

**Remarks on the Next Generation
COPS Initiative in Alexandria,
Virginia**
January 14, 1999

Madam Attorney General; Deputy Attorney General Holder; Associate Attorney General Fisher; Mayor Donley; Chief Samarra; all the members of the Alexandria police force; to all the other chiefs and law enforcement officials who are here; the representatives of law enforcement who are here; Gil Gallegos, the president of the National FOP; Sam Cabral, the International Union of Police Associations president; Ron Neubauer, the International Association of Chiefs of Police president: I am delighted to see all of you.

I really enjoyed listening to Senator Biden and Senator Robb reminisce about how this bill came to be. I want to say a special word of thanks, if I might, to the team at the Justice Department and especially to Joe Brann, who himself is a former chief of police, the Director of our COPS program. Thank you, Joe, for doing such a great job with our police officers. [*Inaudible*]

You know, when I asked Janet Reno to be Attorney General, she had been the prosecutor in Miami. And the main thing I wanted to do with the Justice Department was to deal with what I thought the biggest problem in America was at that time—legal problem—which is that there was a very, very high crime rate, and the violent crime rate was especially high. And there was—I had spent a lot of time both as attorney general of my own State, and as a Governor, I had run a prison system and watched it explode. I had managed a large State police operation. Then, as a Governor and later as a candidate, I had actually walked the streets and been in the neighborhoods of New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, San Antonio, Los Angeles, looking for strategies that worked to bring the crime rate down.

And so when I asked Janet Reno to come on, I said the most important thing is that the local police, the local prosecutors, the local mayors, the people that are out there worrying about the crime rate, they have to know not only that we are their friends, but we are their partners. And we're going to

stop doing what normally happens in Washington, which is that you make speeches and talk tough and nothing happens. I would rather say less and do more.

And by 1993, when I took office, we were beginning to see in many major cities crime rates go down because of the development at the local level of community policing strategies. And it is true that we would never have been able to do this without the leadership of Senator Biden and the support of Senator Robb. We finally were able to pass that crime bill, to get into community policing, to have 100,000 police on the street, to ban the assault weapons, to build more prisons, to have more prevention programs to keep kids out of trouble in the first place. And I would like to say a special word of appreciation to law enforcement for proving that Joe and Chuck and I were right.

You see a guy like Joe Biden up here, full of enthusiasm—wouldn't it break your heart if it turned out to be wrong? What kind of speech—can you imagine him giving a hang-dog speech? It would have been terrible. [*Laughter*] So I want to thank you. I want to thank you for a lot of things, for staying with us with the assault weapons ban, for staying with us with the Brady bill, which has now kept a quarter of a million—a quarter of a million—felons, fugitives, and stalkers from getting handguns.

I want to thank you for proving that there are people like Irma Rivera out there in America—all over America—who want to wear uniforms and make the streets safer and give our kids their futures back. She was terrific, wasn't she? Let's give her another hand. [*Applause*] Thank you.

So we're very happy. If you look there at the reduction in crime on that chart, you see that crime rates overall have dropped to a 25-year low; property crime down; violent crimes declined 20 percent in the last 6 years. The murder rate is at its lowest level nationwide in 30 years, mostly due to the dropping number of young people with guns. We can take a lot of pride in what has happened and in the strategy that has brought it about.

We have seen the impact of more police. We've seen the impact of the prevention programs, of the penalties, the efforts to get guns out of the hands of criminals, the burning

out of the crack epidemic, thank the Lord. And we've seen greater peace of mind coming, probably more than anything else, from the presence of the police on the street, in the neighborhood, in a preventive, cooperative fashion. And that is very, very good.

Now, having said all that, I want to go back to a point Senator Biden made. Dealing with crime, now that it's down, is kind of like dealing with the economy. We've got the lowest unemployment rate in 29 years. But it doesn't mean anything to somebody without a job or to a depressed neighborhood. And given how volatile things are in the world—all you have to do is pick up the paper every day and read about it—we've got to stay on the economy.

The same thing is true of crime except, in some ways, more so, because, yes, the crime rate is the lowest it's been in 30 years, and you heard the Attorney General say that means there will be under 3 million victims. Three million people is a lot of people—3 million families, 3 million friends. I don't know anyone who seriously believes that we have a country as safe as it ought to be. I don't know anyone who seriously believes that we're saving every young person and keeping them out of trouble in the first place. I don't know anyone who seriously believes that we can be the kind of country we want to be if we have to continue these levels of incarceration, if we have to continue spending more and more money on prisons that we ought to be spending on education, on after-school programs, on summer school programs, on keeping these kids out of trouble in the first place.

So I say, in spite of all this celebration, what we should do is to say, "Okay, we know what works. Now let's bear down and keep doing it until we have got this problem as small as it can possibly be." No serious person thinks that we are there. So, for my money, what we ought to be doing today is saying, "Hallelujah, this works. Now let's keep on doing it until we have squeezed every last drop of possibility for peace and security out of this strategy."

We are, as you have heard, on time, ahead of schedule, under budget with the 100,000 police program. In fact, we have already funded more than 92,000 of the 100,000

community police. We will fund them all in the near future, and that is very, very encouraging.

Now, we also have to deal with the fact—you heard Senator Biden mention this—that our community policing effort is set to expire in the year 2000. I still believe we need to do more. It's still dangerous work; 155 of your colleagues lost their lives in the last year. It's still a numbers game in some places.

When we started this 100,000 police program, the violent crime rate had tripled in the previous 30 years, but the size of the police forces, in the aggregate, had gone up only 10 percent. So we got the violent crime rate and the overall crime rate coming down, but there's still not an intersection. In other words, the police force is going from 500,000 to 600,000—that's a 20 percent increase—but we still need to do more.

Now, today I came here to say that in my balanced budget proposal to the Congress, which I will unveil at the State of the Union Address, we will have nearly \$1.3 billion, an increase of more than \$6 billion over 5 years—\$1.3 billion for the next year, budget year—to renew our community policing program. This will help to hire and redeploy an additional 30–50,000 community police officers over that same period. It will be the best investment we can make in a safe future for our children, and I hope we can pass it with your help.

We also, as has already been said, need to make sure that our police officers have 21st century tools to do their jobs. Today, drug dealers communicate by cell phones and pagers; scam artists work the Internet; gangs carry cutting-edge weaponry. Criminals have the best technology. Police should, too. Therefore, today I propose we devote \$350 million in the balanced budget to put crime-fighting technology into the hands of police officers.

For too long, we have seen some criminals go free because the methods used to gather evidence were not up-to-date. But when police can report from their squad cars, rather than return to the station to fill out paperwork, they spend more time on the beat. When officers can track crime as it happens, using innovative crime-mapping technology,

they can respond more quickly and effectively.

Chief Samarra has told us what a difference these new tools can make here in Alexandria. And the Vice President has put together a task force to help more communities take maximum advantage of available technology.

Police carry a heavy burden, but we know they can't carry it alone, and we have to do more to engage all our communities in the fight against crime, to help win the fight police have been waging so successfully.

We also have in this budget additional funds for community-based crime-fighting, everything from neighborhood DA's to work closely with police and residents, to faith-based organizations to help to prevent juvenile crime.

And I want to say one last thing about the role of the police. We could never have gotten the prevention funds we have gotten in the last 5 years if the law enforcement community hadn't advocated it. I was astonished when I came to Washington to see how many Members of Congress were literally afraid to vote for prevention—afraid that people back home would think they were soft on crime or weak or looking the other way. But when all the people in uniform who had their lives on the line came up and testified, "Hey, we cannot jail our way out of this problem. We've got to keep more of these kids out of trouble in the first place. That's the least expensive, most humane, most ethical to proceed here"—you made it possible for these programs to work.

One of the things that's really going to help you do your job is something that is going to be in my education budget I announced last week. We are going to triple the funds for after-school programs to keep kids learning in school—something positive, rather than learning something negative on the streets—when during the hours after school the juvenile crime rate soars.

None of this would have been possible if the police officers of the country hadn't been willing to come to the Congress and say, "Hey, this works. Help us keep these kids out of trouble in the first place." So we thank you for that as well.

America is grateful for the hard work of our men and women in uniform. Every day you make our streets and schools safer, our homes more secure, and in so doing—make no mistake about it—you make freedom more real for the American people. We know you can't do it alone. We've tried to be good partners. We intend to be better partners as we move to the next century.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:42 a.m. at the Alexandria Police Station. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Kerry J. Donley of Alexandria; and Chief Charles E. Samarra and Officer Irma Rivera, Alexandria Police Department. The President also referred to the Community Oriented Police Services (COPS) program.

Proclamation 7162—Religious Freedom Day, 1999

January 14, 1999

*By the President of the United States
of America*

A Proclamation

On Religious Freedom Day we commemorate a landmark achievement in the history of our Nation: the adoption in 1786 by the Virginia legislature of a religious freedom statute. This historic legislation, drafted by Thomas Jefferson and co-sponsored by James Madison, was designed to prevent religious discrimination and to protect Virginians from pressure to join or support any church. It served as the model for the First Amendment of our Constitution, the guarantee of freedom of religion that has beckoned so many people fleeing persecution to seek sanctuary in this land.

Americans are a deeply religious people, and our right to worship as we choose, to follow our own personal beliefs, is the source of much of our Nation's strength. Our churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, and other houses of worship are centers of community service and community life. They preserve and promote the values and religious traditions that have infused our efforts