

Remarks to the National Conference of Black Mayors April 28, 1994

Thank you so much. I didn't know where Henry was going with that story. I thought it was going to get down to where he couldn't think of anything to thank me for but giving his brother a good job. [Laughter] My imagination was running wild, and so was yours. [Laughter]

Mayor Kelly, thank you for being with us and for giving such leadership to what is now my hometown. I've enjoyed being a citizen of Washington, DC, and going to schools and walking streets and doing things that Presidents often overlook. You can be in a cocoon here and forget you live in a city full of people and promise and problems. I've enjoyed that.

I want to thank Mayor Espy for his leadership and for his friendship. I want to say a special word of appreciation to Secretary Cisneros, who's agreed to be our administration's main link to you, for the outstanding leadership he has provided at Housing and Urban Development, the things that he's doing that have needed doing for so many years, some of which have immediate payoffs, some of which may have years to go before we fully see the benefits of them. But we have somebody in that job now who's full of ideas and heart and who works hard, who spent 2 nights in the public housing projects in Chicago so he could see what the people were going through up there.

I want to thank my longtime friend Carroll Willis and my friend Loretta Avent for the work they've done with this organization and keeping up with you. Sometimes you keep up with them and give them plenty to do, and I appreciate that. Give them a hand there, yes. [Applause] I knew I wanted Loretta to come to work for this administration when she worked in the campaign. And then after I got elected President, she moved into the Governor's Mansion, where we were getting literally hundreds of gifts and things a day. And we couldn't keep up with them all, couldn't box them up, couldn't keep up with them, and people streaming in there all the time. Loretta—I don't think Loretta ever went home before 2 o'clock at night, never got there any later than about 6:15 in the morning, and I figured anybody that needs less sleep than I do needs to be working in the White House.

[Laughter] It's hard to have, you know—we had 24-hour-a-day security at the Governor's Mansion without the Secret Service and without even spelling Loretta; she was just there all the time. [Laughter]

I also want to say a special word of thanks to the members here who have been my friends for many years. I see a lot of you out there I've known for such a long time, and especially to the people from my home State who did a lot of work to help make it possible for me to get in a position to run for this job.

This is a remarkable week. We are seeing the unfolding of the first genuine multiracial elections in South Africa. We are seeing people who have been denied the vote for 350 years willing to stand in line in record numbers. And when they started this whole process, your country—I'm proud of this—put up about \$35 million to help the people of South Africa learn how to conduct elections and how to participate and all that. I'm very proud of them.

You ought to see their ballot; they've got, I think, 18 different parties, maybe more, maybe 21; anyway, a big old number running for the various seats in the Parliament. And those people, they've got it figured out. There's one party called the Soccer Party, and there are little symbols of soccer balls just in case you forget who you want to vote for. If you like soccer, you can vote for them. They've got one party called the Kiss Party, and their symbol is a lipstick kiss, in case you're feeling romantic on election day. [Laughter] The man who got at the top of the ballot has got his picture up there. He looks remarkably like Nelson Mandela. In case you make a mistake, he wants your vote. [Laughter] It's very impressive, really. The whole thing has been astonishing. But the most impressive thing has been the way the people have showed up in record numbers, poor people, old people, people who never learned to read, people who just want to be a part of this.

And I couldn't help thinking that the struggle which started in this country with the Voting Rights Act three decades ago now, which made it possible for us today to have 355 black mayors across America and which required a lot of our

fellow citizens to risk their lives, it's now being replayed on the world stage in a stunning spectacle in South Africa. And I know a lot of you take a lot of pride in that and know that in your own way, in your own lives and careers, you helped to pave the way for this important day. And I thank you for that.

I'd like to make a couple of remarks that Henry's already mentioned, some of the issues I wanted to touch on. I came to this job, as those of you who have known me a long time know, with some very clear convictions about what our country was doing wrong and what it would take to change it. I believed very strongly that we needed a different economic policy and we needed to try to get this economy growing again, connected to the world economy in a positive and good way. I believed very strongly that we needed to try to bring the American people together again because it's obvious that we're going up or down together. And I thought we were coming apart when we ought to come together. And I'm trying to do that, and I think we are making some headway in that direction. And I think that the statements that have been made by some of the people in our administration have really helped. I think when Secretary Cisneros, for example, refused to tolerate what was going on in Vidor, Texas, and insisted that people, without regard to race, have a right to live wherever they wanted to live, I think that was the sort of thing that was very important to be done.

And I also felt that the Government needed to work in a different way, that what we were doing was just not working, that in a way, the way we were doing our business was not very well suited to the challenges of the world we're facing and the world toward which we're all moving. And so I wanted to try to change the way we do that. I wanted a better partnership between the White House and the Governorships and the mayoralities. And we're moving toward that.

I wanted the White House to have a partnership where we heard a broad spectrum of voices in America. We're having tomorrow—I'm so excited about this—for the first time in the history of the United States, the President of the United States tomorrow on the lawn of the White House will meet with the leaders of every federally recognized Native American tribe in the entire United States. And I'm excited about that.

I wanted us to change the way we do our business up here, and I've tried to support efforts to reform congressional procedures. And we are going to get a campaign finance reform bill out of this Congress. And I think we're going to get a good lobby reform bill out of this Congress which will restrict some activities and, most importantly, disclose others, which I think is very, very important to try to balance the scale. There's nothing wrong with lobbying; everybody, we're all lobby groups when we want something that somebody else has to decide on and we don't. But it needs to be done in an open and balanced and completely forthright manner so that everybody has a chance to have their fair share and their fair say.

So we're working on changing those things. The Vice President's reinventing Government initiative has been very, very important. It's enabled us, for example, without firing anybody, to give incentives to Federal employees to take early retirement and to phase down the size of the Federal Government and to reform our procedures over a period of 5 years by about a quarter of a million people. So that 5 years from the date I became President, we'll have fewer than 2 million people working for the Federal Government for the first time since 1960. We will do it by phasing down, not by putting people in the streets, giving people incentives for early retirement, and we will take all that money and put it in a trust fund and pay for this crime bill to put police officers back on the street.

So those are the things that I wish to do. And I wanted us to blend our policies at home with our policies abroad so that—we realized we couldn't be strong abroad unless we were first strong at home, that it is the power of our example and the success of our efforts that gives us real influence abroad, and that we can never fully rebuild ourselves at home unless we were involved with other nations around the world.

We have an interest in what happens in South Africa. South Africa rekindles the whole spirit of democracy and the spirit of free enterprise all across the southern part of Africa, as it has the potential to do. We, the United States, are in the best position, perhaps, of all the advanced countries to trade with and benefit from that revitalized South Africa and its neighbors.

So these are the things that I wanted to do. And in pursuit of that, I hope you have been

pleased with the progress we have made in just the first 16 months. We've had over 2.3 million private sector jobs come into this economy, more than twice as many as in the previous 4 years. We are looking at steady growth, steady decline in the deficit, and a strong outlook for the future.

We recognize that that alone will not provide jobs or raise incomes in a lot of most distressed urban and rural areas. We have seen a lot of our places suffer when the economy was good as well as when the economy was bad. So we've tried to do some special things, the creation of the empowerment zones and the enterprise communities that Secretary Cisneros has worked so hard on, the creation of a community development bank bill to try to establish these community development banks all across America to make microenterprise and small business loans in places and to people who otherwise would not get them.

We have worked on reforming the community reinvestment act to ensure that there will be more reinvestment in our cities and in our small towns and rural areas. We've tried to have a dramatically streamlined operation for getting loans for community-based business start-ups through the small business administration.

We've changed the tax laws. This year, one-sixth of our working people who work for modest wages and have children in their home will be eligible for income tax cuts because they're trying to do what everybody in America says they want: They are people who are choosing work over welfare. They are people who are choosing to be good parents and good workers. And our tax system should reward them. We should have a tax system that says, hey, if you're willing to go out there, even taking a low-wage job and trying to take care of your family and pay your taxes and be a good citizen, we ought to use a tax system to lift you out of poverty, not put you in it. And I think that is a very important thing.

This administration has worked hard in the area of education and training. The Goals 2000 bill that I just signed sets world-class standards of educational excellence but supports grassroots reform. We have a school-to-work bill, which I'm going to sign pretty soon, which will help States to establish systems to move children who don't want to go to 4-year colleges but do need further education and training in the systems that give them a chance to get good training

so they can get good wages and good jobs, not dead-end jobs.

We're going to reform the unemployment system of this country to try to make it a reemployment system. You know in your own communities that the unemployment system doesn't work anymore because usually when people go on unemployment, they do not get called back to their old jobs like they used to. So there's no point in letting them just draw unemployment until it runs out and then figuring out what to do. People should be able to start retraining programs the minute they become unemployed, not after they exhaust their unemployment. This will make a significant difference.

In the area of health care, we're working hard, as I'm sure all of you know, to expand early childhood health, along with the expanded Head Start program. We have an immunization initiative which will provide more free vaccines to poor children and people who need it but which will also help to set up systems which will enable us to reach all the children of this country. Only two-thirds, actually slightly less than two-thirds of our kids, get all their recommended shots by the age of 2. There are lots of third world countries that have a higher rate of immunization than we do. And we need your help in that. We want you to be a part of that. It can make a big difference. *[Applause]* Thank you.

I just want to mention two issues in closing. One is the crime bill, and the other is health care, because they relate to and embody so much of what I've been trying to say. How do you get the country moving in the right direction? How do you get people together, instead of drifting apart? How do you make this work again so that it makes a difference in people's lives?

First of all, with regard to the crime bill, we do provide more police officers in small towns and big cities. And that will make a difference if they're community police officers, if they know their neighbors, if they know how to work with people, if kids trust them, if they can work to prevent crime as well as to catch criminals. This will work. I have seen it drop the crime rate dramatically in city after city where it has worked. So I urge you to participate in this, not just to get more people on the payroll but to make sure they're well trained, connected to the folks, and doing the

right things. In other words, we owe it to the American people to prove what we already know, which is that we can lower the crime rate if we use these resources in the right way.

The second point I want to make is—and Henry mentioned this—we passed the Brady bill last year. Some people argued against it because they said, “Well, the Brady bill will only work against honest people; they’ll have to wait longer to get their guns because crooks will go buy them off the street.” Well, do you realize we would never do anything, we would never take one positive step in our personal or public lives if we listened to people who said, “Well, if you do this, it won’t solve all your problems.” Well, the Bible says nothing we can do will solve all our problems, right? I mean, we’d never do anything. If the test was, will this solve everything, we would never get anything done.

The Brady bill has already helped to save lives. It has caught people trying to buy guns who had criminal records, who had mental health histories, who had stolen weapons in the past. It is beginning to work. In this crime bill, I am doing my best to get the House to agree with the Senate that we ought to ban a large number of these assault weapons. We can put police on the street, but if they’re outgunned by the gang members, it’s pretty tough to deal with it. It’s not right.

The Senate bill actually protects—because a lot of you come from rural places, and I know a lot of you’ve got constituents and over half of them have a hunting license now. So this Senate bill actually protects almost 700 kinds of hunting weapons and sporting weapons specifically, in the bill. This does not outlaw guns, it outlaws assault weapons, the purpose of which is to kill people, not shoot ducks or quail or deer or squirrel. And I think it’s real important that you take this opportunity to be in Washington to let your Representatives know that you would like it if they would adopt the assault weapons ban. And tell them to go on and adopt the protection for the hunting weapons, too, so that no one can really say—who looks at the bill—that this is designed to undermine people’s ability to hunt. It’s designed to undermine people’s ability to hunt other human beings in large numbers. That is what we’re trying to do.

The last point I want to make about the crime bill is this. In this crime bill, we give the States some more money to build prison space where they need it, but we spend more money than

has ever been spent by the Federal Government giving communities and States prevention funds, everything from opportunities for schools to open early and stay open late, for communities to have midnight basketball leagues, for rehab programs to have drug treatment for everybody who needs it, for—we’re going to try something a lot of you will like—we’ll have enough money in this bill to give a respectable number of communities significant funds to hire, provide jobs for unemployed young people. I don’t want to mislead you, it’s not a national jobs program, but a part of this prevention strategy requires us to identify some communities and give them enough money to really take a dent in the youth unemployment problem and just see what happens to the crime rate. If the crime rate drops in half, then what’s anybody else going to say about it? We’ll then know what we can do to lower the crime rate.

I want to make this point: There will be a big argument, again, not by the law enforcement officials, but maybe—and the politics of this over the next week is, well, should we build more prisons and do less prevention? And my own view is: If you listen to the law enforcement people, they’ll say you can build prisons from now til kingdom come, and you need to stop kids before they do these things. So, what I want to urge you to do is to say, “We want the 100,000 police, and if you give us the police, we’ll do it right.” That’s your responsibility, make sure they’re well-trained, well-connected and they do it right.

We’ll support the law enforcement provisions in here and the tougher punishment, but we want you to take the assault weapons off the streets, and we want you to give us the prevention funds, and we will prove that we can reduce the crime rate. We have to give our young people something to say yes to as well as tell them what to say no to. This is an astonishingly important bill. It’s the biggest and most serious anticrime bill ever considered by the Congress. The Brady bill took 7 years to pass. They’ve been fighting about a crime bill for 5 years. We’re going to get it, but this is a big chance. We ought to do it right.

The last point I want to make is about health care. And I’d like to make two or three points about it. A lot of you know—I look out across this crowd, and I know the communities from which a lot of you come. There are people here who represent towns with 300 people. Some

of them I built sewer systems in and water systems when I was a Governor. There are people here who represent massive cities and all in between.

You face essentially three or four big problems in the health care system. You've got a lot of folks who still don't have health insurance. They do get health care, but they get it when it's too late, too expensive. They show up at the emergency room, then they either pass the cost along to the rest of your folks, or they can't pass the cost along in which case they risk going out of business. So you've got a lot of rural hospitals and some urban hospitals at risk of going out of business, partly because of no uncompensated care.

Then you have a lot of people, particularly in rural areas, who do not have access to health care because there aren't any doctors out there anymore or properly trained nurse practitioners and people working with them. Our health care bill attempts to resolve all those things by providing for guaranteed private insurance for all Americans, by strengthening the public health networks in urban areas and rural areas, too. In my State now, 85 percent of the immunizations are being given out in the public health clinics. The children of wealthy citizens of my State are getting their shots in the health clinics. We have to strengthen the public health networks. And this is a terribly important thing. And the emphasis on covering primary and preventive services, breast cancer tests for women, cholesterol tests for men, giving these kids their shots early when they need them, these things are terribly important.

And I can say that it is necessary to preserve the network of health care in America. It is necessary to give Americans the health care they need. It is also entirely necessary, if you want me to keep bringing the deficit down and still have some money to spend, working with you to build America, because the only thing we are really increasing spending on overall now is health care.

We're bringing down domestic spending. We're bringing down defense spending. We've stabilized interest on the debt because we're bringing the deficit down, but we're still increasing spending on Medicaid and Medicare by 2 and 3 times the rate of inflation, largely because of the system we have in America. And you know, people are trying to say, "Well, Clinton wants to impose a Government-run system on

America." That's not true. It's guaranteed private insurance. And they're trying to say, "Well, it's not fair to small business." But what about the small businesses that do cover their employees?

Our plan says every employer and employee without insurance or without adequate insurance should make some effort but we'll give a discount to the small businesses with low-average wages so they don't go out of business. It is a private plan where Americans have choice. And it will work if we have a chance.

I say that because while a lot of you don't run public health programs—unless you're in a big city, you probably don't have anything to do with the public health program—our ability to work with you to build this country is directly related to our ability to guarantee a healthy population, to give people the security they need.

Every one of you has got somebody living in your city, even if you live in a really small town, who's had somebody in their family that's been sick. So they've got what's called a pre-existing condition, which means they can't get insurance or they pay too much for it or they can never change their job because they'll lose their health insurance. Every one of you does. Isn't that right?

So, again, I would ask you to ask your Members of Congress not to let this year go by without solving this health care problem. There's no reason in the wide world America is the only wealthy country in the world that can't figure out how to provide health care security to all its people.

People talk to me about reforming the welfare system all the time. You think about this. If somebody gets out of jail and goes into a low-wage job without health care, right, they're working for a living, paying taxes so that they're giving health care to people who are still in jail while they got out. If somebody gets off the welfare rolls and takes a lower wage job without health care, they're then working hard, paying taxes, going home at night looking at their kids without health care, and their taxes are going to pay for people who stayed on welfare so they and their kids could get health care.

Now, you don't have to be Einstein to figure out that doesn't make a lot of sense. And I just simply refuse to believe that we are the

only country in the world that can't figure out how to fix that. I believe we can.

So I ask you, please, while you're here and when you go home, tell your Members of Congress, it's a new day in America. We're changing things. We're facing our problems. We're seizing our opportunities. And you'll stick with them if they have the courage to make the tough decisions: health security for all and a crime bill that really gives us a chance to lower the crime rate and make the American people safe again.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:17 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly of Washington, DC; Mayor Henry Espy of Clarksdale, MS; Carroll Willis, senior adviser to the chairman of the Democratic National Committee; Loretta Avent, Special Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Affairs; and Nelson Mandela, president, African National Congress.

Interview With Larry King

April 28, 1994

Virginia Kelley

Mr. King. We're with Dick Kelley and James Morgan. And joining us now by phone from Washington is the son of Virginia Kelley, the President of the United States, Bill Clinton.

Are you there, Mr. President?

The President. Hi, Larry.

Mr. King. How are you?

The President. I'll tell you what, are those two guys telling you the truth tonight?

Mr. King. They are telling the truth—

Dick Kelley. You know if I didn't, I'd really get hell from you. [Laughter]

Mr. King. Have you read the full book, Mr. President?

The President. I have read it. I read it twice, as a matter of fact.

Mr. King. And?

The President. I think she did a terrific job. I want to thank Jim for all the work he did on it. And after Mother died, I had to do a little work just checking some of the facts, but I was amazed at how candid and forthright she was. And she turned out to be a right good storyteller. It's a terrific book. I think a lot of folks will really enjoy reading it, and we'll see a portrait of a remarkable person during an important time in our country's life. I was really proud of her for doing it.

Mr. King. Last time we were together, we spoke about your loss. Wasn't it difficult to read it?

The President. It was. Or the first time, before it was actually published in book form, it kind

of helped me deal with the loss. But I tell you, it still makes me a little sad. Last week when I finished reading it the second time, I found myself fighting back the tears a little bit, but that's one of the things that makes the book so wonderful. I've even had total strangers come up to me and say that they cried when they read it, too.

James Morgan. The lawyer at Simon and Schuster, who's going over the legal checking with me, told me that she cried. And I figured if you can make a New Yorker cry, it's some book.

Mr. King. What was her most, Mr. President, remarkable aspect to you?

The President. I think her resilience. You know, she was just a person driven by love and loyalty and an incredible desire to keep living. And she couldn't be beaten down. I mean, she was widowed three times. When Dick asked her to marry him, she reminded him that she'd been widowed three times and asked him if he had considered odds of what he was trying to get into.

But no matter what happened to her, she just bounced back. And I think that's probably the most important lesson she imparted to me and to my brother, just don't give up.

Mr. King. They've discussed the difficulty of when Roger had his troubles and how she held up during that time, during your only defeat, how she held up during that time. Was she a strength source, was she a place—most people figure their mothers as a safe place to go.