

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
SIGNING CEREMONY OF
EXECUTIVE WARRANTS FOR CLEMENCY

THE CABINET ROOM

1:21 P.M. EST

First, let me, before reading the prepared statement, thank the chairman and all the members of the board. I know it has been a difficult job, and a tough responsibility, but I, for one, am very grateful for what each and every one of you have done.

On September 16, I announced my program of clemency, and I am pleased on this Thanksgiving weekend that I am able to announce my first decisions on recommendations of the Presidential Clemency Board involving 18 individual cases of draft evasion.

I wish to thank each of you here for sharing this ceremonial moment, and I also wish to thank the Clemency Board members for their very hard and effective work.

The signing ceremonies often mark the end of a project, but today the signing represents the beginning of the difficult task of administering clemency. Instead of signing these decisions in a routine way, I wish to use this occasion to underline the commitment of my Administration to an evenhanded policy of clemency.

When I initiated the policy, I detailed the reasons for my decision in this very difficult problem. I consider them as valid today as when I first announced them. We do not resolve difficult issues by ignoring them. There are honest differences that will continue to be discussed, but discussions must not overshadow the need for action and fair and open resolution of the clemency problem.

Of the 18 recommendations the board has made to me, I have reviewed each one and have personally approved each one. Information on these cases will be made available by the Press Office.

MORE

(OVER)

I believe this more detailed information will help to explain the basis for my decision in each instance. Of course, considerable more information was made available to the board, and to me, on which to base these decisions, but to make public the complete files on each individual would be a negation of his right to privacy.

In each case, however, the law was violated and each has received punishment. The power of the clemency can look to reasons for these actions which the law cannot. Unlike God's law, man's law cannot probe into the heart of human beings. The best way we can do this is to offer clemency and to provide a way for offenders to earn their way back into a rightful place in society.

Last week, I traveled overseas in search for peace. Yet, we cannot effectively seek peace abroad with other nations until we have made peace at home. While America reaches out to those whom we have disagreed with in the past, we must do no less within our own Nation.

Sometimes it seems easier for us to forgive foreign enemies than fellow Americans at home. Let us continue to search for a softening of the national animosity caused by differences over the Vietnam war. We will not forget the sacrifices of those who served and died in Vietnam.

In their honor, America must seek ways to live up to the ideals of freedom and charity that they fought to preserve. These first few decisions do not end the unfinished business of clemency, but the task of formal forgiveness is underway.

I hope it marks the beginning of personal forgiveness in the hearts of all Americans troubled by Vietnam and its aftermath.

I do want to thank all of the board members, not only for the first-class job they have done, but the way in which they have approached this very difficult responsibility. I am grateful. I am sure the individuals in the cases that are involved here are grateful, and I think the American people will be grateful for them assuming a difficult responsibility and performing it with very great distinction.

I thank you, Charlie, and each of the board members, on this occasion on behalf of all, including 213 million Americans.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 1:28 P.M. EST)