

killed for a pair of sneakers or jewelry or a designer jacket. In Detroit, a 15-year-old boy was shot for his \$86 basketball shoes. In Fort Lauderdale, a 15-year-old student was robbed of his jewelry. Just this past December in Oxon Hill, Maryland, a 17-year-old honor student was killed at a bus stop, caught in the crossfire during the robbery of another student's designer jacket.

School uniforms are one step that may be able to help break this cycle of violence, truancy, and disorder by helping young students to understand that what really counts is what kind of people they are, what's on the inside, to remember that what they're doing at school is working, not showing off their own clothes or envying another student's clothes.

Two years ago Long Beach, California, was the first school district in our Nation to require elementary and middle school students to wear uniforms to class. So far, the results have been encouraging. In the first year of school uniforms, both fights between students and students bringing guns to school were cut in half. Overall crime in the schools was cut by more than a third. Just as encouraging was the way Long Beach pulled together: the board of education voting, starting a uniform program; parents actively supporting it; businesses and churches and civic organizations helping to buy uniforms for the students who can't afford them; and students using their new freedom from fear and freedom from insecurity and freedom from envy to learn.

Aziza Walker, a fourth-grader from Long Beach, wrote me this letter. "It is easier to pick out what I want to wear. It's more convenient for my mom, so she won't have to wash so many colors. It also helps me when I walk home with my cousin or by myself. So I won't get shot, beaten, or robbed by a gang or just by some maniac on the street."

We have a basic, old-fashioned bottom line. We must get violence out of our schools, and we must put discipline and learning back in our schools. If it means teenagers will stop killing each other over designer jackets, then our public schools should be able to require their students to wear school uniforms. If it means that the schoolrooms will be more orderly, more disciplined, and that our young people will learn to evaluate themselves by what they are on the inside instead of what they're wearing on the outside, then our public schools should be able to require their students to wear school uniforms.

Let me be clear: Washington will not tell our schools what to do. We know the best teacher for a child is a loving parent, and the decision whether to require uniforms should be made by parents, by teachers, by local schools. But if they want to do it, we want to help them understand how it can be done. That's why today I signed a directive instructing the Secretary of Education to distribute a new manual on school uniforms to every school district in the Nation. Rather than telling schools what to do, we are providing a roadmap for setting up the school uniform policy for schools who choose to start one.

Every one of us has an obligation to work together, to give our children freedom from fear and the freedom to learn. If we act together, we can give them the chance to make the most of their young lives and to build better futures.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 8:15 p.m. on February 23 at the Sheraton Miramar Hotel in Santa Monica, CA, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on February 24.

Remarks Prior to a Roundtable Discussion on School Uniforms in Long Beach, California

February 24, 1996

Thank you very much, Mr. Cohn. I am here mostly to listen to all of you. And I thank you for taking a little time to meet with me.

I have spent an enormous amount of my time in the last 18 years now since I became a Governor of my State in 1986—'78—in public schools. And I devoted a lot of time as President

to how we can improve education through higher standards and higher expectations, get higher performance. It is obvious that unless the school is a safe, disciplined, drug-free learning environment, it's impossible for learning to occur.

And what we have tried to do at the national level is to encourage all kinds of grassroots reforms and to make it possible for people to do what they think is appropriate in their schools, not to tell schools how they should go about improving learning and improving the environment but to support them when they wanted to do it. And because there were some legal questions raised, I did send the Attorney General out here.

As you know, I mentioned your school district in the State of the Union Address. And today just before I came here, I signed an Executive order instructing the Secretary of Education to send to all the school districts in the country this manual that we have just done up on school uniforms—that we're going to send to all the school districts in the country, not to tell them they should do what you have done but to encourage them if they want to do it and to show them how to do it.

I also wanted to say something else. As I said, I mostly want to listen to you, but I think

it's important to point out that if there is a school uniform or a dress code in a school, you not only have the chance of reducing the violence, I also think it sends a different message to the students. When young people are young, we should try to teach them to judge themselves and others based on what's inside them, not what's outside them. And in that sense, I think the school uniform policy is as valuable for students from well-to-do families as it is for students from poor families because of the message it sends.

And I'm very—I'm pleased to be here, and I wanted to come here mostly to honor you for your efforts and hopefully to publicize your efforts throughout the country. I'm also anxious to hear from the students. I have to tell you I got a lot of hot letters from students—[laughter]—after I bragged on your policy. The mail and the E-mail were burning up—[laughter]—for the next several days.

So why don't we start and just hear from everyone who is here.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:02 a.m. in the library at Jackie Robinson Academy. In his remarks, he referred to Carl Cohn, superintendent, Long Beach School District.

Memorandum on the Manual on School Uniforms

February 24, 1996

Memorandum for the Secretary of Education

Subject: Manual on School Uniforms

Quality education is critical to America's future and the future of our children and families. We cannot educate our children, however, in schools where weapons, gang violence, and drugs threaten their safety. We must do everything possible to ensure that schools provide a safe and secure environment where the values of discipline, hard work and study, responsibility, and respect can thrive and be passed on to our children. Most schools are safe. But we must have zero tolerance for threats to safety in our schools. It is time to make every school the safest place in its community. Parents should be able to send their children to learn free

of fear. All of our schools should be permitted to focus on their original purpose: education.

Many local school districts have made school uniforms an important part of an overall program to improve school safety and discipline. Too often, we learn that students resort to violence and theft simply to obtain designer clothes or fancy sneakers. Too often, we learn that clothing items worn at school, bearing special colors or insignias, are used to identify gang membership or instill fear among students and teachers alike.

If student uniforms can help deter school violence, promote discipline, and foster a better learning environment, then we should offer our strong support to the schools and parents that try them. We should applaud parents, teachers, and school leaders when they take courageous