

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:46 p.m. in the Crystal Ballroom at the Carlton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Steve Grossman, national chair, Democratic National Committee.

## Remarks on the Proposed Extension of the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act

*August 6, 1998*

Thank you, Sarah and Jim. I think every American should be grateful that the power of your spirit was great enough to overcome the pain of your injury and disappointment, so that you could dedicate all these years to this great cause.

Thank you, Mr. Vice President, for being, as you said when you got such a laugh, a critical part of every good thing that happens and, even before we met, an early sponsor of the Brady bill. Coming from where we come from, the Vice President and I were not always popular with all of our constituents because we were always for the Brady bill, but just about every one of them knows now that it was the right thing to do.

I thank the Attorney General and the Secretary of the Treasury for all they have done. I thank all the law enforcement officials, the leaders of the Association of Chiefs of Police, the Sheriffs Association, the Brotherhood of Police Officers who are here. And Officer Flynn, I thought you were just downright terrific up here today, and I was very proud of you. Thank you.

I want to thank all the Members of Congress who are here. I think the Vice President attempted to introduce everyone. I think we inadvertently didn't mention Congressman Roemer from Indiana. We thank him for being there. And there are a number of you who have played large roles over the years. I hesitate to single out anyone, but I want to thank Senator Durbin, and I want to say a special word of appreciation to Congressman Schumer. Thank you, sir, and all the rest of you for what you have done.

As the Vice President said, more than 5 years ago we committed ourselves to a comprehensive strategy to lower the crime rate and to make America a safer place to live: community policing; antigang initiatives; targeted deterrence; tougher penalties; but most important of all, because of what law enforcement officers and

community leaders told us, smarter, more comprehensive prevention.

The strategy from the Brady bill to the crime bill, from the assault weapons ban to the Violence Against Women Act has begun to show remarkable results, thanks to police officers and citizens all across America. We're ahead of schedule and under budget in meeting our goal of putting 100,000 police on the street. All across America, violent crime, property crime, murder are down. Crime rates overall are at 25-year low. Americans should take pride in that but should resolve to do better. No serious person believes that this country is as safe as it ought to be.

The Brady law, in particular, shows the progress we can make when we take responsibility for making our community safe. Since the law took effect, gun trafficking and gun-related crime are on the wane. And as has been said, according to a recent Justice Department report, background checks have put a stop to nearly a quarter of a million handgun purchases since the law took effect, 62 percent of them based on felony convictions or indictment.

Now, that sounds like a big number, and Officer Flynn mentioned those gripping, personal, tragic cases. But let me break it down for you: That number is 118 felons a day, every day, since the Brady law took effect, 118 a day going home empty-handed instead of well-armed. How many people are alive today because of that law? We will never know. But no one doubts the number is very, very large indeed.

As we near the fifth anniversary of the law and celebrate its progress, we have to continue to fight against crime and violence. We cannot retreat. Yet, as has already been noted, that is precisely what the gun lobby and its allies on Capitol Hill have asked us to do, to retreat from a law that is keeping guns out of the

hands of criminals, retreat from the national interests, surrender our fight for safety to the special interests.

Now, before the Brady law even goes fully into effect, the gun lobby and its friends in Congress are trying to destroy it. They claim to support the national insta-check system but would deny the FBI the funds necessary to make the system work. They claim to support background checks but would have the FBI immediately destroy records vital to the process. In their official literature, the gun lobby is proudly calling this measure, and I quote, "an anti-Brady amendment."

Let me be clear. I will oppose any legislation that would gut the Brady law and put guns back into the hands of felons and fugitives when we can prevent it. Here again, this is a place we ought to put progress ahead of partisanship, public safety ahead of politics.

Years of experience now show that this law works, as the Vice President so clearly argued. Now we have to make it more effective, not less effective. I have asked Congress to extend Brady background checks to violent juveniles who should not be able to buy a gun on their 21st birthday. Congress should also enact the Brady waiting period as a permanent requirement before it expires in November.

Too many crimes are committed within hours of a handgun purchase. The waiting period gives tempers time to cool. It gives potential criminals the time to consider the consequences. It gives local law enforcement officials the time to check all relevant records, even those not computerized, and stop every last prohibited person, who can be found, from walking home with a gun in hand and violence in mind.

This is good law enforcement. It's smart. It works. That's why both the International Brotherhood of Police Officers and the International Association of Chiefs of Police are today supporting permanent extension of the Brady waiting period. The real measure of our progress, of course, is more than a decline in crime; it's a rise in responsibility and respect for the law and the feeling of security that is so intangible yet so profoundly important to the essence of American citizenship.

For those of us in public life, it is our obligation to strengthen that feeling of security, especially the laws that protect our families, save lives, and draw the line between right and wrong and against violence. At heart, this is

what the Brady law has accomplished, and this is the vision to which we must all remain true if we are to build a safer and stronger America for the 21st century.

There has been another development today that, because of this opportunity, I feel I have to comment on. One of the reasons that the crime rate has gone down, as everyone knows, is that the economy has gone up and the unemployment rate is at a 28-year low. I think it is important to keep the economy strong and for the long run and to honor our obligations across the generations. That's why I have said that I'm proud we're going to have the first balanced budget and surplus in 29 years, but I don't want us to run right out and spend it before we take care of the crisis in Social Security that is looming when the baby boomers retire.

Therefore, I was disappointed today when the Speaker proposed to drain \$700 million from the surplus before we have even realized the surplus and before we take even the first steps to save Social Security. As I said in my State of the Union Address, we should reserve every penny of the surplus until we save Social Security for the 21st century.

You know, we waited 29 years for this, to get out of the red ink. It looks to me like we could at least wait a year and enjoy it and take care of future generations' challenges before we run right out and spend this money. This is about our budget, the health of our economy, keeping us strong and safer, about our fundamental values as a country. We worked a long time to get back on the path of responsibility, and we shouldn't abandon it before we've even achieved our real objectives.

Now, I think it would be wrong for us to end today without hearing from the person whose courage made this day possible, our friend Jim Brady.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:06 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to James Brady, former White House Press Secretary, who was wounded in the 1981 assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan, and his wife Sarah Brady, chair, Handgun Control, Inc.; and Gerald Flynn, national vice president, International Brotherhood of Police

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Officers. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of James Brady. The Brady Handgun Violence Pre-

vention Act, title I of Public Law 103–159, was approved November 30, 1993.

## Statement on House Action on the Executive Order on Prohibiting Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation in the Federal Civilian Work Force

August 6, 1998

I am gratified that the House has defeated an attempt to overturn my Executive order providing a uniform policy to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in the Federal civilian work force.

This vote reflected the values of our Nation. The American people believe in fairness, not discrimination, and the Hefley amendment would have legitimized Government-sponsored discrimination against its own citizens based on their sexual orientation.

It has always been the practice of this administration to prohibit employment discrimination in the Federal civilian work force based on sexual orientation. Most Federal agencies and departments have taken actions to memorialize

that policy. The Executive order does no more than make that policy uniform across the Federal Government. It does not authorize affirmative action or preferences or special rights for anyone.

The Executive order reflects this administration's firm commitment that the Federal Government make employment-related decisions in the civilian work force based on individual ability and not on sexual orientation.

NOTE: Executive Order 13087 of May 28 on equal employment opportunity in the Federal Government was published in the *Federal Register* at 63 FR 30097.

## Remarks to the White House Conference on Building Economic Self-Determination in Indian Communities

August 6, 1998

*The President.* Thank you. Thank you for the wonderful welcome. Thank you for the song. Thank you, Dominic, for giving us a picture of opportunity and hope for the future. I'm very glad that you're not only a good student but a good entrepreneur and a good promoter. Dominic was kind enough to give me one of his bracelets before I came out. [*Laughter*] So I'm his latest walking advertisement, and I'm glad to shill for him. [*Laughter*]

I would like to thank the members of the administration, the 15 agencies that have come together with the White House to sponsor this conference. I thank Secretary Daley, Secretary Riley, Secretary Glickman, Small Business Administrator Aida Alvarez, who are here. I'd like

to thank Deputy Assistant Secretary Michael Anderson, Kevin Gover, Mark Van Norman, Angela Hammond, and two young people on our staff, Julie Fernandes and Mary Smith, who work with Mickey Ibarra and Lynn Cutler; all of them worked very hard on this conference. I thank them.

I'm proud to be here with Chief Marge Anderson, Governor Walter Dasheno, Chief Joyce Dugan, Chairman Frank Ettawageshik, Chairman Roland Harris, Chairwoman Kathryn Harrison, President Ivan Makil, Governor Mary Thomas, Chairman Brian Wallace, President John Yellow Bird Steele. I thank all of you.

I have looked forward to this day for quite a long time. The Iroquois teach us that every