

Remarks to the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement
Executives
July 30, 2001

Thank you all very much for that warm welcome. I am honored to be here for the 25th anniversary of NOBLE. And I want to welcome each of you to Washington.

I also thank you for giving me a chance to come and talk about a powerful tool to help you all do your job. And that tool is stronger communities and the willingness for our society to welcome faith-based and community-based programs at the grass-roots level, all aimed at teaching our children right from wrong, all aimed at making sure there's hope in every neighborhood throughout America.

I want to thank Ida very much for her brief but meaningful introduction. [*Laughter*] I want to thank Leonard Cooke and Maurice Foster as well.

I've got to say something about Hubert Bell. [*Applause*] Maybe I'd better not, Hubert. It sounds like you're doing pretty good. [*Laughter*] But Hubert was really a part of our family for a long period of time, and we appreciated his service and sacrifice. He protected my mother and dad, for which, of course, not only is their loyal son grateful, but so are they. And it's great to see you, Hubert.

Also riding with me today is a fine man who I fortunately convinced to serve our country as the Deputy Attorney General, from the State of Georgia, Larry Thompson. Larry, thank you for your service, as well.

You've always got to say something nice about the police chief in the community in which you live—[*laughter*—just in case. [*Laughter*] In my case, just in case the limo driver drives a little too fast. [*Laughter*] But Charles, thank you for your leadership. I first saw that in action during the inauguration, and he did a fantastic job and so did the men and women who wear the

uniform here in the Nation's Capital. Thank you for your service.

It's also a pleasure to be here today with many of the founding members of NOBLE and its membership. Thank you for giving me a chance.

NOBLE is one of America's most effective police organizations and a voice for justice around our great Nation. And I want to thank you for that. I want to thank you for serving as a conscience in many communities in America.

It's also an important part of law enforcement, the history of law enforcement in America. Until the sixties, few African Americans could dream of wearing the policeman's uniform and badge. Even those given the authority of the badge sometimes did not get the respect they deserve. I'm told about a man named James Cherry in 1964 who became the first uniformed black officer in Jackson, Tennessee. And on his first house call to the home of a white resident, a woman opened the door and looked at him and said, "I don't want you. I want the real police."

Fortunately, times have changed in America. Fortunately, when Officer Cherry shows up to the door today, people are saying, "Thank you, Officer, for coming to help me. Thank you for your service." Folks in this country have realized law enforcement depends upon the participation of fine African men and women all across America. And I want to thank those officers for the commitment and the risks they take on a daily basis.

And we owe you something in return. We owe you something in return for your service, and that's justice. And that's why I've asked the Attorney General and the Deputy Attorney General to examine racial profiling. It's wrong in America, and we've got to get rid of it.

Law enforcement is one of the great callings in our society; it really is. It's a noble profession. It's also one of the great success stories of the past decade. Last month the Justice Department reported that violent crime fell almost 15 percent last year alone, the largest drop ever recorded. Across America, law enforcement is doing its job, and crime is in retreat.

Some examples of success have captured the attention of the Nation. When Superintendent Richard Pennington of the New Orleans Police Department was appointed in 1994, New Orleans was rated the most violent city in America. And the truth of the matter is, the police department had serious, serious problems. The chief began by reforming the department itself. He used the latest technology to track crime and built trusting relationships between the department and neighborhoods all throughout New Orleans.

Today, 7 years after his arrival, the people of New Orleans respect the police department because violent crime is down 75 percent in that city. A leader can make a difference, Chief Pennington, and you have done so. And by working hard in the neighborhoods, the police department has earned their respect, and that's important.

My administration must offer more than just praise, however. We must promote policy that provides active support for police officers around the country. We've begun already with Project Safe Neighborhoods. I don't know whether you know this or not, but the NOBLE officers helped write the program, helped come up with the strategy that says that we need to develop local partnerships all across America to enforce gun laws on the books. We need to spend more resources and energy in a coordinated way that says to people, if you carry—illegally carry a gun, there is a consequence; that if you think you can act out your frustrations by illegally carrying weapons and/or illegally using them, there's only one consequence: That's arrest and jail.

And so we've put \$550 million aside for 2 years, that says, let's have a focused, concerted effort. Let's focus our time and energy and efforts on ferreting out those who hold others hostage in our society and stand side by side with the police officers all across America—arrest and prosecute and incarcerate those who illegally carry and use guns. It's a mission we must do to make our neighborhoods more safe. And I want to thank NOBLE for helping write and devise the strategy that in my heart of hearts I know is going to work.

But we must have goals beyond just punishment. We must, at the deepest level, embrace our youth instead of fearing them. It starts with making sure we've got good education systems all around America. An educated child is one much less likely to commit a crime.

And we're making pretty good progress here in Washington. We've got a bill passed out of the House and a bill passed out of the Senate, and one of these days they may get together and put one on my desk—and the sooner, rather than later. The sooner, rather than later, because it's time to get some legislation out so that the local school boards and local districts can start the plan.

And let me tell you the crux of the bill. I think you'll appreciate this. It challenges the soft bigotry of low expectations. It challenges the notion that there are certain children in our society who can't possibly learn, and therefore, let's just move them through—let's just say, "If you're 10, you're supposed to be in the fourth grade, and if you're 13, we'll put you here, regardless of what you may or may not know." Those days have got to end.

What we've got to start asking of each child is, "What do you know? And if you don't know what you're supposed to know, we will make sure you do, early, before it's too late." See, I believe every child can learn, and I believe our society must focus on accountability to make sure they

do. And so we've got a good piece of legislation that starts with setting high standards, challenging that soft bigotry. It says, local people ought to be running the schools around America. One size does not fit all. But it also says that if you receive help, you must show us whether or not you're teaching our children to read and write and add and subtract. And if they were—and if they are, there will be thousands of hallelujahs. But if not, you must change what you're doing because no child in America should be left behind.

Besides learning to read and write and add and subtract, it's so essential that our children learn values that defeat hostility and aggression, the values that will bring dignity and direction to their lives. We want to help them make decisions based upon character and conscience and integrity, not the fear of punishment.

We must prevent crime by reclaiming lives of those who may have lost hope, and I believe we can do so in America. And I believe we've got a great chance to start here in Washington, DC. It starts with making sure that responsible adults are involved in the lives of our children. These children need consistent, committed love that breaks down walls of distrust. They need a sense of belonging and respect from someone other than the local gang leader. These things are most often done by parents, no question about it. But sometimes, we must encourage mentors and ministers and faith healers to become actively involved in the lives of these young children.

There are so many stories, all around America. Frankly, these stories exist not because of government but because somebody is talking to a higher authority; somebody has heard the call to love a neighbor like he or she would like to be loved themselves.

I think, for example, of the program in Chicago called From Gangs to Grace. It works out of the New Life Covenant Church, which sits right in the middle of gang territory. The program was formed 3

years ago by former gang members whose lives were torn upside down because of drugs. One of them, a fellow, was named Pedro Munez. He spoke eloquently about the program. He says, "My vocabulary has changed, and I don't curse anymore. I treat my family with respect. I just treat everybody with respect now."

A young man who has learned the value of respect is going to be a better man. He's going to honor his father and mother. He's going to treat young women as he should treat them. He's going to live up to his responsibilities. He'll serve to be a good example. There's no limit to what comes when you change one heart, one young man learning to learn because of the virtue of respect.

Most effective police programs in America have learned the value of working with charities and churches and synagogues and mosques on youth development and crime prevention. Most of you have learned that strong communities and strong values make your work a lot easier. Most of you have been involved in the so-called Faith-Based Initiative way before I proposed it to the United States Congress, and I understand that. As a matter of fact, much of the work that you have done that proceeded me here has become the basis for meaningful legislation.

It's legislation that says to the United States Congress, let us fund the faith-based organizations all across America. Let's give them a chance to compete for Federal dollars. Let's not lock them out just because they have the word "faith" in front of their program. After all, faith-based initiatives and programs can change people's hearts. And when they change people's hearts, they change people's lives. And a changed life is much more likely to be a person—peaceful, respectful person.

We should not fear faith in our society. We should not fear welcoming community groups that not necessarily have been sanctioned by Government, that exists as—apart from Government. We should welcome

them. These are the soldiers in the armies of compassion. These are the people whose calling exists because of the church or the synagogue or the mosque, but people who are intent upon helping young people make the right choices in life.

You know, it's amazing, as I travel around the country I hear from people at the grassroots level who have gotten the message. Sometimes it seems like, to me, the word hasn't quite gotten up to Washington, DC. And it's time for Congress to pass legislation to rally the faith-based programs, so they can stand side by side with those folks in the community who are trying to bring peace and law and order, the people who wear the uniform.

A bill came out of the House of Representatives the other day, and I had a good meeting with Senator Lieberman and Senator Santorum, talking about making sure that the Faith-Based Initiative continues its momentum. It's the right thing to do for America. It is the next step beyond welfare. It is a way to recognize there are still people who are hopeless, people who need help. And it's making sure the American Dream extends its reach in all neighborhoods.

We must call upon all folks, all people who are willing to help change lives in a positive way. Listen, this is a great country, and the reason it's a great country is because it's full of so many decent and honorable and loving citizens. It's a great country because there's love in a lot of people's

hearts. It's a great country, and we must rally the greatness of the country, and that's our people. And it's a great country, as well, because there are thousands of people who are willing to serve a concept greater than themselves in life. And there's no greater concept in life than to try to bring peace to neighborhoods. There's no greater concept than to take risk, like the men and women who wear the uniform do on a daily basis.

And so I'm here to thank you for your work. I'm here to tell you, this is a Government that stands by your side, a Government that understands that an educated child is going to make your job a lot easier, but a Government that also understands that as we rally the community and faith-based programs—interface with people—it's going to make America a much more compassionate and decent and hopeful land.

Again, I'm so honored that you invited me here. Thank you for hearing me out, and may God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:30 p.m. in the Marriott Ballroom at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Ida L. Gillis, national president, Maurice Foster, executive director, Leonard G. Cooke, national vice president, and Hubert T. Bell, Jr., special assistant to the president, National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives; and Charles H. Ramsey, chief of police, Washington, DC.

Videotaped Remarks to the Boy Scouts of America National Jamboree *July 30, 2001*

Hello, Boy Scouts, and thanks for this opportunity to send a word of greeting to your National Jamboree. Let me also thank General Colby Broadwater and the fine men and women of Fort A.P. Hill for hosting this event.

I'm so sorry the weather didn't allow me to join you in person, but I wanted to say a few words to the Scouts and Scoutmasters who have come to this jamboree from all across the country.