

But I ask Congress to support them and also ask Congress to start this new century by abandoning another stale debate. For in addition to the old debate about whether we should focus on punishment or prevention and whether the Federal Government should make speeches or give money, there's a debate that unfortunately hasn't died out in Washington, and that's about whether it's better to strengthen the enforcement of the existing gun laws or to have strengthened gun laws.

The truth is, just like the other questions, the real answer is, we should do both. That's what we've done with the Brady bill. That's what we have done with the assault weapons ban. And we should do more. The drop in the crime rate has been due both to changing laws and to better enforcement and better prevention.

Last year we passed some sensible measures in the United States Senate, thanks to the help of Senator Kennedy and with the Vice President casting a tie-breaking vote. As he says, whenever he has to vote, we win. [Laughter] So by one vote, we were able to defeat the high-pressure tactics of the NRA to pass an important advance in doing background checks at gun shows and urban flea markets, having child safety locks for all new handguns, a ban on importing large capacity ammunition clips. But we couldn't pass it in the House of Representatives, even after the travesty of Columbine High School. I believe passing commonsense gun safety legislation should be the very first action of this Congress.

I will say again, to all the people who listen to these arguments, there has been no discernible increase in the burden on any law-abiding sportsperson in this entire country with the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban, but we've saved a lot of lives of kids, police officers, and citizens. And closing the gun show loophole, which is something I know something about because they're very popular in my part of the country, or the urban flea market loophole or banning the import of these large capacity ammunition clips, which people can't manufacture and sell here at home anyway, or requiring these child safety locks for kids is an important advance, and it ought to be done. It'll have the same impact that the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban did. It won't cause anybody who is law-abiding any hassle, but it'll save lives. It's important that we do this, too.

I also want to say I think it's important that the gun industry take more responsibility in

changing the way it designs, markets, and distributes firearms. [Applause] And let me say to all of you who care about this—there was some spontaneous applause there—you should know this. There are responsible citizens in the gun industry who actually want to work with us to find new ways to make sure the guns they sell don't wind up in the wrong hands and that kids aren't killed accidentally with them. Part of the answer may be in new technologies that could reduce accidents.

I want all of you to listen to this. The law enforcement officers probably won't be surprised by this, but this is important that you know this. The accidental gun death rate of children under 15 in the United States is 9 times higher than that in the other 25 biggest industrial countries combined—combined. We don't have to put up with that either. Technologies now exist that could lead to guns that can only be fired by the adults who own them. My budget helps the gun industry accelerate the development of this technology. So we need to support that as well.

In his last campaign in 1968, Robert Kennedy said the fight against crime, and I quote, "is a fight to preserve that quality of community which is at the root of our greatness." We saw something about the root of America's greatness today here in Orchard Gardens: a community leader proud of her center; a police officer who grew up just a stone's throw from here; elected leaders who know the people who live in this area, whom they represent; a mayor proud of the progress that people working together can do; all these people in uniform justifiably proud of what they have achieved. That's what this is all about, all of us working together and helping each other.

I say again, for all the progress we have made, we should never rest, not any of us, as long as there's one more child whose life needs to be saved, as long as there's one more kid that can be turned away from drugs and guns and violence and kept out of prison in the first place, as long as there's one more street to make safe. We shouldn't quit until your country, your State, and your community are the safest places in the world.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:20 p.m. in the Orchard Gardens Community Center. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Thomas M. Menino