

hundreds of hunting and sporting weapons for the first time in Federal law. It was passed because America's law enforcement officials asked for it, every single law enforcement organization in the country.

It was passed to try to help save the lives of law enforcement officials who have to go out on the streets and sometimes face gangs that are better armed than they are. It was passed to save the lives of innocent people who often get caught in crossfires. And I believe it would be deeply wrong for Congress to repeal this assault weapons ban and in essence to take the side of the Washington gun lobby over the interests of the law enforcement people of this country and the law-abiding citizens of this country. And I very much hope that it will not pass. It will endanger law enforcement officials if it does pass. It will cost more citizens their lives if it does pass. The only people that will be benefited are people who engage in illegal activity.

I believe Congress should reject this extreme step. We ought to keep the assault weapons ban. And I would like to call upon the Republican leadership in the Congress to reconsider their decision to bring this to a vote. It doesn't need to be voted on in the House or the Senate, and if it is passed, I will veto it. They know I intend to do that. There is no point in dis-

tracting the American people or the Congress from the important work before us.

Let me close by saying that this is what we ought to be doing more of, what we're doing here and what the Senate has done with the Kassebaum-Kennedy bill. Again, I say that it's—I rarely make announcements in this room or in this White House with people that are so reflective of Main Street America on an issue that would have such a profound impact on ordinary Americans as this Kassebaum-Kennedy bill.

President Shaffer, and to all the rest of you, I thank you. You have done a good thing for your country today. Thank you very much.

Legislative Agenda

Q. Mr. President, how much do you think Presidential politics is going to enter into all these votes?

The President. I hope not very much at all. It's a long time till the election; we don't need a work stoppage here. We need to just keep on working. We'll have several months for elections.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:38 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to George Frazier, past president, Independent Insurance Agents of America.

Remarks Prior to Discussions With President Rene Preval of Haiti and an Exchange With Reporters

March 21, 1996

The President. Let me begin by just saying how very pleased I am to welcome President Preval to the White House. This is our first chance to have a face-to-face meeting, but we've been in regular contact, and I am anxious to have this chance to discuss the future of Haiti.

I'm very pleased by the events of the last year and a half. Haiti has had the first peaceful transfer of power in 200 years, from one democratically elected President to another. They've had parliamentary elections. The institutions and people who caused so much of the problems of the past have been changed, and there is, I think, a new atmosphere of hope in the country.

We know that they have significant challenges, economically and otherwise, and we are committed to continuing our efforts to work with our friends around the world, Canada and other places, to try to support Haiti and to make sure that the great democratic effort they're making succeeds.

Economic Reforms in Haiti

Q. What kinds of economic reforms, Mr. President, would you like to see them pursue at this point?

The President. Well, I think that we want to see them work out an achievable plan of reform to gain the support of the international

financial institutions so we can get the investment necessary into Haiti to generate private sector jobs and grow the economy. We want to see investors going back in there again and giving jobs to the people. We have to do what we can to see that the benefits of freedom flow to ordinary citizens through an advance in their economic standing.

Q. Does that effort have to be picked up, in your opinion? Are they moving fast enough?

The President. Well, I want them to do whatever is necessary to secure the support of the international financial institutions as soon as possible, because I think that is what is necessary to grow the economy. And I want the President and the country to succeed, and I think bringing some economic benefits down there is going to be critical to that. But we want to support them in other ways as well.

Product Liability Legislation

Q. Mr. President, do you think that the product liability bill is beyond redemption or is there some chance after a veto that it could be salvaged?

The President. I've said all along that there is legislation in this area that I would sign. I think that some change is appropriate, and I think Senator Rockefeller made a very strong effort there. There were some things put in the conference, as you know, which I feel very

strongly made it worse. But there are some changes that I think are relatively modest that could be made that would permit me to sign it. So I still have some hope that we'll get a good products liability bill out of this Congress.

[At this point, one group of reporters left the room, and another group entered.]

Haiti

The President. Welcome. It is a great pleasure for me to welcome President Preval here to the White House. We are all excited about his visit to the United States and anxious to have a good conversation. I'm very proud of the progress that Haiti has made in preserving its freedom and liberty and very pleased that when he was inaugurated it marked the first peaceful transfer of power from one democratically elected President to another in 200 years.

Now I want to do what I can to be as supportive in Haiti's efforts to preserve freedom and democracy and also to advance economically. I want to see the people of Haiti reap the benefits of freedom and democracy in terms of new jobs and new opportunities. So we will be discussing what we can do to advance that.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:13 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on the Tentative Agreement To End the General Motors Strike March 21, 1996

I am pleased that the United Auto Workers and General Motors have reached a tentative agreement. GM and the UAW have a long and proud history of working together to solve their disputes. Both sides have worked hard to settle this dispute and I congratulate them for spending long hours at the bargaining table and arriving at a tentative agreement which will hopefully

send more than 150,000 workers back to their jobs.

When American corporations work together with their workers, we can meet our challenge to grow the economy and provide families higher wages and increased economic security.