

Week Ending Friday, January 1, 1999

The President's Radio Address

December 26, 1998

Good morning. December is a month for families, a season of celebration and anticipation, especially for our children. But with alcohol flowing at parties and millions of families taking to the road to see friends and relatives, the holiday season can also be a season of tragedy. Last December more than 1,300 Americans lost their lives in alcohol-related crashes. Who knows how many presents under the Christmas tree were left unopened, presents for a child killed by a drunk driver.

Today I want to talk about how we can work together to make our roads safer for our families. For a generation, drunk driving has been one of America's greatest public safety challenges. The sight of a car weaving through traffic is an all too familiar and frightening one for many Americans. Over the past decade, spurred to action by grassroots activists such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and with the leadership of the Department of Transportation and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, America has worked hard to keep drunk drivers off our roads with increased public awareness, stronger laws, and stricter enforcement.

My administration has made safety our number one transportation priority. In 1995 we helped States make it illegal for anyone under 21 to drive with any amount of alcohol in their system. We put young people on notice: just one drink before driving—one beer, one glass of wine, one shot—and you can lose your license.

There's good news to report. Last year the number of people killed in alcohol-related crashes dropped to an all-time low. For the first time since we started keeping track in 1975, alcohol-related deaths accounted for less than 40 percent of all traffic deaths and dropped by 5 percent among 15- to 20-year-olds. But we have much more to do.

In a report I'm releasing today, the Department of Health and Human Services estimates that in 1996 more than a quarter of all drivers—46.5 million—used drugs, alcohol, or both within 2 hours of driving. Ask any parent, any family, anyone who has lost a loved one to an alcohol related crash; one impaired driver is one too many.

So today I'm announcing that the Justice and Transportation Departments will strengthen their efforts in the new year, through grants to States and other incentives, to enforce underage drinking laws, to carry out alcohol impaired driving prevention programs, and to pass and enforce strong State highway safety legislation.

The most effective action we can take to make our roads even safer is to set the national impaired driving standard at .08 percent blood alcohol content. No one will ever doubt that a person with that much blood alcohol is unfit to drive after meeting Brenda Frazier. This spring at the White House she described the horror of watching a drunk driver run over her 9-year-old daughter at a school bus stop. The driver's blood alcohol content: .08 percent.

This year I worked with Members of Congress to make .08 the law of the land. Tragically, the special interests blocked this life-saving measure. I am determined to succeed in setting a .08 standard in the new year. It's the right thing to do. In the meantime, I've asked Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater to work to make .08 the rule on Federal property. I commend the 16 States and the District of Columbia, who have already adopted the stricter standard.

But every American family also must take responsibility for safer roads for all our families. Tell your neighbors and teach your own children about the dangers of drunk driving. And as we gather this week to ring in a new year, stop and think before getting behind the wheel. If you've had too much to drink,

hand your keys to a designated driver. Together, we can make sure the new year is, indeed, a safe and happy one for all Americans.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 11:04 a.m. on December 24 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on December 26. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 24 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Statement on the 1997 National Crime Victimization Survey

December 27, 1998

The 1997 National Crime Victimization Survey released by the Department of Justice today shows that violent crime fell 7 percent last year and 21 percent since I took office. With the violent crime rate now its lowest level since 1973, Americans are safer today than they have been in many years. These new figures again show that our strategy of more police, stricter gun laws, and better crime prevention is working. But we are not yet done. Working together, both in Washington and in communities across our Nation, we must redouble our efforts to make our streets, homes, and schools safer for all Americans.

NOTE: This statement was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary at 8 a.m. on December 27 but was embargoed for release until 9 a.m.

Remarks Announcing Social Security System Compliance With Year 2000 Computer Problem Safeguards

December 28, 1998

Good morning. Let me say, one of the things that she might have told you is that before she volunteered for the National Council of Senior Citizens for 20 years, she was an employee until 1972, when she retired, of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. Therefore, she worked for the Treasury Department. And on New Year's Eve, she will be 90 years old. [Applause] So we thank her.

Situation in Iraq

Ladies and gentlemen, before I get into my remarks, because this is the only opportunity I will have to appear before the press today, I think I should say a few words about an incident early this morning over the skies of Iraq, where American and British aircrews were enforcing a no-fly zone in northern Iraq. They were fired on by Iraq surface-to-air missiles. They took evasive action, returned fire on the missile site, and returned safely to their base in Turkey.

We enforce two no-fly zones in Iraq: one in the north, established in 1991; another in the south, established in 1992, which now stretches from the southern suburbs of Baghdad down to the Kuwaiti border. The no-fly zones have been and will remain an important part of our containment policy. Because we effectively control the skies over much of Iraq, Saddam has been unable to use air power to repress his own people or to lash out again at his neighbors. Our pilots have the authority to protect themselves if they're threatened or attacked. They took appropriate action today in responding to Iraq's actions.

Once again, I want to tell you I am very proud of the work they do, the risks they take, the skill and the professionalism with which they do it. They attacked because they were attacked. And they did the appropriate thing. We will continue to enforce the no-fly zones.

Social Security and Year 2000 Computer Problem

Now, let me say, this is a very happy announcement today. And I want to thank Secretary Rubin, who most people associate with saving the economy, not saving Social Security, but that's an important part of his job, too. I want to thank Kathy Adams, who is one of those people in the Government that makes it go and never gets enough credit for it. So I'm delighted to see her up here and, through her, all the other people who work every day to make America work.

I've already told you about Pauline Johnson Jones. And I want to say, too, I have been very moved by how passionate Ken Apfel has been about making sure that this problem got solved, and today we saw that