

The crime bill, which was introduced just a couple of days ago in both the Senate and the House, contains more funds for more police officers on the street, something I believe in, we want to put another 100,000 out there in America so everybody can adopt a community policing strategy. It also has the Brady bill which will require a 5-day waiting period before anybody can purchase a handgun. And in addition to that, there are several bills in the Congress, and I hope and pray one of them can reach my desk this year, which will ban various types of assault weapons entirely from being held in the possession of our young people.

Let me tell you something, folks. I come from a State where more than half the adults have a hunting or a fishing license or both, where most of us were in the woods by the time we were 6 years old, where some schools and some plants have to be closed on the opening day of deer season. Nobody shows up anyway. [Laughter] There's not a person in this country that values the culture of the outdoors and the hunting and all of that any more than I do. But neither those who love to hunt, or who love to shoot weapons in contests, nor the framers of the Constitution when they wrote the second amendment ever envisioned a time when children on our streets would illegally be in possession of weapons designed solely to kill other people and have more weapons than the people who were supposed to be policing them. And we better stop it if we want to recover our country.

Just last week the Governor of Colorado, Governor Roy Romer, signed a law that prohibits juveniles from owning handguns. He joined Governor Florio of New Jersey and 17 others who have passed that law this year.

These are things we have to do. All three of these things are preventive. They're worth a pound of cure. Have more programs like this one. Give these kids a chance to have something to say yes to, not just telling them what they have to say no to, and a chance to order their lives and to fill themselves from the inside out. A lot of these programs don't deal with people from the inside out. That's the only way you can really change people's lives.

Give our police forces a chance to succeed with a community-based strategy that prevents crimes as well as catches criminals. And get the guns out of the hands of the kids. Give our law enforcement officers a fighting chance to keep the streets safe and people secure.

These are elements of prevention that will give us the security we need to make the changes we need economically to move into the 21st century. They will have the extra benefit of dramatically lowering the costs of health care and enabling us to finance the kind of progress we need in health care which again will give us the security we need to be the people we have to be in this dynamic era.

Thank you very much, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:14 a.m. at the Pinellas Marine Institute.

Remarks on NAFTA and an Exchange With Reporters

September 24, 1993

The President. I was asked on the way out of Florida this morning to make a comment on the Court of Appeals decision involving NAFTA, where the Court of Appeals reversed the trial court and said, in effect, that NAFTA does not have to have an environmental impact statement. First, I applaud the decision. And second, I want to emphasize that if this agreement goes through, it will lead to improvements in the environment and increased investment on the Mexican side of the border in environmental cleanup.

I also would like to say, based on the cause and conversations that I have been having with Members of Congress, I'm beginning to feel a little bit better about this agreement. I think that more and more Members of Congress who actually listen to the arguments, pro and con, understand that the overwhelming majority of the arguments against NAFTA are complaints about things that have already happened under the existing law, all of which NAFTA will make

better.

NAFTA will raise wages more quickly in Mexico than if we don't adopt it. It will raise environmental spending more in Mexico than if we don't adopt it. It will reduce illegal immigration more in Mexico than if we don't adopt it. And it will plainly lead to more high-tech jobs, high-wage jobs in this country. And also I think more of our Members of Congress understand that NAFTA stands for, in the minds of the rest of the market-oriented countries of Latin America a desire on the part of the United States to have a hemispheric trading bloc, which everyone believes will lead to more jobs and higher incomes in America; that is, NAFTA is the beginning, after which you can look at Chile, at Venezuela, at Argentina, at other of the market-oriented economies in Latin America. These things, I think, are beginning to sink in, and I'm very hopeful that we're going to be making some more progress. I think we are.

South Africa

Q. Mr. President, on another subject, Nelson Mandela today called for an end to the sanctions on South Africa. I know you've followed this issue closely for many, many years. Is the United States now prepared, are you prepared to lift the sanctions?

The President. When Mr. Mandela was here with President de Klerk, we talked about this. And then I've talked with him on the phone since he was here. And I'm looking forward to doing it again. Obviously the United States is going to be heavily influenced by the remarkable turn of events in South Africa, by the continued commitment on the part of the people of South Africa to move to a multiracial democracy. And so I will be very influenced, obviously, by what Mr. Mandela says. But I'll have a statement about that—

Bosnia

Q. Mr. President, when you go to the United Nations on Monday, can you tell us what you'll tell them about your feelings concerning Bosnia?

The President. Tune in Monday. I don't want to give the speech today.

Russia

Q. Mr. President, regarding the situation in Moscow, President Yeltsin now is clearly threatening to use force, if necessary, to disarm his opponents in the Parliament. Does that affect

your attitude towards the situation in there, your support for Yeltsin?

The President. My support has not been affected by anything that has happened thus far. It is a difficult situation. I don't think we should attempt to quarterback every move from the United States. And I don't think I have anything else to say about it yet.

Anticrime Legislation

Q. Mr. President, there are a lot of people who are asking, after your comments this morning on the nexus between violence and medical costs, what your crime policies are really doing to make a change in this other than just support for gun control?

The President. Well, I've got a crime bill up there that goes far beyond support for the Brady bill and for a restriction on automatic weapons—I mean, assault weapons, although I favor both those very strongly. We also, through the crime bill and several other initiatives, are attempting to put more police officers on the street, to support boot camps and other alternative forms of punishment for young people to try to steer them away from a life of crime, and to support improvements in the criminal justice system itself to make punishment more swift and more sure.

But if you look at the crime bill, if you look at the effort to put more police officers on the street and to support community policing, and if you look at the effort to provide boot camps and alternative forms of punishment and pass the Brady bill and pass some limits on these semi-automatic assault weapons, that's a pretty broad-based anticrime strategy. I hope that the Congress will act on it and act on it this year.

NAFTA

Q. Mr. President, some people have expressed the view that NAFTA constitutes a kind of an unfortunate obstacle to you in political terms with all the focus that will be needed to pass the health care reform. How do you see the politics of the two issues fitting or not fitting together?

The President. I disagree with that, because, first of all, let's look at what has to happen now on health care reform. We're going to do one more round of intensive consultations, then we'll have some legislation to send to the Hill that embodies the principles I discussed with the American people. There will be other bills.

They will go to the committees, and then we will begin the careful and exhaustive process of reviewing this.

Meanwhile, NAFTA is on a much faster time track. The trade agreement has to be turned into legislation within a limited period of time by the Congress. And then there's a limited period of time for debate. So I will be spending a significant amount of time everyday calling Members of Congress in both parties trying to line up support and working on other people like Mr. Iacocca, to try to get them to speak out for us and working on bringing people into this debate who are selling things to Mexico and people whose jobs depend on it to show that it's a job winner as well as trying to illustrate to the Congress that the great benefits of NAFTA may well lie in its ability to be expanded to the rest of Latin America.

So I've got a big agenda. And the NAFTA issue will be over before too long. That is, under the fast track legislation on trade agreements, there is a fixed amount of time we have to do it. We're either going to do it or not. It'll be over—the health care debate is on a different timetable. So I don't see them conflicting now. We just had to get the health care debate started, or we never would have finished it.

Health Care Reform

Q. Mr. President, on health care reform, if you end up underestimating the cost of your plan, are you calling for a formal annual review mechanism that would allow for tax increases or benefit cuts, if necessary, in order to meet your target?

The President. What I think we should do is we should have an annual review process which would permit us, if we don't realize the

savings through management we intend to realize, to make a decision to phase in some of the newer benefits over a longer period of time. That would control what we do—or to present them as options that can be paid for separately at the decision of the consumer until the savings enable us to phase them in completely.

I do not believe—I will say again—I do not believe you can justify taking the world's most expensive and bureaucratic system in which most Americans who have insurance pay more than they should, under any conceivable model that they'd be in, anyone besides this one, and ask them to pay taxes on top of that to pay for the uninsured. We have got to manage this system to make it simpler, to achieve the savings without sacrificing choice and quality. We can plainly do it. We know it's been done in Germany, just to take one other example. We know it's been done several places in the United States. And the administration is happy to carry the burden into these congressional hearings of demonstrating the evidence that it can be done. But if it doesn't happen just as it should, then what should happen is we should phase the benefits in more slowly or present them as options that can be paid for. We shouldn't raise general taxes on people who are already paying too much for their own health care to pay for somebody else's health care who's not paying anything for it. I just don't think that's right.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:35 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House, upon his return from St. Petersburg, FL. In his remarks, he referred to former Chrysler Corp. chairman Lee Iacocca.

Statement on Lifting Economic Sanctions Against South Africa

September 24, 1993

I welcome the call today by ANC President Nelson Mandela for the lifting of economic sanctions against South Africa. This call from this courageous man who has been one of the principal victims of apartheid means that the leading groups in South Africa now oppose the maintenance of economic sanctions on their country.

Yesterday's action by the South African Parliament to create a Transitional Executive Council (TEC) and today's announcement by the ANC are watershed events in the history of South Africa and its movement toward a non-racial democracy. South Africans of all races can be proud of these momentous achievements. Americans can also take pride in the role they