

THE WHITE HOUSE

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RADIO ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT TO THE NATION

The Roosevelt Room

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. Today I want to talk about the important progress we're making in our efforts to get guns out of the hands of violent juveniles.

Our administration has put in place a tough, smart, anticrime strategy -- relying on more community police, stricter punishment, and better after-school prevention efforts. This strategy is working. For five years in a row, we've seen serious crime drop nationwide. Last year we saw the largest one-year decline in violent crime and murder in 35 years.

Our most recent figures even show a slight decline in juvenile crime. But we all know that juvenile crime and violence are still significant problems in our country. We know that children are still killing children -- for shoes, for jackets, for turf. We know that too many of our young people are drawn to guns and violence as a way of life.

One fact stands out and demands our attention. Over the past decades, the number of gun murders by juveniles has skyrocketed by 300 percent. This is simply unacceptable. We know we must break this deadly trend.

Some of our cities are beginning to do it. In Boston, thanks to a comprehensive effort by prosecutors, police, probation officers, community leaders and ordinary citizens, not a single juvenile murder has been committed with a gun in two full years. Boston Police Commissioner Paul Evans should be commended for his leadership role in this outstanding effort, and I'm very glad that he's joined me here today.

A year ago, I looked at Boston's approach, and it was clear that tracing guns seized from young criminals was a key to the city's success. So I directed the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to launch a national initiative in 17 cities to replicate Boston's effort and trace all the guns used in crimes.

A year later, the first results are in. Police departments in these 17 cities submitted for tracing nearly twice as many guns used in crimes as they did the year before. We found that almost half of all guns used in crimes came from young people. More importantly, for the first time, we know where the juveniles are getting these guns, how they are getting them, and what kinds of guns they are using.

One crucial fact is now clear -- that guns are finding their way quickly from legitimate retail stores to black markets through a network of gun traffickers and corrupt gun dealers. Make no mistake: Gun traffickers are funneling guns to lawless youth. We know how they operate and we intend to shut them down.

In Milwaukee, thanks to our youth gun-tracing initiative, police officers were able to find a pattern. Several guns used in drive-by shootings and armed robberies had originally been purchased by one man, a security guard named Larry Shikes. Police investigators quickly discovered that Shikes was selling brand-new semi-automatic weapons from the trunk of his car. Police swept in and arrested him in April. He pled guilty to trafficking charges and he will be sentenced next month.

Our youth gun-tracing initiative has been so effective that I'm pleased to announce we will expand our efforts to 10 more cities, including Philadelphia and Los Angeles. I want to thank the ATF and all the people who have worked on this initiative -- especially Under Secretary of Treasury Ray Kelly, who is also with me today. We will work with Congress to hire more ATF agents to work with local police officers and prosecutors to pursue traffickers based on the leads we're generating now every day.

We also have a chance to build on our progress by passing a smart, tough juvenile justice bill that cracks down on guns and gangs. We need to provide for more prosecutors, tougher penalties, and better after-school gang prevention programs. We should require that every new gun sold in America has a child safety lock. And we should prohibit violent teenagers from buying guns once they become adults.

Last week, I was disappointed that a Senate committee considering a juvenile crime bill voted against requiring federal firearms dealers to provide child-safety locks. I urged the full Senate to reconsider this action. A juvenile crime bill must be comprehensive. Of course, it must get tough on violent juvenile offenders, but it also must cut off their access to guns. That's one big reason why Boston's program works.

To keep guns away from crime-committing youth, we must also continue to perform background checks on gun-buying adults. The Brady Law has already stopped more than 250,000 fugitives, felons and stalkers from buying handguns. The Supreme Court recently struck down a portion of the Brady Law that requires local officials to perform these checks. But in a meeting this week with law enforcement officials from around the country, Attorney General Reno and Treasury Secretary Rubin confirmed that the overwhelming majority of police departments are continuing to do the responsible thing --to perform these background checks voluntarily because they work.

Now that we're making every effort to keep criminals from getting guns through the front door of a gun shop, we're turning our attention to locking the back door, too. We have started to crack the code of the black market in illegal weapons. We are tracing the guns, targeting the traffickers, taking more of our children out of harm's way. Cities like Boston have shown us great results. And if we'll all work together, there is no reason why every community in America can't expect and achieve the same success.

Thanks for listening.