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Teleconference With Mayors on Crime Legislation and an Exchange With Reporters

August 26, 1994

The President. Hello? I'm just listening to your war stories; you sound good. I think they did help, all those calls you mentioned. They made all the difference.

The Attorney General and I are here on the phone, and we want to begin by just thanking you for everything you have done. I think, you know, it's obvious that this was a very tough battle in the House and in the Senate, that the outcome was often in doubt, and you guys hung in there tough. And you made a huge difference, and we are very, very grateful to you.

I know that you know well that among the things that this crime bill does is to create 100,000 new police officers, a 20 percent increase in police on the beat in the United States in communities all over this country. And in just a few minutes, I'm going to sign an appropriations bill here that makes available the first round of resources to make the crime bill a reality next year. We've already put some new police officers on the street through the funds we provided last year as a downpayment on the crime bill. The bill I'm about to sign will provide funds to train and hire 15,000 more police within the next 12 months. I know that some of you put police officers on the streets with last year's funds, but you probably all know that we received 10 times, 10 times as many applications for police hiring as we could afford, including many that were well-qualified. That is a real rebuke to those who say that there's no real need for this police funding. In the next 2 months alone, we're going to give you the resources to hire 2,500 more police officers in cities that were only turned down last year and this year because we didn't have enough money.

Let me emphasize, too, that this appropriations bill, consistent with the crime bill, provides significant money to fight violence against women, to lock up criminal aliens, for prisons, and for boot camps and drug courts and the other prevention programs that we believe so strongly in and also to help enforce the Brady bill. This is the downpayment. We're looking forward to seeing you all here when we sign the crime bill and celebrate it, but now I think we all know that the responsibility is on those of us who fought so hard for this to make sure the money is well spent, to make sure the implementation works, and to make sure that we make people safer and more secure on our streets.

General Reno, would you like to say something?

[*Attorney General Reno expressed her appreciation to the mayors for their hard work and stated that she looks forward to working with them to implement the bill. However, during her remarks one of the mayors indicated they were not receiving the transmission. When the problem was resolved, the President resumed.*]

The President. Mayor Giuliani, are you on? Go ahead, Mayor.

[*Mayor Rudolph Giuliani of New York City, commended the President and the other mayors on their efforts on the crime bill.*]

The President. Thank you, Mayor. I have to say, I think the fact that you and Mayor Riordan and some of the other Republican mayors were willing to stand up and be counted on this made it easier for the House and the Senate Members of your party who wanted to join in this endeavor to stay with it. And I can't thank you enough for that.

I think, you know, we have got to find a way to do the public's business on issues that affect all Americans without regard to their party. And there is nothing more profoundly significant than this. I just—I can't say

enough to thank you. We tried to take this crime bill beyond the debates of the past, beyond what I like to call the false choices that have been imposed too often on political debates.

This bill has got prevention and prisons and punishment and police in it, and I think will help to empower communities to make their streets safer. And as the Attorney General said, that's what, to me, was the compelling attraction of this bill. And as the days and weeks ahead unfold, the American people will learn more and more about what's in this bill, and I think they will like it even better than they do. And you will always, I think, be very proud of what you did.

Mayor Daley.

[*Mayors Richard Daley of Chicago, IL, Norman Rice of Seattle, WA, Richard Riordan of Los Angeles, CA, and Emanuel Cleaver II of Kansas City, MO, each made brief remarks praising the President's efforts on the crime bill. Mayor Cleaver then stated that he hoped the President would be able to take his vacation.*]

The President. Well, I'm going to oblige you later today. Are you still running, Mayor?

Mayor Cleaver. Yes.

The President. You've gotten so thin you're making me look bad. [*Laughter*] Stay after it.

Mayor Cleaver. All right.

The President. Mayor Rendell, I just want to say before you speak that I think you and Mayor Daley and Mayor Giuliani and the other mayors who are former prosecutors, were able to make a unique contribution to this debate because we tried to keep always in the public mind and in the minds of the Members of Congress that the law enforcement concerns were driving this bill and that even the prevention programs, as the Attorney General said repeatedly, were pushed and inserted into the bill with the insistence of people who had been in law enforcement who knew that they were a critical part of this strategy. So I want to thank you for that especially because your conviction here was rooted in your experience as is the case of the mayors—the other mayors who are former prosecutors.

[*Mayor Edward Rendell of Philadelphia, PA, thanked the President for not backing down on the key components of the bill though it must have been difficult.*]

The President. Just another day in paradise here. [*Laughter*]

[*Mayor Rendell discussed the importance of crime prevention programs and the provision to prevent Federal courts from controlling the number of prisoners placed in State or local prisons.*]

The President. Well, I can tell you, as a former Governor, that's one provision I wanted in there in the worst way, because I went through all those lawsuits as an attorney general and Governor; I know what it's like. I spent millions and millions of dollars of our taxpayers' money at home building prisons. I didn't begrudge that, but I also thought a lot of those requirements on spacing and population were excessive. And this is a very good piece of legislation on that. I thank you for that.

Mayor Abramson, I think you get the prize for making the most telephone calls. You must have a cauliflower ear; they tell me you made over 200 calls on this bill.

[*Mayor Jerry Abramson of Louisville, KY, thanked the President for allowing mayors and police chiefs to help develop a balanced bill.*]

The President. Thank you very much. General, do you want to say anything? I think they can all hear you now.

Attorney General Reno. They just did a wonderful job from the very beginning, and I think the bill is strong because of them.

The President. Thank you so much.

The Mayors. Thank you, Mr. President. Have a good vacation.

The President. Let's go to work on this thing now and implement it right.

The Mayors. All right, we'll do that.

The President. Goodbye.

[*At this point, the teleconference ended, and the President then took questions from reporters.*]

Health Care Reform

Q. Mr. President, Senator Mitchell all but said today that he's not going to be able to

get comprehensive health care reform through and that he'll spend the recess looking for ways to make progress on health care. Is that acceptable to you? Is there any point at which you would accept, or which you would take off your veto threat?

The President. Well, he's coming over here to see me today, and I think I better talk to him. I have talked to, oh, four or five other Senators in the last day or so since the crime bill passed last night. And a number of them who are strong supporters of health reform think that we ought to give this break a few days to occur and give Senator Mitchell and Senator Chafee and a couple of others a chance to talk before we make any decision.

I certainly don't want to embrace an approach that will do more harm than good and that won't achieve our objectives. But let's see what they're doing; let's see what people are feeling like after they get a night's sleep or two. These folks went through an awful lot here the last couple of weeks, and it may be that the long road they had to walk through—crime—was in part made longer by people who were working the timetable.

But they did it, and they deserve a lot of credit. And one of the things that this crime bill shows—this is a big, sweeping, complex piece of legislation that's really good for America. And it shows that it is possible to do something like this in what has been too often a too partisan environment. So I'm not prepared to make a final judgment on that at this time.

Q. Mr. President, you said just a moment ago that you didn't want to embrace an approach that would do more harm than good. That sounds like you'd be willing to wait.

The President. Well, I think the less I say right now, the better. Let me talk to Senator Mitchell. This debate is now going on in the Congress. It depends on what Congress is capable of producing. And I think we need to wait on that. That's the counsel I've been given by a number of Senators who do want health care reform and want it as quickly as we can get it. They think we ought to let the dust settle a couple of days and give Senator Mitchell a chance to do a little talking with some others for a couple of days, and then we'll see where we are.

Cuba

Q. Mr. President, do you think you've stemmed the tide of the Cuban refugees?

The President. Well, we're working at it, that's all I can tell you. I'm encouraged that the numbers are down. The weather may or may not have something to do with that. We have made it clear that we're willing to discuss, through the appropriate channels, the whole issue of immigration. And we do have laws on the books which will permit us to do some more on legal immigration than we have done. So we're working at this.

And I just want to say what I said yesterday: The Attorney General's doing a great job; the Immigration and Naturalization Service folks are doing a good job. We just need to be calm, steady, and firm, and I think we'll work through it just fine.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:20 p.m. from the Oval Office at the White House. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Statement on Signing the Hazardous Materials Transportation Authorization Act of 1994

August 26, 1994

I am very pleased today to sign H.R. 2178, the ''Hazardous Materials Transportation Authorization Act of 1994.'' This accomplishes two important objectives of my Administration—reducing outmoded and unnecessary Government regulation and enhancing public safety on our Nation's roads.

This is the second piece of important legislation that I have approved this summer to reduce unnecessary government regulation of the trucking industry, thereby helping to keep our economy strong and competitive. Title VI of the Federal Aviation Administration Authorization Act of 1994 (Public Law 103–305) removed the heavy burden of inconsistent State regulation of the trucking industry, which costs consumers up to $8 billion a year in added freight transportation costs for virtually everything we buy. Title II of the Act that I am signing today provides additional regulatory reforms at the Federal level.