

Statement on the Killing of a British Soldier in Northern Ireland February 13, 1997

I am grieved and outraged by the callous killing of a British soldier in Northern Ireland yesterday. The First Lady and I extend our deepest sympathy to the soldier's family and to the British Government and people on the loss of this young man. We wish the authorities success in bringing the murderers swiftly to justice.

All those who care about the future of Northern Ireland must join me in condemning this cowardly crime. I remain convinced that the people of both of Northern Ireland's traditions

want to take the path of peace and reconciliation, not hatred and violence.

The Belfast talks chaired by Senator Mitchell continue to have my full support. I urge all those taking part, who share a commitment to democratic values, to move as rapidly as possible into substantive negotiation about the future of Northern Ireland.

The loyalists and their leaders have shown great courage and restraint in not allowing themselves to be drawn into an escalating spiral of violence. I urge them to remain steadfast.

Remarks on Receiving the "Adoption 2002" Report and an Exchange With Reporters February 14, 1997

The President. Thank you very much, Olivia. Ladies and gentlemen and boys and girls, thank you all for being here. I also want to say a special word of thanks to some Members of Congress who are not here today but who have done an enormous amount of work on this issue, including Senators Rockefeller, Chafee, and DeWine, and Congresswoman Kennelly and Congressman Camp.

Let me begin by also saying Happy Valentine's Day. All the kids look wonderful. The rest of us look all right, too—[laughter]—but the kids look especially wonderful.

I want to thank you, Olivia, for the work you've done. And I want to thank the First Lady for the work she has done on this issue over more than 20 years now. I'll never forget the first conversation we had, shortly after we were married, about a case that she had involving a child in foster care who wanted to become an adopted child. I didn't know very much about it before then, and ever since then this issue has been of consuming interest to me because of what I learned through her. And I thank her for that.

We know that our children's fundamental well-being depends upon safety and stability, that without these, children have a very hard time in this complicated, challenging world of

ours. We know that far too many of our own children are indeed now in danger in the homes in which they live. The public child welfare system was created to provide a temporary haven for those children but not to let them languish forever in foster care.

As you heard Olivia say, we have nearly half a million of our children in foster care today. Nearly 100,000 will never return to their original homes. Many of those children still will never know what it's like to live in a real home until they grow up and start their own families. But it does not have to be that way. We can find adoptive and other permanent families for waiting children like these fine children who have joined us today and the children whose valentines you see hanging behind me and here in front.

In December I asked the Department of Health and Human Services to come up with an aggressive legislative and administrative strategy to double the number of children we move from foster care to permanent homes annually by the year 2002 and to move them there much more quickly. I'm proud to say that the Department went to work to produce this blueprint for achieving our goal.

Now we have to move quickly to put this plan into action, so that no child is deprived

of a safe and permanent home for even one day longer than necessary. Every agency of every State, every family court, every case worker in the country must understand that children's health and safety are the paramount concerns of the child welfare system, especially when determining whether to remove a child from his or her home or return them there. We'll work with Congress to make sure the law explicitly reflects this priority. We'll issue guidelines to the States so there will be no question as to the law's meaning.

Second, to meet the goal of moving 54,000 children into permanent homes in 2002, we'll work with States and set yearly targets. We'll give them, as my balanced budget does, \$10 million a year for the next 3 years to give them the assistance they need, to State agencies, courts, and communities, to devise such a system. We'll also have \$10 million to establish competitive grants for States to develop model strategies for moving children from foster care to permanent families.

Third, we'll propose legislation that gives States bonuses, as Olivia said, for every child that is adopted over the prior year's total, with even larger bonuses when the child has special needs. The balanced budget will start paying for these bonuses, but we know they'll pay for themselves, since foster care costs far more than adoption. This isn't just cost effective; of course, it's the right thing to do.

Fourth, to achieve our goal of moving children more quickly, we'll work with Congress to shorten from 18 to 12 months the time a child waits for the first hearing. And we're going to call it a permanency planning hearing, so that there's no mistake as to its purpose.

Fifth, to give credit for model strategies that are working, we'll give national awards for excellence every year in November, National Adoption Month.

Finally, we'll redouble our efforts to make sure no child of one race is deprived of a loving home when a family of another race is prepared to give it. That is illegal and wrong and often hurts our very neediest children. The Department of Health and Human Services will continue to ensure that States are meeting their obligations under this law.

Putting this plan into action today will mean that we are ensuring that no child will languish in foster care when loving families are out there ready, willing, and able to open their hearts

and their homes. This is just one part of our strategy to guarantee the well-being of our most vulnerable children. By giving States the flexibility to develop their own strategies, we're moving closer to achieving that goal.

I'm proud to announce that we have approved Ohio's request for a waiver in dealing with their child welfare system. This is the fifth of its kind, and there will be more to come. It gives Ohio the authority to design and to test a managed care approach to improve child welfare services and move children out of foster care more quickly.

By working together across party lines at every level of government, in businesses, religious groups, communities, and in our homes, we can make sure that every child in America grows up in a safe and nurturing home. That is a goal every American should be proud to support. That is a gift of love we can make to all of our children. And if you look at the children here today, it's hard to think of anything more important we could be doing to say, Happy Valentine's Day.

Thank you.

[At this point, the President and the First Lady greeted the children, and then the President took questions from reporters.]

American Airlines Labor Dispute

Q. Mr. President, both sides of the American Airlines dispute seem to keep putting the ball into your court. How do you feel about being put into that position? Both sides of the dispute seem to keep putting the ball into your court.

The President. They need to go back to work. They've got a few more hours of work to do.

Q. Let me put it this way: What's the upside and the downside of your acting one way or the other?

The President. I'm going to have a meeting on this later this afternoon to get an update, and then I think I should make myself available for questions after I see where we are in a couple hours.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:51 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Olivia A. Golden, Acting Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

Message on the Observance of Presidents' Day *February 14, 1997*

I am pleased to join all Americans in celebrating Presidents' Day, 1997.

Each year at this time, we reflect with pride and gratitude on the achievements of our former Presidents; and we pay special tribute to George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, two extraordinary leaders whose clarity of vision and strength of character did so much to shape our country's destiny.

Presidents Washington and Lincoln led America at pivotal moments in our history, moments that profoundly affected our nation's character and course for decades to follow. George Washington helped to win our liberty and give us a democracy strong enough to endure through the centuries and flexible enough to survive the fresh challenges that face each generation of Americans. During the dark days of the Civil

War, Abraham Lincoln held together the frayed fabric of our Union and reaffirmed our founders' commitment to the self-evident truths of liberty and equality.

Today we stand at another defining moment in our national journey. We must chart a course for America into a new century and a new millennium. Inspired by the wisdom of Washington and strengthened by the determination of Lincoln, we will build a new American community, based on responsible citizenship and a resolve to realize the full potential of all our citizens. In this way, we can best keep faith with the remarkable leaders whose memory we honor today.

Best wishes for a wonderful observance.

BILL CLINTON

Statement on the Establishment of an Emergency Board in the Dispute Between American Airlines and the Allied Pilots Association *February 14, 1997*

As you know, I have been closely following the labor negotiations between American Airlines and its pilots represented by the Allied Pilots Association. I want to compliment the parties, the National Mediation Board, its chairman Kenneth Hipp, and mediator Harry Bickford for their hard work to date. Progress has been made over the last several days and especially in the last few hours. Despite these good-faith efforts, however, the parties have been unable to reach a tentative agreement by the 12:01 a.m. strike deadline.

To facilitate an agreement, and because I believe that a strike would have an immediate and adverse impact on the traveling public, I am creating a Presidential emergency board to work with the parties and to make recommendations regarding a resolution. No strike will occur while the Presidential emergency board is in place.

A strike would cause a severe disruption to both domestic and international air transportation. American Airlines is the Nation's second

largest airline; it carries over 220,000 passengers every day. It would be extremely difficult for other carriers to fill the void. The Department of Transportation has estimated that approximately 43,000 passengers per day would not be accommodated by other airlines. The disruption would be particularly felt in Dallas, Miami, Chicago, New York, and Puerto Rico where American provides a large percentage of existing flights. It would also affect the nations of the Caribbean, many of whom rely heavily on American Airlines for air service to and from their shores.

In the event of a strike, most of the 90,000 American and American Eagle employees would be placed on leave. The majority of these employees are based in Texas, Illinois, New York, California, Florida, and Oklahoma. Many of the elected officials from the States led by Senators Graham and Hutchison and Representative Martin Frost and Governor Chiles have made clear to my administration that a strike would severely affect their economies.