

"I will get things done for America to make our people safer, smarter, and healthier. I will bring Americans together to strengthen our communities. Faced with apathy, I will take action. Faced with conflict, I will seek common ground. Faced with adversity, I will persevere. I will carry this commitment with me this year and beyond. I am an AmeriCorps member. And I will get things done."

[Audience members repeated the pledge line by line after the President.]

Congratulations.

Now—good for you. Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to ask you, in advance, to give a warm round of applause to the Howard University Choir. They've waited through this whole thing to sing "America The Beautiful" with us. [Applause]

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:55 p.m. in a tent on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Andre Crisp, AmeriCorps volunteer, who introduced the President; Eli Segal, former Chief Executive Officer, Corporation for National Service; Alan Solomont, former national finance chair, Democratic National Committee; and the late Dan Dutko, Democratic Party fundraiser. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

Statement on the Election of Abdurrahman Wahid as President of Indonesia

October 20, 1999

I congratulate Abdurrahman Wahid on his election as President of Indonesia. He and the people of Indonesia deserve enormous credit for the democratic process that led to this peaceful change in government. This election, conducted fairly and transparently, has been a true triumph of democracy.

Indonesia still faces many challenges—achieving national reconciliation, consolidating economic recovery, and building institutions accountable to its people. With a democratically elected leadership, I am optimistic that real progress will be made toward all these goals.

I look forward to working closely with the new President and his government.

Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report on the National Emergency With Respect to Significant Narcotics Traffickers Centered in Colombia

October 20, 1999

To the Congress of the United States:

As required by section 401(c) of the National Emergencies Act, 50 U.S.C. 1641(c), and section 204(c) of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), 50 U.S.C. 1703(c), I transmit herewith a 6-month periodic report on the national emergency with respect to significant narcotics traffickers centered in Colombia that was declared in Executive Order 12978 of October 21, 1995.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
October 20, 1999.

Remarks Honoring the National Association of Police Organizations' "Top Cops"

October 21, 1999

Thank you very much, Tom. Congressman Stupak, Representatives Larson and Udall, thank you for being here. And I want to thank in their absence Senator Biden and Senator Leahy. Senator Biden had to go cast a very important vote in the Congress. He was here earlier.

I also want to thank the executive director of NAPO, Bob Scully, who has been a great friend to this administration and a great fighter for our police initiatives. And I want to introduce formally our new director of the COPS program, Tom Frazier, the former Baltimore Police Commissioner. Thank you, Tom, for your willingness to serve. Please stand up so they can see you.

I also have a note which says we are joined today by Attorney General Nixon of Missouri and Mayor Lafuente of Poughkeepsie, New York, so I welcome them here.

I look forward to this day every year, to honor the people who are standing behind me. They honor us every day just by going to work. And they, I am sure, would be the first to tell you that even though they have done really magnificent things deserving of the honor of America's Top Cops, that they really stand in the shoes of thousands, indeed, tens of thousands of others who do the right thing day in and day out to make America a safer place.

In 1968, in his last campaign, Robert Kennedy said the fight against crime "is a fight to preserve that quality of community which is at the root of our greatness."

Those we honor today are at the forefront of that fight and, therefore, exemplify that greatness. They have performed astonishing acts of valor and humanity, crossing the line of fire to rescue downed officers; being shot and wounded, yet, managing to return fire and subdue an assailant; flying across the Alaska wilderness to singlehandedly capture five armed kidnappers; spotting a dangerous gas leak and evacuating 200 citizens moments before the apartment building exploded.

These and other amazing stories aren't from the TV shows; they actually happened. They represent in dramatic form the kind of professional police work that goes on every day. Just last week, three brave officers were ambushed and killed and two others were wounded by a gunman in Pleasanton, Texas. We mourn their passing and offer our prayers for their families and their fellow officers. Every day, every officer that puts on a badge knows that he or she, too, may be called upon to put life on the line.

As has already been said by the Deputy Attorney General and by Congressman Stupak and by Tom, America today is a safer place as a result. We had years, in times past, when the crime rate would go down a little, and then it would go up a little, but the trendline was always up, with a few welcome downs. But this year, as the Justice Department reported this week—excuse me, for last year—the crime rate fell again in all categories, in all parts of the country. The overall crime rate is now at a 26-year low, the murder rate at a 31-year low.

Crime has been dropping, now, for 7 straight years. This is the longest continuous decline in the crime rate ever recorded in our country. In part, that is because all of us, from the grassroots to Washington, DC, have intensified our support for common-sense strategies to fight crime and to prevent crime.

Seven years ago, many people thought the crime rate would go up forever. I had had the privilege of working for 12 years as Governor and, before that, as attorney general of my State, with law enforcement officers. I had the opportunity in 1991 to travel across America and talk to community policing and community prosecuting efforts that were working, to meet with community leaders that were walking the streets in citizens' patrols and had confidence in the local police because of the relationships they had. And I had seen what now we see sweeping the country: that there was community after community where the crime rate was going down if they were doing the right things and if they were doing the smart things.

And so I worked with the Members of Congress who were here then, and especially with Senator Biden and Senator Leahy, to take what we learned from community leaders and from law enforcement officers and turn it into a crime bill that would put 100,000 police on the street, as I had promised, that would ban assault weapons, something I strongly supported. And in addition to that, we passed the Brady bill, which has now resulted in over 400,000 people being denied the right to purchase a handgun because they've got a problem in their background.

In 1994, we passed the crime bill with the assault weapons ban; we began our COPS program; we toughened penalties; and we expanded programs for smart prevention. Now, there was a lot—believe it or not, there was a lot of controversy about all this back then. We were told that the Brady bill would prevent no criminals from getting guns. We were told these police would never appear on the street, and if they did, it wouldn't make any difference—never mind the fact that by 1993, violent crime had tripled in America over the previous 30 years, while the size of our police forces had increased by only 10

percent. And more and more police officers were being forced off the street into squad cars with their partners because the neighborhoods in which they were working were so much more dangerous.

I want to reiterate to all of you all that the Congress, those that voted with me, and I did. The only thing we did was to take what people, like the people in uniform behind me, were telling us all over America and turn it into law. They said, "If you will give us the tools, the American people will make our streets safer, and we will do our part."

Well, 5 years later, as has already been said, we have already funded over 100,000 police officers, more than we promised, ahead of time and under budget. Five of the 32 officers we honor today, 5 of those behind me, were funded under the COPS program.

Now, in spite of all we come here to celebrate, I doubt if there is a person here or a person in our country who thinks the crime rate is low enough. I just got off the phone talking to a young woman who was being honored on Oprah Winfrey's TV show today because of her courage in that shooting that occurred in a church in Texas a few weeks ago. And she had a young friend with Down syndrome. She pulled the child down, threw herself over the child—the child did not understand what was going on and just wanted to get up. This young girl sustained a wound in her shoulder. So she held the blood in her body with one arm and kept the rest of her body on her friend. This is still a great country with great young people like that.

But before we get too self-congratulatory about the crime rate being at a 26-year low, we need to ask ourselves—in view of the headlines we've had in this country for the last 2 years and in view of the daily experiences of the people we honor today—whether there's a single soul that believes this is a safe enough country.

Now, you know, I'm always trying to get people to aim big. When I said we were going to put 100,000 cops on the street, people rolled their eyes and said it would never happen. When I said we were going to cut the deficit in half in 4 years, people rolled their eyes and said it would never happen. We've now got the first back-to-back surpluses in 42 years.

Things do not happen unless you imagine them happening, and then put in place strategies to reach your dreams. I think the time has come for America to say, "Okay, we now know we can get the crime rate down, but we have a new goal. We want the freest big country in the world to be the safest big country in the world, and we're not going to stop until America is the safest big country on the entire face of the Earth."

Now, if we're serious about that—if we're serious about doing something to protect the children, like those who have been victimized in Littleton and all these other school shootings; the children who were shot at that Jewish community center; people like that fine young Filipino postman who was murdered in California; or the people who were shot in the middle of the country, the young Korean Christian coming out of his church, the African-American basketball coach who was murdered; all those people in that church in Texas—if we're serious about that, you all clapped—then you say, "Okay, how are we going to get that done?"

Well, first of all, we have to continue to plug the holes in our strategy of keeping guns out of the hands of criminals and kids. We have to close the gun show loophole in the Brady bill. People shouldn't be able to buy guns at gun shows and flea markets and not have background checks. We ought to ban the importation of these large ammunition clips. We ought to do other things which make the things that are already on the books—the background checks, the assault weapons ban—work. And I'm deeply disappointed that the Congress hasn't acted on it yet.

The second thing we ought to do is to recognize that for all the good work these police have done, we actually need more in the high-crime neighborhoods of America. If you want community policing, there must be the man- and woman-power there to cover the waterfront. And that's why I asked the Congress, I said, "Look, this 100,000 police thing is working. It's inexpensive. We beat the budget. We put the people out there. The cities are using them. The counties are using them. Let's put 50,000 more out over the next 5 years in the highest crime areas, in the toughest areas. And I believe it will work,

particularly if we also provide new community prosecutors, the best crime-fighting technology for the police from better communications systems to crime mapping systems. And I know there is bipartisan support for this.”

Senator Biden has gotten enormous support for his bill to extend the life of the COPS program for another 5 years. If Congress passes it, I’ll sign it. We almost won, as you heard, yesterday in the House of Representatives a vote to fully fund our proposal in the first year. Instead, they funded only half the police officers, no community prosecutors, and far, far less new crime-fighting technology, which is a big issue.

Now, this doesn’t make any sense to me. If you’ve got a problem that you’re solving and you know it’s still too big and you know what to do to make it better and you really believe this ought to be the safest big country in the world and we’ve got the money to do it, why would you choose to spend the money on something else instead of making America the safest big country in the world? If Congress sends me a crime-fighting bill that’s a crime spending bill that doesn’t have the right priorities, I will have to veto it. I want those police on the street. They are making America safer, and I am not satisfied, and you shouldn’t be satisfied until it’s the safest country in the world.

We think there ought to be more police and fewer guns on the street. I do not think a strategy of fewer police and more guns is what the American people want. And so I ask for their support. And again I say, this is not a partisan issue out in America. I am quite sure, standing behind me in uniform, there are police officers who vote for members of both parties. I would be astonished if they were all Democrats—gratified but astonished. *[Laughter]*

This is not a partisan issue. When they wheel you into the emergency room with a gunshot wound in your body, nobody asks you for your party registration before they try to dig the bullet out.

We know what works. We need to listen to the police. We need to listen to NAPO. We need to work together in a bipartisan, even a nonpartisan spirit. This is a national

security issue, just as much as the bill I signed the other day at the Pentagon.

And every time I think about a child who is victimized, every time I have to relive the stories of all these school shootings that we’ve experienced since I’ve been President, I know that I can’t wave a magic wand and make it all go away. I know that no matter what we do, there will still be people who do bad things and people who are seized by demons. But I know one thing: We can make this a lot safer country.

And when I hear people in the Congress say, “Well, we just have to punish people more. We don’t really have to make it harder for them to get guns, even if they’re criminals,” I would point out that we’ve got a higher percentage of people behind bars, serving longer average sentences, than anybody else. If that were the answer, why are the police telling us to take more sensible measures to restrict access to guns?

And if you have this argument, let me give you a statistic that will trump any argument. Forget about deliberate crimes. The death rate from accidental shooting of children in America is 9 times higher than that of the next 25 biggest industrial countries combined—combined.

So don’t let anybody tell you that we don’t need to do more to keep guns away from kids and crooks. We do. And don’t let anybody tell you that we can’t do it without interfering with the constitutional right to hunt, to engage in proper sports shooting and all those things. We’re not talking about that. And don’t let anybody tell you that 50,000 more police on our street, 50,000 more people like those we honor today, wouldn’t make America a safer place, not only by catching criminals but by physically being there and working with community leaders by preventing crime in the first place.

We’ve got all these opportunities on the edge of this new millennium, with the strongest economy in our lifetimes. I don’t think it’s too much to say that we ought to use these opportunities to save Social Security and Medicare, to give our kids a world-class education with 100,000 teachers, and to keep working to make America the safest and the healthiest big country on Earth.

I am proud that all of you are working with us to achieve that goal. And if we keep working, I still think we will get it done.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:25 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Thomas J. Scotto, president, National Association of Police Organizations, who introduced the President; Attorney General Jeremiah W. Nixon of Missouri; Mayor Colette Lafuente of Poughkeepsie, NY; and Mary Beth Talley, who protected her friend Heather McDonald during the shooting at Wedgewood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, TX.

Statement on Signing Legislation Establishing Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park

October 21, 1999

I am pleased today to sign into law S. 323, which creates the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park in Colorado as America's 55th national park.

The Black Canyon, carved over eons by the unyielding waters of the Gunnison River, is a true natural treasure. Its nearly vertical walls, rising half a mile high, harbor one of the most spectacular stretches of wild river in America. No other canyon in North America combines the remarkable depth, narrowness, and sheerness of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison.

This bipartisan bill demonstrates once again that preserving our environment for future generations is a cause that transcends party lines. In that spirit, I urge Congress to fully fund my lands legacy initiative this year, and to work with me to secure permanent funding to continue these efforts well into the 21st century. Together, we can ensure that other treasures like the Black Canyon are preserved for all time.

Statement Commemorating the Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin

October 21, 1999

Four years ago today, according to the Hebrew calendar, Yitzhak Rabin was murdered by an assassin in Tel Aviv. He was a Prime Minister, a general, a diplomat, and a coura-

geous soldier in the battle for peace. All of us who were his friends still mourn his death.

Twelve days from now, world leaders will gather in Oslo to honor Yitzhak Rabin's memory. I will attend on behalf of the American people. It was in Oslo, 6 years ago, that Israelis and Palestinians made the crucial decision to try to work together to achieve peace. Now, Prime Minister Barak, Chairman Arafat, and I will come together in Oslo to build on that legacy and move closer to Rabin's goal: a permanent peace between Israel and the Palestinian people.

There is much hard work ahead, with difficult decisions for all sides. But as we look back in sorrow to mourn the passing of a great man, we must do everything in our power on behalf of the cause to which he gave his life.

Statement on House Action on Education Legislation

October 21, 1999

Making our schools work for all America's children is the most important challenge we face. By passing H.R. 2 today, the House took an important step toward improving educational opportunities for the Nation's most disadvantaged students. Although I have a number of concerns with this bill, I am pleased that H.R. 2 reflects a bipartisan consensus on several principles of the education reform plan I sent Congress earlier this year. As I said in my State of the Union Address, the Federal Government has a responsibility not only to invest more in our poorest schools, but to demand more results in return.

In particular, the bill continues the work of standards-based reform, expands public school choice, and recognizes the importance of holding schools accountable for results. I am pleased that a solid bipartisan majority in the House voted to reject the false promise of vouchers. I am also pleased that the House, by passing the Mink amendment, chose to incorporate gender equity provisions in this legislation.

As the reauthorization process continues, I will work with Congress to improve certain aspects of this bill, including provisions for