

Teleconference on Community Policing Grants and an Exchange With Reporters May 12, 1994

The President. Mayor Archer?

Mayor Dennis Archer. Mr. President, how are you, sir?

The President. Mayor Peters?

Mayor Mike Peters. Yes, how are you?

The President. Mayor Darrah?

Mayor Joan Darrah. Yes, President.

The President. And Mayor Campbell?

Mayor Bill Campbell. Hello, Mr. President, how are you?

The President. I'm fine. I'm here with the Attorney General, who's also on another phone right here with me.

Attorney General Janet Reno. Good morning.

The President. We want to congratulate all of you for working so hard to make your communities safer. I'm proud to announce today, as all of you know, that the four of you, along with the leaders of 142 other cities, counties, and towns all across this country, will get a downpayment on this administration's pledge to put another 100,000 police officers on the street.

I want to specifically note some Members of Congress who are not on the phone call but whose districts have winners: Congressman John Lewis, Congresswoman Barbara-Rose Collins, Congressman John Conyers, and Congresswoman Barbara Kennelly, all of whom have worked closely with us on this initiative.

The Justice Department received applications from nearly 3,000 communities in every State and territory for these community policing grants and awarded them now to more than 200 cities and towns. It's obvious that communities all across the country are coming to the conclusion that if they have more police officers on the street who are properly trained and properly deployed, we can drive the crime rate down and make our people safer. That is at the heart of this administration's crime bill and has been at the heart of our strategy from the beginning. When I ran for President, I pledged to do my best to break gridlock and pass the most sweeping, effective, and comprehensive crime bill in history and that that bill would include 100,000 new police officers.

Now, the bills have passed both the House and the Senate; they're going to conference. Es-

pecially with the courageous passage of the assault weapons ban by the House last week, I think you can feel comfortable that all those officers are on the way. This program, as I said, is our downpayment. And we're very encouraged about it.

The American people have waited for this bill long enough. And I do want to take this opportunity in talking with you to say that it is imperative that we not let politics any more delay for one day the passage of this crime bill. We have got to get the House and the Senate together and go through with it. And I want to urge you, even as we celebrate your winning these awards for these new police officers, to urge you to keep pressing the Congress to push forward.

Freedom from violence and freedom from fear are essential to maintaining not only personal freedom but a sense of community in this country. And I think now we have the best chance at forging a bipartisan consensus for dynamic, aggressive, and sustained efforts to bring the crime rate down that we have ever had. And that is in no small measure due to all of you.

So I thank you for what you've done. I congratulate you on your award today, but I urge you to help us pass the crime bill so that we can continue to put the police officers out, do something about the weapons, do something about prevention, do something about punishment.

I want to ask now the Attorney General to say a few things, and then I'd like to hear from each of you.

General Reno.

[At this point, the Attorney General and Mayor Archer of Detroit, MI, made brief remarks supporting the community policing initiative and the pending crime legislation. Mayor Archer commended the President on his efforts to ban assault weapons and conveyed greetings from President Carter, who was visiting Detroit.]

The President. That's great. Well, you tell him, first of all, I enjoyed being with him last week. And I thank him and President Ford and Presi-

dent Reagan for the work they did on the assault weapons ban. And tell him that I'm going to be calling him in a day or two.

[*Mayor Peters of Hartford, CT, Mayor Darrah of Stockton, CA, and Mayor Campbell of Atlanta, GA, made brief remarks supporting the community policing grants and the pending crime legislation.*]

The President. Well, thank you, Mayor. I just want to point out, you know, when you and I talked last week, we emphasized that it's not just important to have more people, it's important to do the right things with them. And I know that you will do that. I know the other mayors will.

I think we also need to hammer home the message that we all believe that we can have substantial reductions in the crime rate. We believe that the streets of America can be made safer again. That is the ultimate objective of all these initiatives, to allow the American people to live in safety and security and freedom with a real sense that we're part of a community again, that we don't have to be afraid of each other. And I am convinced it can be done. And we're going to do what we can here, knowing that grassroots leaders like you have to make the difference.

General Reno, do you have anything to say?

Attorney General Reno. No. Just amen. [Laughter]

The President. Have a great day. Thank you. Goodbye.

Mayors. Goodbye.

Supreme Court Nominee

Q. President Clinton, have you decided on your Supreme Court nominee, will you announce today, and who is it?

The President. Well, you won't have to wait much longer. When I have a decision, I will announce it. But let me answer—there was a question earlier. There was an interesting comment in the paper today by a—I'm sorry, I

don't remember the gentleman's name, but an expert on this whole process who pointed out that the most important thing is for the President to appoint someone that the President feels very good about and a high level of confidence in. I know that this has now become the most pressing story in the Capital. But this is really a story that will have implications for years, indeed, perhaps for decades to come.

I think one of the benefits, and perhaps one of the burdens, the American people got when I was elected President is that I believe I know a lot about this issue, and I care a lot about it. I used to teach constitutional law. This is not a decision I can defer to aides, even though I have been well assisted in this and I appreciate it. So I am going to attempt to do what I did last time, even against all the pressure of time deadlines, and that's to make a really good decision that I feel good about.

I think that I did that with Judge Ginsburg. The Attorney General advised me on that issue, and I appreciate her advice. And she's given me some advice this time, and I appreciate that. But you won't have to wait much longer. And when I do it, it will be something that I'm convinced will be good for the United States for a long time to come. And if it takes just a little time to work through these questions that I have, then it's worth doing.

Q. Does that mean you just haven't reached a decision yet?

The President. It means just what I said. When I have something to announce, I will announce it. On these matters, I tend to keep my own counsel more than on other things. I think it is the right thing to do. It is one of the few things that the President just does on his own, of course ultimately with the advice and the consent of the Senate. I'm going to do my best to do a good job with it.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:14 p.m. from the Roosevelt Room at the White House.