

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks on Signing Legislation To Improve Aid for Veterans and Military Families and an Exchange With Reporters

August 6, 2012

The President. Well, I want to thank everybody who is here because they all did outstanding work in helping to get this legislation completed.

As you know, I think all Americans feel we have a moral, sacred duty towards our men and women in uniform. They protect our freedom, and it's our obligation to do right by them. This bill takes another important step in fulfilling that commitment.

I want to thank the Members of Congress who helped to make this happen. It is going to have immediate impact. It improves access to health care. It streamlines services in the VA. It expands support for veterans who are homeless.

There are two parts of the bill, though, that I especially want to highlight. First of all, this bill ends a decade-long struggle for those who serve at Camp Lejeune. Some of the veterans and their families who were based in Camp Lejeune in the years when the water was contaminated will now have access to expanded medical care. And, sadly, this act alone will not bring back those who've lost, including Janey Ensminger, but it will honor their memory by making a real difference for those who are still suffering.

The second part of this bill that I want to highlight prohibits protesting within 300 feet of military funerals during the 2 hours before and 2 hours after a service. I supported this step as a Senator. I am very pleased to be signing this bill into law. The graves of our veterans are hallowed ground. And obviously, we all defend our Constitution and the First Amendment and free speech, but we also believe that when men and women die in the service of their country and are laid to rest, it should be done with the utmost honor and respect.

So, I'm glad that Congress passed this bill and I hope that we can continue to do some more good bipartisan work in protecting our veterans. I've been advocating, for example, for a veterans job corps that could help provide additional opportunities for the men and women who are coming home as we're winding down our operations in Afghanistan and having ended the war in Iraq. And so this is a good sign of a bipartisan spirit that I'm sure is going to carry through all the way to election day and beyond.

With that, I'm going to sign the bill. Make sure I sign the right place, though.

[At this point, the President signed the bill.]

There you go. Congratulations, everybody. Good work. Thank you very much.

Shootings in Oak Creek, Wisconsin

Q. Mr. President, after the Wisconsin shooting, are you going to push for any further gun control measures?

The President. Well, first of all, we're still awaiting the outcome of a full investigation. Yesterday I had the chance to speak to both the Governor and the mayor, as well as leaders of the Sikh community in Oak Creek. All of us are heartbroken by what's happened. And I offered the thoughts and prayers not only of myself and Michelle, but also for the country as a whole.

I think all of us recognize that these kinds of terrible, tragic events are happening with too much regularity for us not to do some soul searching and to examine additional ways that we can reduce violence. And as I've already said, I think there are a lot of elements involved in it, and what I want to do is to bring together law enforcement, community leaders, faith leaders, elected officials of every level to see how we can make continued progress.

We don't yet know fully what motivated this individual to carry out this terrible act. If it turns out, as some early reports indicate, that it may have been motivated in some way by the ethnicity of those who were attending the temple, I think the American people immediately recoil against those kinds of attitudes, and I think it will be very important for us to reaffirm, once again, that in this country, regardless of what we look like, where we come from, who we worship; we are all one people, and we look after one another, and we respect one another.

But as I said, the FBI is working with local officials, and they're still investigating what motivated this individual. And as we find out more, I suspect that not only the White House, but others in Congress and at the local level will have more to say.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:25 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Scott K. Walker of Wisconsin; Mayor Stephen Scaffidi of Oak Creek, WI; and Wade M. Page, suspected gunman in the August 5 shootings in Oak Creek, WI. H.R. 1627, the Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012, was assigned Public Law No. 112–154.

Categories: Bill Signings and Vetoes : Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012, signing remarks; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Obama, Michelle; Page, Wade M.; Scaffidi, Stephen; Walker, Scott K.

Subjects: Access to health and medical care; Civil rights : Freedom of speech; Congress : Bipartisanship; Justice, Department of: Bureau of Investigation, Federal; Legislation, enacted : Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012; Veterans : Access to health and medical care; Veterans : Benefits; Veterans : Employment and job training assistance; Veterans : Service and dedication; Wisconsin : Governor; Wisconsin : Shootings in Oak Creek.

DCPD Number: DCPD201200620.