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Remarks at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond, Oklahoma

April 5, 1996

Thank you very much. Governor Nigh, Mrs. Nigh, Congressman Istook, Mr. Mayor, Mr. Speaker, the other distinguished guests on the platform, and to the students and the other members of the University of Central Oklahoma community and family, Governor David Walters and Mrs. Walters, and to all the people who are here with me today because of the mission we are on.

Let me say it's good to be back here. I heard the students laughing when Governor Nigh announced that I was here 8 years ago, and I was thinking, most of the students were in grade school the last time I was here. [*Laughter*] Later this year I'll be eligible for my AARP card—[*laughter*]—but I'm still glad to be here.

As all of you know, and as the Governor said, I came here today to Oklahoma to pay my respects nearly a year after the tragedy of the bombing, to attend a memorial service for the families of those who were victims, for the survivors and their families, and others who were Federal employees who worked there, and to help your State officials to dedicate the beginning of the child care center which will be rebuilt, which is a remarkable accomplishment, and to meet with this scholarship committee, which informed me of the results which were just announced to you by Governor Nigh.

And it is coming at an especially sad but ironically appropriate time, just a couple of days after we suffered the loss of our Secretary of Commerce and a number of fine Federal employees—some of them very young, barely older than some of the students here—a number of fine U.S. military personnel, and some of our country's most outstanding business leaders in that plane crash in Bosnia.

I would like to make just two points briefly. I know it's cold and you've been waiting a long time, but I ask you to reflect on two things. That plane went down in Bosnia full of people who have worked very hard to help the American people fulfill their potential. Ron Brown was immensely proud of the fact that more than any other Commerce Secretary and Commerce Department in our history, they had been instrumental in opening new avenues for people to buy American products and American services and create jobs for Americans, so that when young people get out of college they can get jobs, good jobs, jobs that pay better than average, jobs with a good future.

But these people went to Bosnia with only the most modest expectation of any personal gain for themselves. They went there to try to use the power of the American economy to help bring opportunity to the Bosnians so that peace wouldn't fall apart and instead would take hold.

But the main thing I want to say is that my friend Ron Brown, who grew up in Harlem, never forgot where he came from and spent his lifetime trying to help other people realize their dreams. When our hearts were breaking over what happened in Oklahoma City—it was this madness that somebody for some perverted political purpose could take everyone else's life away from them who weren't even standing in the way, they just happened to show up in the wrong time in the wrong place. And so I would like to say two things to you today.

First of all, all of us need to ask ourselves a year later, what are our responsibilities not only to help the children, who were tragically robbed of their parents in Oklahoma City, to fulfill their dreams but to provide that opportunity for all people? I've worked very hard to expand the quality and availability of college loans and the college scholarships for children of modest incomes. I'm still hoping we'll pass a balanced budget amendment

in our legislation in this Congress that will include a tax cut that gives families a deduction for the cost of college tuition, because I think it's the best possible tax break we could give America, to do that.

But this is not a political issue. Every American has an interest in seeing every other American be able to live out their dreams. And we have certain positive responsibilities, just like Ron Brown believed that we did, to try to do that, and access to higher education is, perhaps, the most important one.

The second thing I want to ask you about, especially the young people, is to think about where do we go from here. And as horrible and personal as the bombing of the Federal building was to you, I want you to try to step back a minute and put it in a larger context. It was, first and foremost, an act of terror. What is terror? Terror is when someone, allegedly for some philosophical or political reason, believes they have the right to take innocent lives, not people who are fighting them in war, not people who are wearing uniforms, not people who are staring at them across a battle line but just to take an action that will take the lives of people who just happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

And we are seeing that all over the world, and you see it in two ways. First, you see homegrown terror, people in your own country that are so profoundly alienated they think they have a right to do this. You've been reading about the Unabomber in recent days. That's an example of that. You remember when the religious fanatics in Japan broke open poison gas in the Japanese subway and killed a lot of people and a few days later could have killed hundreds more, but miraculously, the second attempt was thwarted. That's an example of that.

And then you have imported terrorism, where people come in from other countries, and they try to wreck your life to pursue their political ambitions. An example of that is the World Trade Center bombing. And it's really tough when they're coming from right next door, which is what is tearing the heart out of the people in the Middle East now. And you remember how recently we saw the people there—innocent, not only innocent Israelis, innocent Palestinians, innocent Moroccans, little children just blown away because some crackpot believes that it is a legitimate way to pursue your political philosophy to kill innocent civilians.

Now what I want to tell you today is—and I want you to think about this, especially the young people—the world you're living in and the world we're moving toward is going to offer you more opportunities to succeed, if you have a good education, than any generation of Americans has ever known. But the same forces that offer you those opportunities to succeed offer people opportunities to commit terrorist acts. And therefore, we must be more vigilant, more active, more determined than ever before.

Why is that? Well, just think about it. What's the world like now? Computer technology can now interface people all over the world. I'm trying to get every classroom and every library and every school in America connected to the Internet by the end of the decade. I know right now there are public schools in America where young junior high school students can get on the Internet and do research out of libraries in Asia and Australia, all over the world. Well, that also means that terrorist networks can get information about how to build bombs and how to wreak mischief if you just know how to find the right home page.

We've got to have open borders in order to move products and services around the world, in order for people to travel around the world. We have to be able to get around in a hurry. The more open the borders are, the more open the information is, the more vulnerable we are to things like money laundering and terrorists moving out of countries.

Now, that should not frighten you. The good news is we are reducing the traditional threats to your security and your future. Communism has failed. The cold war is over. We have agreed to treaties that will reduce by two-thirds the number of nuclear weapons that existed when the cold war was at its height. And for the first time in the history of nuclear weapons, for the last 2 years there's not a single nuclear weapon pointed at any American citizen. That is the good news.

That's the good news. But in an open world of easy information, quick technology, and rapid movements, we are all more vulnerable than we used to be to terrorism and its interconnected allies, organized crime, drug running, and the spread of weapons of destruction. And so I spend a lot of my time as your President trying to think about what we can do to minimize those dangers.

We've done a lot to try to fight terrorism. We've done a lot to try to fight drug trafficking. We've done a lot to try to fight the money laundering that goes along with all this, to try to help other countries stand up to organized crime, because nobody is immune from this. You see it in all of the places I cited. You see it when those terrible bombs go off in London. I saw it in Latin America where we have honest law enforcement officials in Colombia trying to help us crack the Colombian drug cartels. And the good news is we arrested seven top leaders in the last couple of years. The bad news is, 500 Colombians laid their lives down trying to break their country of the grip of drug cartels.

So what we have to do is to ask ourselves—our generation, the generation that preceded us, won World War II and then won the cold war—what we have to do now is to fight back these organized forces of destruction so all the opportunities that await you young people will be there and so you can pursue them without fear; so that if you're willing to work hard and obey the law and make the most of your own lives, you will be able to live out your dreams. That is what this is all about.

The lessons we have to take out of what happened to us at the World Trade Center, what happened to us in Oklahoma City, what we were able to avoid when we stopped terrorist attacks in the last 2 years on our own soil and against our airplanes as they were flying over the oceans, those are the things we have to learn.

Now, what I want to say to you is that, first, you've got to realize all these things work together. On the 19th of this month, when you all are observing the one-year anniversary, the reason I won't be here is I have to go to Russia to a nuclear summit. And part of it is about continuing to reduce nuclear weapons. But part of it is making sure that every place in the world that has the residue of the nuclear age, this nuclear material, make sure it is secure and safe and cannot be stolen, because we don't want our homegrown terrorists or our foreign terrorists to get their hands on nuclear material that, with just the size of a wafer, you could make a bomb 10 times more powerful than the one that destroyed your Federal building in Oklahoma City. So I have to go there. The United States has to be a part of that. And that's an important thing. But we also have to recognize that there are things that we have to do here at home.

Last year I asked people in the other parts of the world to stand with the United States because we took a tough stand against the countries that support terrorism, against Iran and Iraq and Sudan and Libya. And I get frustrated when they don't help. But when those bombs blew up in Israel, it sobered a lot of countries up, and in 3 days the President of Egypt and I were able to persuade 29 countries to send high-level leaders, including heads of state, to Egypt to meet to stand up against terrorism. We had Arab countries condemning terrorism in Israel for the first time.

So we've got—we're getting in a position now where the people are willing to say we can't let terrorism pay. We can't let terrorism pay. We've got to make sure that terrorists pay for what they're doing. We have to make sure that's true here and around the world.

When I was in Israel—and I suppose they have about as much experience with terrorism as anybody—I talked to leaders of both political parties. And they hardly agree on anything over there; they fight just like we do. [*Laughter*] But you know what? They were both agreed on one thing. They said you have got to continue to take the lead in the fight against terrorism, and you need to pass that legislation that you're trying to pass to crack down on the forces of terrorism in the United States and enable us to stand against them when they invade our country.

It's been almost a year since I was pledged that terrorism bill, and it's still not in the shape it needs to be. But let me just tell you three things that I think ought to be in it, and there's a big debate about it.

We know what kind of bomb blew up the Federal building. We propose that we be able to have markers that go into explosives when people buy them. Contractors don't have a thing in the world to fear. People need to buy explosives. You can't do a lot of work without them. But if explosives are used to kill innocent civilians, we ought to be able to find out where they came from and who bought them. That's what I believe, and I hope you do, too.

We ought to have explicit authority that permits the Attorney General of the United States to stop terrorist groups like Hamas from raising money in America. And if we catch people doing it, we ought to be able to throw them out of the country immediately—immediately, not after some long, drawn-out process.

We ought to have the best technology available to our law enforcement officials to keep up with these terrorists that move around in a hurry, and they're very sophisticated and very hard to catch. And we can do that without violating the civil liberties of the American people, without undermining the constitutional rights of criminal defendants.

But I'm telling you, folks, these people are smart. They understand computers. They understand information. They understand how to hide. They understand how to doctor bank records. They understand how to launder money.

And when it all comes down to it, just think of what would happen if Oklahoma City had happened 5 or 6 or 7 times within a month or two. Think what it would have done to the American people. Think what would have happened if 3,000 people had been killed at Oklahoma City and every American had felt like those people were within 50 miles of them. That's what happened in Israel just a few weeks ago. It can paralyze a country. It can take its heart out. It can take its confidence away. It can make young people believe they have no future.

Now, I am very optimistic about America's future, and I am proud of the work that our law enforcement officials have done in catching these people. And I am proud of the fact that we have caught and deported more terrorists in the last 3 years than at any time in our history put together. I am proud of that.

I am not saying these things to frighten any Americans. I am just telling you I have been around the world representing you; I've talked to people all over the world. I do not believe—if we can do our job and if we had just a little bit of luck—I do not believe that you will have to worry about a nuclear weapon wiping out a whole American community or killing lots of Americans in the way that our parents worried about us when I was growing up. But I do not believe you can fulfill your dreams and be totally free until we have taken the strongest possible stand against terrorism, organized crime, drug running, and weapon sales. And they are all related.

So I ask you, I ask you because you will have more weight than most people—this State has suffered, this State has felt it, this State understands the human dimension of people killing innocent people for perverted, allegedly political reasons—to say in simple, clear terms, this is not a political issue; this is not a partisan issue; this is not an ideological issue. This is a matter of America getting ready for the future and guaranteeing our young people the opportunities that they deserve to live out their God-given dreams and destiny.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:40 p.m. in the courtyard at the School of Education. In his remarks, he referred to George Nigh, president, University of Central Oklahoma, and his wife, Donna; Mayor Bob Rudkin of Edmond; and Glen Johnson, speaker, Oklahoma State House of Representatives. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Executive Order 12998—Amendment to Executive Order No. 11880

April 5, 1996

By virtue of the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and laws of the United States of America, including section 3347 of title 5, United States Code, it is hereby ordered that Executive Order No. 11880