

1-1-1995

Remarks on Signing the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994

William Jefferson Clinton

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/udlr>



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Clinton, William Jefferson (1995) "Remarks on Signing the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994," *University of Dayton Law Review*. Vol. 20: No. 2, Article 4.

Available at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/udlr/vol20/iss2/4>

This Symposium is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Law at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Dayton Law Review by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact mschlengen1@udayton.edu, ecommons@udayton.edu.

REMARKS ON SIGNING THE VIOLENT CRIME CONTROL AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ACT OF 1994

*William Jefferson Clinton**

The American people have been waiting a long time for this day. In the last twenty-five years, half a million Americans have been killed by other Americans. For twenty-five years, crime has been a hot political issue, used too often to divide us while the system makes excuses for not punishing criminals and not doing the job, instead of being used to unite us to prevent crime, punish criminals, and restore a sense of safety and security to the American people.

For the last six years, children have become the most likely victims of violent crime and its most likely perpetrators. And for six years, Washington debated a crime bill without action while more and more children died and more and more children became criminals and foreclosed a productive life for themselves.

In the last two years, Meghan Sposato lost a mother she had only begun to know; Polly Klaas lost her life to a felon who should never have been back on the streets; and James Darby wrote his President a letter because he was so afraid, only to lose his life walking home before anybody could erase his fears. And still, some people in this town tried to keep this day from happening. But today, at last, the waiting ends.

Today the bickering stops, the era of excuses is over, the law-abiding citizens of our country have made their voices heard. Never again should Washington put politics and party above law and order.

From this day forward, let us put partisanship behind us, and let us go forward—Democrats, Republicans and independents, law enforcement, community leaders, ordinary citizens—let us roll up our sleeves to roll back this awful tide of violence and reduce crime in our country. We have the tools now. Let us get about the business of using them.

One of the reasons that I sought this office is to get this bill because if the American people do not feel safe on their streets, in their schools, in their homes, in their places of work and worship, then it is difficult to say that the American people are free.

Not so long ago, kids grew up knowing they'd have to pay if they broke a neighbor's window playing ball. I know—I did it once. They knew they'd be in trouble if they lied or stole because their parents and teachers and neighbors cared enough to set them straight. And everybody knew that anybody who

* President of the United States.

committed a serious crime would be caught and convicted and would serve their time in jail. The rules were simple, the results were predictable, and we lived better because of it. Punishment was swift and certain for people who didn't follow the rules, and the rewards of America were considerable for those who did.

Now, too many kids don't have parents who care. Gangs and drugs have taken over our streets and undermined our schools. Every day we read about somebody else who has literally gotten away with murder. But the American people haven't forgotten the difference between right and wrong. The system has. The American people haven't stopped wanting to raise their children in lives of safety and dignity, but they've got a lot of obstacles in their way.

When I sign this crime bill, we together are taking a big step toward bringing the laws of our land back into line with the values of our people and beginning to restore the line between right and wrong. There must be no doubt about whose side we're on. People who commit crimes should be caught, convicted, and punished. This bill puts Government on the side of those who abide by the law, not those who break it; on the side of the victims, not their attackers; on the side of the brave men and women who put their lives on the line for us every day, not the criminals or those who would turn away from law enforcement. That's why police and prosecutors and preachers fought so hard for this bill and why I am so proud to sign it into law today.

When this bill is law, "three strikes and you're out" will be the law of the land; the penalty for killing a law enforcement officer will be death; we will have the means by which we can say punishment will be more certain. We will cut the Federal work force over a period of years by 270,000 positions to its lowest level in thirty years and take all that money to pay for this crime bill. The savings will be used to put 100,000 police officers on the street, a twenty percent increase. It will be used to keep 100,000 violent criminals off the street. It will be used to give our young people something to say yes to, places where they can go after school where they are safe, where they can do constructive things that will help them to build their lives, where teachers replace gang leaders as role models. All of these things should be done and will be done.

This bill makes it illegal for juveniles to own handguns and, yes, without eroding the rights of sports men and women in this country, we will finally ban these assault weapons from our street that have no purpose other than to kill.

But my friends, let us be frank with each other: Even this great law, the toughest and smartest crime bill in our history, cannot do the job alone. By its own words, it is still a law. It must be implemented by you, and it must be supplemented by you. Even when we put a new police officer on your block, the officer can't make you safe unless you come out of your home and help the officer do his or her job. Even when we keep our schools open late and give our children an alternative to drugs and gangs, your children won't learn the difference between right and wrong unless you teach them and they're in those schools when they're open. Our country will not truly be safe again until all Americans take personal responsibility for themselves, their families, and their

communities. This day is the beginning, not the end, of our effort to restore safety and security to the people of this country.

Here in Washington there is more that we can do. Today I am naming Vice President Gore, whose reinventing Government report first proposed the cuts in the bureaucracy that will pay for this bill, to head the President's Prevention Council. I want him to work with every Department to make this a coherent and cost-effective effort to give communities the tools they need to prevent crime from occurring in the first place. In a few weeks I will name the head of our program to put 100,000 new police on the street.

And early next month, the Justice Department will award grants to put new police on the street in 150 more cities and towns that applied last year.

Last Sunday, I was in Maryland, and Senator Sarbanes told me that already one of our community policing grants had resulted in the capture of a serious felon in a community in his State. This will make a difference. And I want to commend the Attorney General and the Justice Department for being determined to do this right, to get this money out to the grassroots so that we can hire the police and get on with the job.

Thirdly, in the coming months the Vice President and I will hold forums on crime and violence all across our country, with all kinds of people from all walks of life, leading up here to a meeting at the White House next year to launch a national effort at the grassroots level in each and every community to implement the crime bill properly, to enshrine the values and common sense the crime bill represents, and to do something about this terrible scourge of violence that is especially gripping our children and robbing them of their future. We intend to continue the fight, and we want you to keep working with us.

Today we remember the thousands of officers who gave their lives to make our Nation safer, whose names are inscribed in a stone memorial just a mile away from here. We remember the innocent victims whose lives were lost and whose families were shattered by the scourge of violent crime. We remember three, James Darby, Polly Klaas, and Jody Sposato, whose deaths literally galvanized this Nation and shamed our political system into action. It is in their memories that I dedicate this bill. I hope this law will always be remembered in their names. And I hope, too, that we will remember what the Vice President said, "The ultimate victory of this law will be in the salvation of the children whose names we will never know."

Early in 1992, I was walking through one of the countless kitchens of a hotel lobby in New York on my way to a dinner when a waiter working there came up to me and grabbed me, and he said, "Mr. President"—he didn't call me Governor then—he said, "My ten-year-old boy is studying this election in school, and he says I should vote for you." But he said, "I want to tell you something first. I came here as an immigrant, and the place where I lived was very poor, and we were very poor. But at least we were free. Now we live here, and we have more money, but we are not free. We are not free because my boy can't walk across the street and play in the park unless I am with him. We are not free because my boy cannot walk to school unless I am with him. Make my boy free."

On the day after the crime bill was signed, I received a letter carefully typed from a very young man who is the son of a member of our administration. It was so eloquent. He said, "I live in a good neighborhood. I go to a nice school. You wouldn't think people like me would care about this crime bill, but I have been keeping up with it every day because every time I go out with my friends at night to a movie or to a game, I think someone might shoot me before I get home. Now I feel so much better."

My fellow Americans, this is about freedom. Without responsibility, without order, without lawfulness, there is no freedom. Today the will of the American people has triumphed over a generation of division and paralysis. We've won a chance to work together.

So in that spirit, let us rededicate ourselves today to making this law become the life of our country, to restoring the sense of right and wrong that built our country, and to make it safe, not in words but in fact, in the lifeblood of every child and every citizen of this country who believes in the promise of America. Let us make it real.