

# Remarks to Participants in the March for Life Rally

## January 22, 1988

The President. Hello to you, Nellie Gray -- --

Miss Gray. Hello, President Reagan.

The President. -- -- and to all of you in the 15th annual March for Life rally.

Miss Gray. Mr. President, I wanted to welcome you to this 15th March for Life. The prolife Americans are coming here from every State of the Union. We appreciate so much your prolife words, but we do want to mention that we are somewhat disappointed that once again in December you unfortunately were assigning some public monies for abortions here in the District of Columbia. And we do want to ask today, as we join -- that even though we have spent a lot of time lobbying with the White House, unfortunately, those monies were appropriated to kill the preborn children in the District of Columbia. We would love to hear from you today, Mr. President, that we will not have any more appropriations for abortions in the District or anywhere else.

The President. Well, Nellie, sometimes these things happen, because, as you know, there are people that are in great disagreement with us. But we are continuing to work and to do our best to end any Federal funding.

Miss Gray. Wonderful. We welcome you, Mr. President, and we await your message now.

The President. Well, all right. The first of your noble marches came just one year after the Supreme Court issued its decision in Roe v. Wade. And for a decade and a half, you've worked to end the tragedy that -- since that day when the Court, in the stroke of a pen, legalized abortion across our nation -- has claimed the lives of more than 20 million infants.

Twenty million -- that's more than twice the population of New York City and close to the population of all of California. And yet our opponents tell us not to interfere with abortion. They tell us not to impose our morality on those who wish to allow or participate in the taking of the life of infants before birth. Yet no one calls it imposing morality to prohibit the taking of life after a child is born. We're told about a woman's right to control her own body. But doesn't the unborn child have a higher right, and that is to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Or would our critics say that to defend life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is to impose morality? Are we to forget the entire moral mission of our nation through its history?

Well, my answer, and I know it's yours, is no. America was founded on a moral proposition that human life -- all human life -- is sacred. And this proposition is the bedrock of our national life, the foundation of our laws. It's the wellspring of our Constitution. Courts may ignore it, and they have. They cannot -- and I should add -- have not denied it. When reverence for life can have no boundaries, when we begin to take some life casually, we threaten all life.

A few years ago, I spoke about the pain that we now know an unborn fetus experiences in the course of an abortion. At the time there was an outcry -- enraged criticism and angry denials. But criticism wasn't the only response. It so happened that I received a letter signed by 24 medical doctors, including eminent physicians like the former chief of pediatrics at the St. Louis City Hospital and the president of the New York State Medical Society. They discussed recent advances in medical technology and concluded: "Mr. President, in drawing attention to the capability of the human fetus to feel pain, you stand on firmly established ground."

Well, you know, I couldn't help noticing, that letter received far less coverage than the many derisive attacks that preceded it. Modern medicine treats unborn children as patients. Mothers are advised to calm the fetus with music. Some say that Mozart is particularly soothing. Isn't there enough evidence for even skeptics to admit that those who assert the personhood of the fetus may be right? And if we are to err, shouldn't it be on the side of life? I believe it's time the law caught up with science.

Now, I'm going to ask your support on a few things. We have sent up to Congress the prolife bill. It states that abortion is the taking of a human life and stops all Federal funding of abortion by making the Hyde amendment permanent. It needs your support, and it deserves your support.

We will soon publish regulations that will cut off Federal family planning funds from abortion-related activities. The law prohibits using title X money to encourage or promote abortion in any way. Yet under the current guidelines, title X programs must offer abortion counseling and referrals. It has been argued that this is evenhanded, a way of ensuring that young women are presented with all options. But that's not how it's worked out. Too often, the same title X funded programs that give referrals have financial ties to programs that perform abortions. In practice, young women using their services have sometimes been led to believe that abortion is their best, if not their only option. As one young woman reported recently in a comment on our new regulations: "I was not given a complete picture [by the family planning clinic]. . . . The decision I made for abortion was no decision at all. It was a coercion."

Well, our new regulations will put an end to this conflict of interest in cases where title X funds are involved. They will prohibit using title X money for any program that performs abortions, or counsels or refers for abortions, or promotes abortion through the media, the courts, or anyplace else. They will require family planning programs to be both financially and physically separate from facilities that use abortion as a method of family planning -- no mingling of silver. We are getting title X back to Congress' original intent: reducing the number of abortions. But as you know, original intent is controversial these days. We'll need your help in defending these regulations.

Now, before I hang up, let me suggest that we all take a moment for a silent prayer -- prayer for wisdom and, since ours is a merciful cause, that we ourselves will know mercy for the suffering of women who have had abortions and for the troubled mind with which so many Americans meditate on this issue. Shall we pray?

[At this point, the participants prayed silently.]

Amen.

Good luck, and God bless you all.

Miss Gray. We thank you, Mr. President. And we want to join with you, and we will work to perfect those bills. We also want to include in our prayers and our silent prayers the prisoners of conscience who are in the jails because they have tried to stop the abortions, and we are sorry that Joan Andrews is not with us today. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you all. God bless you.

*Note: The President spoke at 12:02 p.m. from the Oval Office via a loudspeaker hookup with the rally site. Participants had gathered on the Ellipse for a march to the Supreme Court on the 15th anniversary of the Court's decision in "Roe v. Wade," which legalized abortion. Nellie Gray was president of March for Life. In her closing remarks, she referred to Joan Andrews, who was convicted in Florida of illegal antiabortion activities.*