

*February 1997: President Clinton, Mayor Menino, Sister Jeanne and 1995-1997 MYC Roxbury Rep Lanita Tolentino participated in this roundtable discussion on juvenile crime.*

**THE WHITE HOUSE**

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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
IN DISCUSSION OF JUVENILE JUSTICE ISSUES  
McCormack Building  
University of Massachusetts  
Boston, Massachusetts

**10:19 A.M. EST**

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor, and let me thank all the panelists who are here and all of those who are in the audience -- people who represent law enforcement groups around America, people who represent the families who have suffered loss.

We are here today for a simple reason: Boston proves that we can take the streets back of our country from juvenile violence and crime, from murder, from lost lives, that we can give our children back their childhood and we can give our streets and our neighborhoods back to the families who live on them.

And what we are trying to do in Washington, what I am determined to do in this legislative session, is to take the lessons learned and the triumphs achieved here in Boston and the progress made, and embody it in a legislative proposal that the Attorney General has worked very hard with me on to try to give other communities the chance to do what you have done here. It's not a very complicated strategy, but it's the most sensible one we can follow.

Between 1990 and 1995, juvenile homicides dropped by 80 percent in the city of Boston. Since July of 1995, not a single child under 16 has been killed by a gun in this city. Our anti-gang and youth violence strategy essentially rests on four elements, all of which can be found in what has been done here: first, targeting violent gangs and juveniles with more prosecutors and tougher laws; second, working to make our children gun-free and drug-free; third, streamlining and reforming our juvenile justice system; and fourth, giving our young people something to say yes to, not just looking for ways to punish those who have done wrong but to give kids a chance to make some positive steps and actually have a little constructive fun in their lives. I've seen that here in Boston, too.

I have a lot to be grateful to the Mayor for, but one of the things that I'm especially grateful for is that he gave me a chance early on in his term to sit and meet with his youth council, the young people that have advised him and worked with him, along with Sister Jean, who has been to Washington to help us out a couple of times.

And I have seen the remarkable balance of your program; I'm excited about it. I also know that for this to succeed nationwide everyone has a part to play. We can pass laws in Washington, we can be supportive at the federal level, but we have to have the support of grass-root citizens, of business leaders, religious leaders, as well as those in law enforcement and parents and obviously the political leaders here.

So, Mr. Mayor, I'm glad to be here. Governor, Senator, Congressman, thank you all for having us here, and I think I'd like to let you go on with the program now and listen.

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ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Mr. President, what you see is a partnership that really works, where people really care. And they've come together and they don't care about turf; they just want to do what's right by the young people of Boston. And it is one of the most exciting efforts that I have seen in this country. It is based on absolute bipartisanship -- I mean, Republicans and Democrat prosecutors working together, and it's exciting when we put aside partisan concerns and look at kids. We are all in this together, and it's an example again of what works, when you take community police officers -- you will remember at the Department of Justice, two community police officers from Dorchester came down with three young men. And those young men were saying those police officers were their mentors, making a difference in their lives.

The work with domestic violence gets to the heart of so much of youth violence. What the probation officers have done is just so extraordinary. And teachers are a part of this, as someone pointed out. And the medical community is in it. We listened to judges and representatives from a hospital talk about how they intervene with victims to interrupt the cycle of violence.

But most importantly, I think what they do in Boston that I think is so exciting is they trust the young people, they listen to the young people, and they listen well. And they believe that young people can make a difference, that they can be held accountable, and that if they're given just a few of the tools, they can truly, truly make a difference.

What the clergy has done here -- Reverend Brown, I was in Reverend Wall's (phonetic) church back this summer. He was working at the juvenile court that day, but Mrs. Reverend Wall was there. And it was just such a wonderful experience to see how the clergy was reaching out to everybody to create a home and a center. With the legislation that you're proposing, we can give other communities an example to do what Boston has done. And the people of Boston and the young people of Boston deserve so much of the credit. (Applause.)

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THE PRESIDENT: If I could just say very briefly, in support of not only what the Justice Department has done, but also we have Ray Kelly here, who's our Under Secretary of the Treasury for Enforcement: We do recognize that one of our important roles nationally -- and I want to thank all the members of the Senate and the House that are here for their support -- is to do what we can to at least disarm people who should not have guns.

And I think the Brady Bill has helped, the assault weapons bill has helped, the work the Treasury has done to try to be more disciplined in who can be federally licensed to sell guns has helped. There are fewer than half the number of people licensed to sell guns today than there were four years ago -- fewer than half. And I thank you for that, for your efforts there.

And in this bill we have two other things: We extend the provisions of the Brady Bill to violent juvenile offenders, and we require some sort of trigger or gun lock mechanism to be on guns that are in the reach of children. I think that's very important. I thank you for what you're doing. (Applause.)

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THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Mayor. I don't think we can possibly minimize the role that you have played in all this, the impetus you gave to everybody else. You are someone who is as gifted as anyone I've ever known at bringing people together and making people feel comfortable when they're from different walks of life, in the same room together, working on the same thing. I think the enormous trust the people of this city have in you is one of the reasons this has happened. And I thank you for that.

Let me also say just briefly in closing two points. Number one, when I asked Janet Reno to become Attorney General I knew that I was -- that we were together taking a chance, because I had been a state attorney general and a governor, dealing with crime problems -- governor of a small state dealing with crime problems on a community basis. And she had been a prosecuting attorney in a very large and a very complicated county, with enormous and very challenging problems. But neither one of us had ever dealt with the federal system except on the other end of it.

I did it because we believe together that the only way we would ever get the crime rate going back down and start saving children's lives and giving people the confidence they need to deal with all the other challenges -- the economic, the educational, the other challenges we face -- is if the lessons that were being manifested at the community level in America could somehow sweep the country and be reflected in national policy.

When I became President and I discovered that Senator Biden, then the Chairman of the Senate committee that had control of this legislation, believed the same thing, we feted lot of heat and became vulnerable to a lot of very what was in the short run quite effective political rhetoric. We were trying to take everybody's guns away and throwing money at these problems, and all that. But you see, now, four years later, we know the truth, that what we have tried to do is simply give more people like Mayor Menino and Probation Officer Brooks and Commissioner Evans and Captain Dunford and all the others a chance to succeed all over America. That's what we try to do.

It is a very simply strategy, but it will work. It will work. And today the juvenile program I'm going to announce is basically an attempt to take what you have proved works here and give those tools to every community in the nation to follow. Let

me just say, no disrespect to anybody else, but you know the people I listened most closely to today were Terry and Lanita because they're going to be around here long after I'm gone.

And what we have to do, the rest of us, is to construct a system that works for them and that works for parents like the Sherrys, who lost a child because of the failures of America and who have spent their lives now trying to make sure it doesn't happen to anybody else. So this is a huge deal.

There was a report -- I will just close with this -- there was a report that was issued a few weeks ago by the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, saying that 75 percent of all the teenagers who lose their lives, who are murdered, in the entire Industrial World are murdered in America -- 75 percent. Now, that hasn't happened in Boston in over a year and a half. If it doesn't happen in Boston, it doesn't have to happen any place else. We can turn this around.

America now knows we can bring the crime rate down. Now America has to learn that we can save our children and that we do not have to put up with this, and that the only way to solve it is the way you have solved it, but that we have a job in Washington to create the conditions and give you the tools which will make it possible for you to solve it. That's what we're trying to do. But let's not forget what the stakes are.

You know, I've spent a lot of time -- we had a big telecommunications trade agreement that we finished last weekend which will create a million new jobs in America over the next 12 years. I want every child in Boston to be allowed to have a chance to get one of those jobs.

Let's do first things first. Let's get this done and let's remember that what we're really trying to do is make what you've done here possible for children in communities all across America.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)