

Million Moms March Rally

5/14/00

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

May 14, 2000

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AND THE FIRST LADY
AT MILLION MOMS MARCH RALLY

The South Lawn

9:15 A.M. EDT

MRS. CLINTON: Good morning and Happy Mother's Day. (Applause.) Bill and I are so happy to have all of you here at the White House as we begin the Million Mom March.

I want to thank all of you who have come from all over the country. I want to thank Donna Dees-Thomases, the founder of the Million Mom March -- (applause) -- all of you who have organized and are part of the organizing committee. I want to thank Mike Barnes and Handgun Control and all of the organizations that have worked with the march. (Applause.)

But I especially want to thank all the moms, and the dads, who are here. (Applause.) And all of the kids, because, really, that is what this is all about. There are lots of members of Congress who are here, both Senators and members of the House of Representatives, and we thank you for being here. And we hope that by this time next year all of the hard work that many of you have done will really see the results in legislation that we're fighting for. (Applause.)

You know, in a few minutes we're going to be marching together. And we are marching not as Democrats or Republicans or independents. We are not marching as African Americans or Native Americans or Latinos or Asian Americans or any kind of American that's hyphenated. We are marching as Americans, and American moms who care about American kids. (Applause.)

And we have come together as mothers to our nation's capital, and to cities and towns throughout our nation, to say that we will not be satisfied until we do everything we can individually and together to protect our children from gun violence.

And this is really an appropriate way to celebrate Mother's Day, because Mother's Day started when Anna Jarvis, a young Appalachian mom in 1858 organized what she called Mother's Work Days to improve sanitation in her community. She and some other moms back in

the middle of the 19th century said, we're not doing enough to keep our children safe from garbage and public health hazards.

And a half a century later, it was Anna Jarvis's daughter who fulfilled her mother's vision by working for the first Memorial Day for Mothers. And then another important American woman, Julia Ward Howe, who wrote The Battle Hymn of the Republic, and had seen the devastation caused by the Civil War and other wars, as well as disease, wanted to bring mothers together for a Mother's Day for Peace. And she urged mothers everywhere in 1870 to come together to work for peace.

Well, I think it is that same spirit that brings all of us here today. It's as if Anna Jarvis and her daughter, and Julia Ward Howe and all the mothers who worked to protect their children in all the years past have inspired us to be on this march.

We've come here in the names of the children we love, the children we have lost and the children we want to save. I have met too many parents who have endured any mother or father's worst nightmare, having to bury their own child. And I have met those brave mothers and fathers who have said that they will not let their child's death be in vain. And many of them are our real inspirations today.

Now, some have asked why women, why mothers -- because we know that gun violence is not a women's issue. It is a family issue, a children's issue, it is an American issue. But I think it sometimes takes women to stand up and say, enough is enough. Enough is enough. (Applause.) We have had enough bloodshed, enough violence. When children are afraid to walk down their own blocks or walk into their own schools; or when parents are afraid to let children even visit neighbors, it is time to say, enough.

And what are we waiting for? Well, it is time for child safety locks. It is time to close the gun show loophole once and for all. (Applause.) It is time to ensure that people who buy and use guns know how to use them and store them safely. (Applause.) It is time to license gun owners like we license drivers, so we make sure they use their cars safely. (Applause.) It is long past time for common sense gun legislation like this.

Now, despite all the evidence, the gun lobby still argues against sensible gun measures. And we've heard it all before. They say guns don't kill; but in the nine months that Congress has failed to act, more than 20,000 Americans have lost their lives to gun violence. They say gun policies don't make a difference. Well, since the Brady Bill was enacted -- over their strong opposition -- 500,000 felons, fugitives and stalkers have been denied the handguns they tried to buy. (Applause.)

We know what works and we know getting there won't be easy. But we know we stand in a long line of women and men who throughout history have stood against violence and stood up for justice, often in the face of great opposition. And that is what we have to be prepared to do today. Because it's very simple. The mothers who are marching and countless millions of mothers like us around our country have a very simple Mother's Day message: we don't want

flowers or jewelry; we don't want a nice card or a fancy meal as much as we want our Congress to do the right thing to protect our children. (Applause.)

We will be marching today for common sense gun laws, but we will not stop with just marching. We will keep walking, we will keep running, we will keep marching, we will keep fighting and we will keep organizing until we are successful in our fight to keep our children safe. (Applause.)

And there are so many of you who here who have pledged to be part of a great movement, a movement that will change our country for the better.

And it is now my great honor to introduce one of the many, many moms who have made this march possible. For the past six months, Christine O'Brien has been organizing the mothers of New Jersey to come to Washington for this Million Mom March.

She came because of her beautiful 15 month old daughter, Bridget, who I was lucky enough to carry here to the podium. She wants to make sure that her daughter is never the victim of gun violence. Because as much as we try to raise our own children to be responsible, we want to protect our children against other children who are not so responsible. And that is what Christine is fighting for, she's marching for all of our children. Please welcome Christine O'Brien. (Applause.)

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THE PRESIDENT: Well, thank you very much and good morning. First of all, I think we ought to give Christine O'Brien another hand. (Applause.) She gave such a good speech, I was wishing she were running for Congress against some of those anti-gun registration -- (applause.)

I want to thank Donna Dees-Thomases and all the organizers and all the regions and all the states and all the communities, now over 60 of them -- I think about 70 now in the country where there will be marches today.

I want to thank my long-time friend, Mike Barnes, of Handgun Control. And I want to thank the many, many members of Congress who are here to march with you today, many of them over here. (Applause.)

I would also like to welcome you on behalf of not only Hillary and me, but also Al and Tipper Gore, who have embraced this challenge with us and believe so strongly in what you are trying to do. Our families care about it. (Applause.)

I want to say that -- I've put my notes away here, I've just one or two things I want to say. First of all, you may have noticed that when I was walking up here, this lovely Native American woman behind me started crying. That's because her child was killed on Mother's Day. She is the second mother I have met in the last 72 hours who lost a child on Mother's Day. There are so many -- there's another one.

One of the things your mothers teach you -- I want to cut to the chase here, let's get down to what this is all about. (Applause.) One of the things your mothers teach you when you're growing up is that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Right? (Applause.) How many of us had our mothers tell us, look both ways before you cross the street, tie your shoes before you start running; I don't want to get my shots, but an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure -- in every single way.

Now, what the argument in Washington, D.C. has been, the dominant argument for the last 30 years, since we first began to discuss this, is that an ounce of prevention is totally unacceptable and we'll try to throw 100 pounds of cure at it and hope it works out. That's the first thing I want to say. This is about prevention.

The second thing I want to say is, when I became President there were a lot of people I think who wondered whether the crime rate would ever go down, but for a combination of factors and a lot of people's efforts around the country, but certainly because of the Brady Bill, the assault weapons ban and other related efforts we now have the lowest crime rate in a quarter century and gun violence is down 35 percent. Now, that's the good news.

It's still the most violent civilized country in the world, with the highest murder rate. But at least we know we can make a difference now and we know what works, so nobody has an excuse anymore. It's not like we don't know that prevention works. We know it does work. (Applause.) One of the things mothers learn to do real early is not let their kids make excuses when they shouldn't. We don't have an excuse anymore.

Now, the third thing I want to -- the point I want to make is, the other side wins this argument on, basically, power, money and fear, and using labels. You know, there was a story this week saying, well, they have reduced support for these measures because white males -- not mothers, I might add -- are shying away from gun control. I want to tell you something, folks: this is their labels against our facts.

Now, they talk about the Second Amendment. Well, the Supreme Court says there is a constitutional right to travel. But we license car owners and we register cars and we have speed limits and we have child safety restraint laws and we have seat belt laws, and you don't hear people talk about car control. (Applause.) When is the last time you heard somebody stand up and give a speech about the imminent evils of car control --(applause) -- threatening our constitutional right to travel, car control.

Now, if somebody came to take all our cars and put them in somebody else's garage and we couldn't get around, we could talk about car control. Meanwhile, we are thankful for highway safety measures that keep our children alive. We believe an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure when it comes to exercising the constitutional right to travel. (Applause.)

And when people talk about -- as Christine said, and Hillary mentioned this -- they say guns don't kill people, people do. Well, even our adversaries fly around on airplanes a lot. Suppose I gave you the following speech tomorrow. Suppose I said, I'm really worried about

how crowded airports are -- and almost everybody who goes into an airport is honest -- and, after all, bombs don't kill people, people do. I'm going to take the metal detectors out of the airport, and the next time a plane blows up, we'll throw the book at them. (Laughter and applause.)

Folks, remember this. The facts are your friends. Don't let people get everybody all upset and thrown into a turmoil here and start screaming and yelling names and labels. We have not been responsible parents for our children because we have, in this one area of our national life, said we're not going to live on prevention, we're going to live on punishment alone.

And when we did finally take some preventive action with the Brady Bill, the assault weapons ban, the cop-killer bullet bans -- all of which were opposed, I might add, by the same people who say these measures are wrong -- they made a difference to the lives of Americans. They helped to make us safer. (Applause.)

Let me just say this. I respect so much those of you who are here today who lost loved ones, who are here to redeem the lives of the loved ones you lost by saving the lives of other people's children. I am grateful to you. (Applause.) America is grateful to you. You could be sitting home today burying your heartbreak and anger, and you undertook this journey. I know how painful it must be for you.

But just remember, you're being good mothers today. You're reminding all those people out there who have listened to these crazy excuses that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, that your little babies didn't have advantage of it, and you're just trying to give it to the other children in this country. This day is especially for you. Don't be deterred by the intimidation; don't be deterred by the screaming; don't be deterred by the political mountain you have to climb.

You just remember this: there are more people who think like you in America. (Applause.) What we have to do is to get them to think. The facts are your friends. You have to get them to think. And then you have to get them to make it clear that as they think, they will vote. When that happens, when everybody thinks about this, and once they think about it they decide to vote on what they think, you will have changed America. In the great tradition that runs from Seneca Falls to Selma, you will have redeemed the promise of freedom; you will have strengthened the bonds of community; you will have proved that the American Constitution works because decent people can stand against mountains of power and move those mountains for the betterment of their children. That's what you're doing.

God bless you and thank you. (Applause.)

END 9:40 A.M. EDT