

after Martin Luther King was killed, 9 weeks after Lyndon Johnson said he wouldn't run for election. And the country was totally divided. And there were more riots in the streets, and the National Capital was the scene of a riot in which block after block burned to the ground.

A few months afterward, we had a Presidential election, the first Presidential election in modern times fought on the grounds of us versus them, where President Nixon, a man of immense talent, I might add, was elected on a theme of the silent majority. Now, some of you remember that. Now, if there's a silent majority, there must, by definition, be a loud minority, right? I was one of them; I know. [*Laughter*] So it was "us" and "them." A few months after that, the economic expansion was over. And we've been having us-and-them politics ever since. And for 7 years, I have worked to end that, I think with greater success out here in the country than in the Capital, but nonetheless, it's been an honor to try.

I'm telling you this as a citizen now, why I'm glad you're here. You have to help us define what this election is about. And that's what we're going to use your contribution for. But those of you who are older, like me, you remember what it was like in the mid-sixties. As a citizen, I have waited for 35 years for my country to be in a position to build the future of our dreams for our children. That's what this is about. It's not just about choosing a person. We have to define the job and the direction. Then the choice will take care of itself. You know what I think. But just remember how quickly these things can get away and what a heavy responsibility we have to make the most of a truly magic moment.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Bren Simon, Danny Abraham, Cynthia Friedman, and John and Nancy Carter, luncheon cohosts; Joseph J. Andrew, national chair, Democratic National Committee; Lori Deutsch, wife of Representative Peter Deutsch; Gov. James B. Hunt, Jr., of North Carolina; and former professional soccer player Pele, Minister of Extraordinary Sports of Brazil.

Remarks on the Shooting Death at Theo J. Buell Elementary School in Michigan and an Exchange With Reporters in West Palm Beach

February 29, 2000

The President. I would just like to say how very sorry I am about the shooting death of the first grade student at Buell Elementary School in the Mount Morris community near Flint, Michigan. I know the prayers of America are with the child's family and fellow classmates and all the people of that small community.

I think it is important that today our thoughts be with them. And I don't know, obviously, all the facts; I may not even have as many as you do. But I think this is once again a call to us to do whatever we can to protect our children from this sort of violence and this tragedy. And I'm just very, very sorry, and I wanted to say that.

Gun Control Legislation

Q. Mr. President, is there anything that can be done to stop tragedies like this?

The President. Well, what I'd like to do, Mark [Mark Knoller, CBS Radio], is make sure I have all the facts before I say that—you know, if we had had one of the laws that we're proposing, it would make a difference. I don't want to—I think today is a day for grieving and regret, sympathy and support for the family and the community and the other kids and the people in that school. This must be an agony for all of them.

But I think that—I do think just generally that we should be really pushing for the child safety locks and even more for the investment in safe gun technology so we can complete this research and see if we can't develop guns that can only be fired by their adult owners.

I think that I'm very troubled. I don't want to comment too much on the facts of this case, but if you get away from this case, as I said when I was inside, just the accidental death rate of our young people from guns is so much higher than any other country that it's clear that we need to keep working on this, and I hope that we will.

Q. You said inside it has been a year since Columbine. Is there anything you can do, a

stick you can use to get Congress to move? Are you willing to say, for example, that you would veto Commerce-Justice if it doesn't have the protections you're looking for?

The President. Well, I believe that we will get some action this year, and I wouldn't rule anything in or out. But I don't want to get into the tactics now, except to say that—keep in mind there is a budget—there is a bill in conference, and one of them is pretty good, and one of them is not. We've got to try to get the best bill we can out of conference. And I just hope that everyone will weigh in and try to get this done. It's very important to the future.

Q. You did seem to indicate in your speech inside that this should be an election issue.

The President. Oh, I do believe that. I think the issue of—not this terrible tragedy, but the issue of gun safety, I think, definitely should be. We ought to make a decision as a people. That's why we have these elections. And we can do that, you see, without any name-calling or anything. People can just state what their positions are and why, and the American people can make their judgments. But I do think, to me, it ought to be one of the big goals of our country to make America the safest big country in the world, and therefore, is a proper subject of debate in this election. It's nothing but an issue, so there's no need for name-calling or anger or anything else. People should just state what they feel should be done, and the American people can make up their mind who is right.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:48 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to 6-year-old Kayla Rolland, who was shot and mortally wounded by a 6-year-old classmate in Mount Morris Township, MI. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on the Establishment of the President's Council on the Future of Princeville, North Carolina

February 29, 2000

As the first city in the United States founded by former slaves, Princeville, North Carolina, holds a special and highly significant place in our Nation's history. In its early days, Princeville was called Freedom Hill by fleeing African-Americans who settled along the banks of the River Tar under the protection of Union troops at the close of the Civil War. In more recent times, repeated flooding from the River Tar has caused damage in Princeville which was devastated this fall by the particularly severe floods that accompanied Hurricane Floyd.

Today I am announcing the creation, by Executive order, of the President's Council on the Future of Princeville, North Carolina. This Council will bring together representatives from 12 Federal agencies, several key members of my Cabinet, and chaired by Sally Katzen of the Office of Management and Budget. It will work with elected officials, the private sector, community and non-profit groups to recommend measures to preserve and protect Princeville for the future. I have asked the Council to move promptly to recommend action that my administration can take to help repair and rebuild Princeville and, to the extent possible, protect the town from future floods.

We have taken many steps since this terrible flooding hit Princeville last fall, from immediately dispatching emergency workers to making resources available for the people of Princeville in their efforts to rebuild. It is my firm belief and the policy of my administration that we must do more to help the people of Princeville who have bravely chosen to stay and rebuild their badly damaged hometown. We owe them our best efforts.

It is enormously important that, as we celebrate Black History Month and honor the