

our institutional and constitutional order. But we showed the world that we have begun to mature in our society. In Guatemala we've begun to learn what the democratic society is and means. This has been done incredibly peacefully, and I say "incredibly" because of the antecedents in our country. And we have been able to get out of a political crisis, which was very difficult, between the three branches of Government, with an agreement which was the best one possible for our people, because the constitutional changes for the first time have taken place without a coup d'etat. The interruption of the constitutional mandate of the Congress and the supreme court is going to be corrected by the purest expression of democracy, that is, a popular election. Therefore, I gave the example of Guatemala, excuse me for that, but I think our problems are the worst. And I think that the rest of the region also has given signs of consolidating the democratic system.

So there was no conditionality; quite the opposite. What we had was total backing of a proposal and a desire for the United States to continue helping us consolidate our democracies, fragile in some cases, more consolidated in other cases, but continue to work for the sake of consolidating peace.

President Clinton. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's 36th news conference began at 11:22 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. President De Leon spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks on Signing the Brady Bill *November 30, 1993*

Thank you very much, Sarah and Jim and General Reno, Mr. Vice President, Mrs. Musick. Thank you for your wonderful remarks.

There were two Members of Congress who inadvertently were not introduced. I want to recognize them because they've played a major role in this. One of our Democratic leaders in the House, Steny Hoyer and Senator Herb Kohl from Wisconsin, who also sponsored the bill to make it illegal for mi-

nors to possess handguns, and I thank you for that, sir.

Senator Metzenbaum, Congressman Schumer, Senator Mitchell; and others who gave birth to this great effort; to all the law enforcement representatives, the Governors, the mayors, the folks from Handgun Control who are here; to the families whose lives would have been changed for the better if the Brady bill had been law; Mrs. Musick and my friend Cathy Gould and her children, Lindsey and Christopher who lost a husband and father who would be here today if the Brady bill had been law, I am honored to have all of you here in the White House. I also want to say a special word of thanks to the Members of Congress who were out there early on this, when there was some considerable political risk either attached to it or thought to be attached. The Brady bill was first introduced almost 7 years ago by Congressman Ed Feighan of Ohio on February 4th, 1987. I can't resist saying a special word of thanks to the Members who come from difficult districts who voted for this bill. My good friend and Congressman, Beryl Anthony, from Arkansas lost a tough race in 1992 and part of the reason was that he voted for the Brady bill. And the NRA came after him in an unusual election. He said to me on the way in here, he said, "If it cost my seat, it was worth it."

Everything that should be said about this has already been said by people whose lives are more profoundly imbued with this issue than mine. But there are some things I think we need to think about that we learned from this endeavor as we look ahead to what still needs to be done.

Since Jim and Sarah began this crusade, more than 150,000 Americans, men, women, teenagers, children, even infants, have been killed with handguns. And many more have been wounded—150,000 people from all walks of life who should have been here to share Christmas with us. This couple saw through a fight that really never should have had to occur, because still, when people are confronted with issues of clear common sense and overwhelming evidence, too often we are prevented from doing what we know we ought to do by our collective fears, whatever they may be.

The Brady bill has finally become law in a fundamental sense not because of any of us but because grassroots America changed its mind and demanded that this Congress not leave here without doing something about this. And all the rest of us—even Jim and Sarah—did was to somehow light that spark that swept across the people of this country and proved once again that democracy can work. America won this battle. Americans are finally fed up with violence that cuts down another citizen with gunfire every 20 minutes.

And we know that this bill will make a difference. As Sarah said, the Washington Post pointed out that about 50,000 people have been denied the right to buy a handgun in just four States since 1989. Don't let anybody tell you that this won't work. I got a friend back home who sold a gun years ago to a guy who had escaped from a mental hospital, that he hadn't seen in 10 years. And he pulled out that old form from the 1968 act and said, "Have you ever been convicted of a crime? Have you ever been in a mental hospital?" The guy said, no, no and put the form back in the drawer. And 12 hours later six people were dead, and my friend is not over it to this day. Don't tell me this bill will not make a difference. That is not true. It is not true.

But we all know there is more to be done. The crime bill not only has 100,000 new police officers who, properly trained and deployed, will lower the crime rate by preventing crime, not just by catching criminals. It also has a ban on several assault weapons, long overdue; a ban on handgun ownership and restrictions on possession of handguns by minors; the beginning of reform of our Federal firearms licensing systems; and an effort to make our schools safer. This is a good beginning. And there will be more to be done after that.

But I ask you to think about what this means and what we can all do to keep this going. We cannot stop here. I'm so proud of what others are doing. I'm proud of the work that Reverend Jesse Jackson has been doing, going back now to the streets and talking to the kids and telling them to stop shooting each other and cutting each other up, and to turn away from violence. I'm proud of people like David Plaza, not so well-

known, a former gang member who has turned his life around and now coordinates a program called gang alternative programs in Norwalk, California, telling gang members they have to take personal responsibility for their actions and turn away from violence; Reverend William Moore, who organized parents and educators and other clergy in north Philadelphia to provide safety corridors for kids going to and from school—160,000 children stay home every day because they're scared to go to school in this country—and all the police officers on the street who have restored confidence in their neighborhoods, becoming involved in ways that often are way beyond the call of duty, people like Officer Anthony Fuedo of Boston, who took a tough section of east Boston and transformed it from a neighborhood full of fear to one which elderly people now feel safe sitting on benches again.

We can do this but only if we do it together. And I ask you to think about this: I come from a State where half the folks have hunting and fishing licenses. I can still remember the first day when I was a little boy out in the country putting a can on top of a fencepost and shooting a .22 at it. I can still remember the first time I pulled a trigger on a .410 shotgun because I was too little to hold a .12 gauge. I can remember these things. This is part of the culture of a big part of America. But people have taken that culture—we just started deer season—I live in a place where we still close schools and plants on the first day of deer season, nobody is going to show up anyway. [*Laughter*] We just started deer season at home and a lot of other places. We have taken this important part of the life of millions of Americans and turned it into an instrument of maintaining madness. It is crazy. Would I let anybody change that life in America? Not on your life. Has that got anything to do with the Brady bill or assault weapons or whether the police have to go out on the street confronting teenagers who are better armed than they are? Of course not.

This is the beginning of something truly wonderful in this country if we have learned to separate out all this stuff we've been hearing all these years, trying to make the American people afraid that somehow their quality

of life is going to be undermined by doing stuff that people of common sense and good will would clearly want to do and every law enforcement official in America telling us to do it.

So, I plead with all of you today, when you leave here to be reinvigorated by this, to be exhilarated by the triumph of Jim and Sarah Brady and all these other folks who didn't let their personal losses defeat them but instead used it to come out here and push us to do better.

And each of you in turn, take your opportunity not to let people ever again in this country use a legitimate part of our American heritage in ways that blinds us to our obligation to the present and the future. If we have broken that, then there is nothing we cannot do. And when I go and sign this bill in a minute, it will be step one in taking our streets back, taking our children back, reclaiming our families and our future.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former White House Press Secretary James Brady, who was wounded in the 1981 assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan; his wife, Sarah, who is head of Hand Gun Control, Inc.; and Melanie Musick, who became a supporter of the Brady bill after her husband was shot and killed in 1990. H.R. 1025, "To provide for a waiting period before the purchase of a handgun, and for the establishment of a national instant criminal background check system to be contacted by firearms dealers before the transfer of any firearm," approved November 30, was assigned Public Law No. 103-159.

Remarks on Presenting the Presidential Medals of Freedom

November 30, 1993

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, all. We have Members of Congress here, members and former members of the United States Supreme Court, and a number of distinguished Americans who share in common a friendship with one or more of our distinguished honorees today. I welcome you all here.

One of the greatest pleasures of being President is the authority to choose recipi-

ents of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest honor given to civilians by the United States. And so today it is my honor to award the Medal of Freedom to five great reformers of the 20th century who changed America for the better: Mrs. Marjory Stoneman Douglas, the late Joseph Rauh, Judge John Minor Wisdom, the late Justice Thurgood Marshall, and Justice William Brennan.

Today they join a distinguished list of citizens in a process initiated by my great predecessor Harry Truman in 1945. Like Harry Truman, all five of them rank among our Nation's great champions of the underdog. Indeed, most of their lives are stories of underdogs themselves. Two of them are sons of immigrants. Justice Brennan's parents came here from Ireland near the time that Mr. Rauh's father and grandfather came here from Germany. One, Justice Marshall, was the great-grandson of slaves. And one, Mrs. Douglas, is descended from a founder of the Underground Railroad. America gave them the freedom to be their best, and they honored our country by becoming five legendary defenders of our freedoms in return.

When this medal was created at the end of World War II, America had great decisions to make about what kind of nation we wanted to be. The postwar years were those which unlocked great forces that would transform our society profoundly and permanently. A baby boom and a development boom brought Americans more mobility and more economic opportunity than they had ever enjoyed before. But this new mobility also opened our eyes to problems we had been previously unwilling to acknowledge: the legal barriers set up to prevent black Americans and working people from sharing in the opportunities afforded to others; the growth that devoured the value of our disappearing regional identities and fragile natural landscapes.

It was during this time in 1947 that Marjory Stoneman Douglas published her best-selling book, "The Everglades: River of Grass," a monumental work on Florida's unique ecosystem, one of our Nation's greatest natural resources. The next year, 1948,