up some business for the State of Pennsylvania, so he's got an excused absence.

It's such an honor to be here with leaders of the national law organizations, such as my friend Gil Gallegos from the State of New Mexico, who is the president of the Fraternal Order of Police. Thank you for being here, Gil, as well as the other leaders.

And most importantly, it's an honor to be here with the men and women who wear the blue, and I want to thank you for your service to your community and to your Nation. And like the mayor, I congratulate those officers who were promoted to corporal. It's a well-deserved honor, and it's fitting that it come on National Police Week.

I want to express my appreciation to all in this city who are involved with law enforcement, and thank you for your skill and your dedication and, most importantly, your bravery on behalf of your fellow citizens.

During the last several years, violent crime in America has been decreasing, and all Americans are grateful. Between 1989 and 1999 the violent crime rate dropped 20 percent. And that's a huge accomplishment. It really is. But unfortunately, American society is still far too violent. The violent crime rate in the United States remains among the highest in the industrialized world.

Nationally there were 12,658 murders in 1999, two-thirds of which were shooting deaths. And for every fatal shooting, there were roughly three nonfatal shootings. And folks, this is unacceptable in America. It's just unacceptable, and we're going to do something about it.

Like most major urban centers—cities—in America, Philadelphia suffered from a stunning rise in violent crime. However, Philadelphia, as the mayor mentioned, has made great progress. For example, in 1990 there were 500 murders; last year there were 319. And the mayor deserves a lot of credit; so does the police commissioner and the police men and women of Philadelphia. And for that, we're incredibly grateful. And we're grateful for programs such as Operation Sunrise, and Safe & Sound, and Youth Violence Reduction Project, which, Mr. Mayor, is making your city more safe and more secure for all of the citizens.

But gun violence is still a serious problem. Three out of four murder victims in this city are shot to death with handguns. Among young victims, that figure rises to almost 9 out of 10. In America today, a teenager is more likely to die from a gunshot than from all natural causes of death combined. These

details have caused too many families to bury the next generation. And for all our children's sake, this Nation must reclaim our neighborhoods and our streets.

We need a national strategy to assure that every community is attacking gun violence with focus and intensity. I'm here today to announce a national initiative to help cities like Philadelphia fight gun violence. The program I propose, we call Project Safe Neighborhoods, will establish a network of law enforcement and community initiatives targeted at gun violence. It will involve an unprecedented partnership between all levels of government. It will increase accountability within our systems. And it will send an unmistakable message: If you use a gun illegally, you will do hard time.

This Nation must enforce the gun laws which exist on the books. Project Safe Neighborhoods incorporates and builds upon the success of existing programs. In Richmond, Virginia, for example, during the first year of what's called Project Exile, homicides were reduced by 40 percent and armed robberies were reduced by 30 percent, in the first year alone. And thanks to Boston's Operation Cease Fire, in almost 2 years, no one under the age of 17 was shot. These are tremendous success stories, and ones that are worth duplicating around our Nation.

My administration is proposing to devote more than $550 million on Project Safe Neighborhoods over the next 2 years. The funding will be used to hire new Federal and State prosecutors, to support investigators, to provide training, and develop and promote community outreach efforts. All newly appointed United States attorneys will be directed to certify to the Attorney General that the new comprehensive gun violence program has been implemented in their districts. We're going to reduce gun violence in America, and those who commit crimes with guns will find a determined adversary in my administration.

Domestic tranquility is a phrase made famous in this city. Project Safe Neighborhoods is one step, and an important step, to making that a reality. And now to explain the program is a fine American, a great Attorney General, John Ashcroft.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:32 a.m. at the Pennsylvania Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor John F. Street of Philadelphia; and Gov. Tom Ridge, Lt. Gov. Mark S. Schweiker, and Attorney General Mike Fisher of Pennsylvania.

Remarks Honoring the 2000 Women's National Basketball Association Champion Houston Comets

May 14, 2001

Well, thank you all for coming. It's my honor to welcome the first Texas team to the White House since I've been fortunate enough to be the President. It seems like it's becoming quite a habit.

Thank you very much, Nancy, for coming. It's my honor to welcome two Texas Congressmen: Ken Bentsen and John Culberson. We welcome you all here, as well. I understand that Val Ackerman is here, and I want to congratulate you for your vision; a true sports entrepreneur who has really put the effort and energy to make the WNBA the success it has been. America owes you a debt of gratitude, particularly a dad of twins owes you a debt of gratitude—women twins.

I want to thank the coach for coming, as well. It turns out every single championship team that comes to the White House has got a lot of ingredients, but one is a coach that is really good at what he does. So Mr. Coach, congratulations on returning, and I suspect I'll see you here next year.

I love the idea of women's—of heralding women's athletics. And one of the great things about the Comets is that you've proven that you're some of the greatest athletes in the world, but also some of the greatest people in the world. I had the honor of living in the State of Texas when Sheryl was playing for Texas Tech. And I remember how proud we were—and I also remember—when you won the national championship. But I also remember watching you and Cynthia Cooper and other stars, when it comes to character, perform your acts of kindness in our communities around the State of Texas.

I think the WNBA also is—not only showcases athletic talent but it attracts a lot of young fans to see their stars perform. And