

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT PLACQUE DEDICATION CEREMONY FOR
NEW YMCA DAY CARE CENTER
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
April 5, 1996

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These places, like the one you are preparing here for your children, are places where our kids begin to learn how to relate to other children; and they have to learn to live out the essential values that have stood our American family so well for so long. They really have to learn how to build instead of tear down, to work together instead of run away, how to treat other people who are just like them with respect and fairness. By rebuilding a place for children to learn these lessons and to play and to laugh again, all of you, as citizens, have done the most honorable thing a nation could ask for, and I want to thank you for that.

I also want to thank those of you who have already mentioned in public, and in private, the tragedy our nation has endured this week with the loss of our Commerce Secretary and my dear friend, Ron Brown, and many other people, many of them quite young, who served our nation in the Commerce Department and the United States military and the business executives who were on that trip.

They lost their lives pursuing the very spirit that we are here to celebrate today. They went to the Balkans, a region that has literally been torn apart by war, where hundreds of thousands of people have been stripped of their dignity and lives and where millions have been turned into refugees and where countless children have been robbed of their future. And they did it just to prove that through faith and commitment, the people of Bosnia could get over their hatred and intolerance, and that America wanted to help.

Ron Brown laughed with me last Monday night when we talked about this mission in detail, that I had sent him all over the world with business leaders, primarily to expand the reach of the American economy, to generate more jobs for Americans. But he was going to Bosnia to use the power of the American economy, with the business leaders who were there, just to try to help the peace take hold, to give normal life back to those people. That is a noble and good thing for which they lived and died, and I ask you for your prayers for them and their families who, in these difficult days, are having their problems understanding the whys of all of this.

So as we remember those who perished here almost a year ago, and we mourn those who died on that hard mountain so many thousands of miles from here, let us again thank God for the grace that has brought us to this point and enabled us to live with our sorrows and tragedies and to rebuild our lives.

You know, the bagpipers over there were playing Amazing Grace. I suppose it's the best-known American hymn, at least the first verse. But as we remember those people in this community who are still grieving and still struggling, and we think of all of the difficulties life presents for which we have no answer, I would like to close with a reference to the third verse of that magnificent hymn: "Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come. 'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." We pray God's grace today on those who lost so much a year ago, and on the efforts of those of you who are working hard to build a better future, to make something profoundly good come out of that tragedy.

I'd like now to ask the children who are here and all of the others on the podium who would like to, to come up here and help me unveil the plaque. I don't have great manual skills, I need all of the help I can get up here.

Could you all come up -- the families, and Governor, Mayor -- you all come on over, let's do this together. God bless you. Thank you very much.

It
don't need
to see
again.

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Ready for
Edits +

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT PLACQUE DEDICATION CEREMONY FOR
NEW YMCA DAY CARE CENTER
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
April 5, 1996

Thank you very much. Governor Keating, Senator Nickles, Mr. Mayor, Lieutenant Governor Fallin, Congressman Brewster, Congressman Istook, to the families that are behind me and the children that just made the walk with us, and their parents, I thank them.

I was especially glad to see Brandon and Rebecca Denny, because they came to see Hillary and me in the White House and I thought they would be glad to see us again. But I asked them if they remembered meeting me, they said, "Yes. How's Socks?" So I thought to myself things are maybe beginning to get back to normal in Oklahoma City -- at least the children have their priorities in order.

Hillary and I thought a lot about where we were last year when we came down here to be with you and with our friend, James Lee Witt, the FEMA director, who is also here today. And I wondered what I ought to say. Let me begin by noting that this is, after all, Good Friday. It is a day for those of us who are Christians that marks the passage from loss and despair to hope and redemption. And in a way that is the lesson of this little walk we just took with these children and their parents -- from a place where we mourn lives cut so brutally short, to this place where, thanks to you and all of those who the Lieutenant Governor mentioned, we can truly celebrate new beginnings.

I hope the lesson of the walk and this effort will comfort and inspire all of those here in Oklahoma City, and especially those who are, as the Governor said, still hurting, still searching, still working to put their lives back together. I know there's nothing that anyone can do to bring back the children whose lives were taken from us, nothing we can do to sweep away the frightening memories that still linger in the children who survived, except to continue to work until ~~they~~ ^{the memories} finally go away.

But what you have done is to show our children that in the wake of evil, goodness can surround them and lift them up. You have done a lot here already to prove that their lives are strong and powerful -- like the tree behind me, which has now become famous around the country. Everybody wants to know why this tree stood up when the bomb went off. It lost its leaves and its bark and it's still kind of ugly -- but it survived and it's going to bloom again. Why is it going to bloom again? Because its roots kept it strong and standing.

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