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REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT BILL SIGNING CEREMONY
AT CIA HEADQUARTERS

Langley, Virginia

11:32 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. No, please. Thank you. Director Bill and members of the Congress, distinguished guests who are here and you, ladies and gentlemen, all distinguished, I bring you greetings from a former Director of this Agency, Vice President George Bush, who couldn't be here with us this morning. (Applause). And I want to give him credit because I'm going to tell a story of his. And it's always dangerous telling a trade joke to members of the trade because the chances are too good that they've heard it. But I'm going to take the chance anyway. It's one of the few stories that I can tell now since ethnic jokes are a no-no. This one is an Irish joke and my name is Reagan, so I can tell the story. (Laughter).

But it has to do something with the occasion and with your line of work. And the story is that there was an agent overseas and happened to be in Ireland and there was an emergency and it was necessary to contact him immediately. So they called in another agent and they said, "Now, you'll go there. His name is Murphy and your recognition will be to say, 'Tis a fair day but it'll be lovelier this evening.'"

So he went to Ireland and -- a little town in Ireland, into the pub, elbowed himself up to the bar, ordered a drink and then said to the bartender, "How would I get in touch with Murphy?"

And the bartender says, "Well, if it's Murphy the farmer you want, it's two miles down the road and it's the farm on the left." He said, "If it's Murphy the bootmaker, he's on the second floor of the building across the street. And," he says, "my name is Murphy."

So he picked up the drink and he said, "Well, 'tis a fair day, but it'll be lovelier this evening."

"Oh," he said, "it's Murphy the spy you want. Well, he's -- " (Laughter). (Applause).

When President Dwight Eisenhower came here almost 23 years ago to dedicate the cornerstone of this building here, he spoke of heroes. "Heroes," he said, "who are undecorated and unsung, whose only reward was the knowledge that their service to their country was unique and indispensable."

As I have said, the enactment of the Intelligence Identities Protection Act is clear evidence of the value this nation places on its intelligence agencies and their personnel. It is a vote of confidence in you by the American people through their elected representatives. It's also a tribute to the strength of our democracy. The Congress has carefully drafted this bill so that it focuses only on those who would transgress the bounds of decency -- not those who would exercise their legitimate right of dissent. This carefully drawn Act recognizes that the revelation of the names of secret agents adds nothing to legitimate public debate over intelligence policy. It is also a signal to the world that while we and this democratic nation remain tolerant and flexible, we also retain our good sense and our resolve to protect our own security and that of the brave men and women who serve us in difficult and dangerous intelligence assignments. (Applause.)

During the debate over this bill, some have suggested that our focus should be not on protecting our own intelligence agencies, but on the real or imagined abuses of the past. I'm glad that counsel was rejected for the days of such abuses are behind us.

The Congress now shares the responsibility of guarding against any transgression and I have named a new Intelligence Oversight Board and Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board to assist me in ensuring that the rule of law is maintained in areas which must remain secret and out of the normal realm of public scrutiny.

Beyond this, I have full confidence that you will do your job vigorously and imaginatively while making sure that your activity is lawful, constitutional, and in keeping with the traditions of our way of life. And while you're at your job and while I'm President, and while these Congressmen stand at watch, we'll work together to see to it that this powerful tool of government is used to advance, not abuse the rights of free people. (Applause.)

Today, after nearly a decade of neglect and sometimes over zealous criticism, our intelligence agencies are being rebuilt. This is altogether in keeping with the American tradition. Such activities have been crucial to our survival as a nation. The sacrifice of Nathan Hale whose statue stands near here is a national legend. And in our own time, the valiant performance of our intelligence agencies at crucial battles like Midway and Normandy is a matter of historical record.

It is out of this valiant service during World War II that your agency was born. As some of you perhaps know, it was in 1943 that General Bill Donovan decided to penetrate the Third Reich with secret agents. He did so against the advice of our more experienced allies who said it was an impossible task. It was only 35 years later that the story of those efforts were fully brought to light in a book called, "The Piercing of the Reich," by Joseph Persico. I thought you'd be interested to know that the young