

May 19 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1995

and in central Africa, you delivered lifesaving food, water, and medicine. Throughout the year, you maintained the security of our country at home and at posts around the world.

Whether you serve in the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Marine Corps, or the Coast Guard, your standards of excellence and your

selfless service are models for all Americans. I am proud to salute you for your many extraordinary accomplishments.

BILL CLINTON

NOTE: Armed Forces Day was observed on May 20.

The President's Radio Address *May 20, 1995*

Good morning. Today the Secretary of the Treasury, who oversees the Secret Service, will announce that from now on the two blocks of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House will be closed to motor vehicle traffic.

Pennsylvania Avenue has been routinely open to traffic for the entire history of our Republic. Through four Presidential assassinations and eight unsuccessful attempts on the lives of Presidents, it's been open. Through a civil war, two world wars, and the Gulf war, it was open. But now it must be closed. This decision follows a lengthy review by the Treasury Department, the Secret Service, and independent experts, including distinguished Americans who served in past administrations of both Democratic and Republican Presidents.

This step is necessary in the view of the Director of the Secret Service and the panel of experts to protect the President and his family, the White House itself, all the staff and others who work here, and the visitors and distinguished foreign and domestic guests who come here every day.

The Secret Service risk their lives to protect the President and his family. For 130 years, they have stood watch over the people and the institutions of our democracy. They are the best in the world at what they do. Though I am reluctant to accept any decision that might inconvenience the people who work or visit our Nation's Capital, I believe it would be irresponsible to ignore their considered opinion or to obstruct their decisions about the safety of our public officials, especially given the strong supporting voice of the expert panel.

Clearly, this closing is necessary because of the changing nature and scope of the threat of terrorist actions. It should be seen as a re-

sponsible security step necessary to preserve our freedom, not part of a long-term restriction of our freedom.

First, let me make it clear that I will not in any way allow the fight against domestic and foreign terrorism to build a wall between me and the American people. I will be every bit as active and in touch with ordinary American citizens as I have been since I took office. Pennsylvania Avenue may be closed to cars and trucks, but it will remain open to the people of America. If you want to visit the White House, you can still do that just as you always could, and I hope you will. If you want to have your picture taken out in front of the White House, please do so. If you want to come here and protest our country's policies, you are still welcome to do that as well. And now you will be more secure in all these activities because it will be less likely that you could become an innocent victim of those who would do violence against symbols of our democracy.

Closing Pennsylvania Avenue to motor vehicles is a practical step to protect against the kind of attack we saw in Oklahoma City, but I won't allow the people's access to the White House and their President to be curtailed. The two blocks of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House will be converted into a pedestrian mall. Free and public tours will continue as they always have. For most Americans, this won't change much beyond the traffic patterns here in Washington. For people who work in Washington, DC, we will work hard to reroute the traffic in cooperation with local officials in the least burdensome way possible.

Now let's think for a minute about what this action says about the danger terrorism poses to the openness of our society or to any free

society. The fact that the Secret Service feels compelled to close Pennsylvania Avenue is an important reminder that we have to come together as a people and hold fast against the divisive tactics of violent extremists.

We saw in the awful tragedy of Oklahoma City and the bombing of the World Trade Center that America, as an open and free society, is not immune from terrorists from within and beyond our borders who believe they have a right to kill innocent civilians to pursue their own political ends or to protest other policies. Such people seek to instill fear in our citizens, in our whole people. But when we are all afraid to get on a bus or drive to work or open an envelope or send our children off to school, when our children are fixated on the possibility of terrorist action against them or other innocent children, we give terrorists a victory. That kind of corrosive fear could rust our national spirit, drain our will, and wear away our freedom.

These are the true stakes in our war against terrorism. We cannot allow ourselves to be frightened or intimidated into a bunker mentality. We cannot allow our sacred freedoms to wither or diminish. We cannot allow the paranoia and conspiracy theories of extreme militants to dominate our society.

What we do today is a practical step to preserve freedom and peace of mind. It should be seen as a step in a long line of efforts to improve security in the modern world that began with the installation of airport metal detectors. I remember when that started, and a lot of people thought that it might be seen as a restriction on our freedom. But most of us

take it for granted now, and, after all, hijackings have gone way down. The airport metal detectors increased the freedom of the American people, and so can this.

But more must be done to reduce the threat of terrorism, to deter terrorism. First, Congress must pass my antiterrorism legislation. We mustn't let our country fight the war against terrorism ill-armed or ill-prepared. I want us to be armed with 1,000 more FBI agents. I want the ability to monitor high-tech communications among far-flung terrorists. I want to be able to have our people learn their plans before they strike. That's the key. Congress can give us these tools by passing the antiterrorism bill before them. And they should do it now. Congressional leaders pledged to pass this bill by Memorial Day, in the wake of the terrible bombing in Oklahoma City. This is a commitment Congress must keep.

On a deeper level, we must all fight terrorism by fighting the fear that terrorists sow. Today the Secret Service is taking a necessary precaution, but let no one mistake: We will not relinquish our fundamental freedoms. We will secure the personal safety of all Americans to live and move about as they please, to think and to speak as they please, to follow their beliefs and their conscience, as our Founding Fathers intended.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9:28 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m.

Remarks at the White House Conference on Character Building for a Civil and Democratic Society *May 20, 1995*

Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Dr. Etzioni. Thank you for that introduction and for the inspiration that your work has given to me and to so many others, for your wonderful book, "The Spirit of Community," and for working on this as hard as you have. I'd like to say a special word of thanks to one of the co-founders of this network—he's been a member of the White House staff since I became Presi-

dent—Bill Galston, for his constant inspiration and prodding to me. I'd like to thank the Secretary of Education and Tom Payzant, the Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, for what they have done to try to promote character education as a part of the larger strategy toward a new communitarian vision for our country.