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NOTE: The President spoke at 11:55 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Ambassador Dennis B. Ross, Special Middle East Coordinator; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt.

Remarks on the Advertising of Distilled Liquor and an Exchange With Reporters

April 1, 1997

The President. Thank you very much.

The Vice President and I have worked very hard for the last 4 years to help parents protect the health and the safety of their children. Our parents face enormous pressures today, greater than ever before, and they need our help as they try to guard their children from harmful influences.

That's why we fought to impose appropriate regulation on the sale and distribution of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco and on the advertising of these products in a way that appeals to young people, why we're working to make our schools and children safe and drug-free, to combat gangs and youth violence.

It's a fact that popular culture is not always popular with parents, because it's not always good for their children. That was the thinking behind the V-chip and the television rating systems, which together will help parents to better control which programs their children watch. You need only to turn on the television for an evening to know there are some things that children should not be watching.

We're here today because parents now face a new challenge in protecting their children, the advertising of liquor on television. For half a century, for as long as television has been around, this has not been an issue. The distilled spirit industry voluntarily did not advertise on television. The reason was simple: It was the responsible thing to do. Liquor has no business with kids, and kids should have no business with liquor. Liquor ads on television would provide a message of encouragement to drink that young people simply don't need. Nothing good can come of it.

Today our message to the liquor industry is simple: For 50 years you have kept the ban; it is the responsible thing to do. For the sake of our parents and our young people, please continue to keep that ban.

I want to thank the television networks and the many television stations all across America which have shunned these new liquor ads. They have acted responsibly. I urge them to remain steadfast. I also want to thank Reed Hundt, the Chairman of our Federal Communications Commission. He has spoken out strongly and plainly to broadcasters to keep the voluntary ban on TV advertising.

I agree with Chairman Hundt that the FCC has an obligation to consider any and all actions that would protect the public interest in the use of the public airwaves. So today I urge the FCC to take the next step. I want the Commission to explore the effects on children of the hard liquor industry's decision to advertise on television. And I want the FCC to determine what action is appropriate in response to that decision.

Let me say directly again to the makers of distilled spirits: It should not require a Federal action to encourage you to continue to act responsibly. I have asked that liquor ads be kept off the air for the same reasons you yourself have kept them off the air for 50 long years. We must do nothing—nothing—that would risk encouraging more of our young people to drink hard liquor. That is simply common sense. Alcohol is a drug most abused by adolescents and teenagers. Studies show a strong connection between underage drinking and youth crime, including murder and rape. Year after year, underage drinking causes thousands of deadly car crashes.

As a nation, we've worked to bring down those numbers by increasing the drinking age to 21 and passing and enforcing zero-tolerance legislation for underage drinking and driving. We've taken that further. I've asked the Transportation Secretary, Rodney Slater and our drug czar, General McCaffrey, to develop an initiative to further reduce drug use and drunk driving by young people.

All these actions are aimed at helping parents to protect their children better and to help young people deal better with the temptation of bad influences. Now I think we

should move urgently to save parents, young people, and our Nation from the unavoidable bad consequences of liquor advertising on television. I urge the manufacturers again to rethink their decision to break from their tradition of being responsible on this front. If they remain responsible, it will be easier for our young people to do so, and parents will have one less thing to worry about.

Barring that, we will work to find ways to respond to the decision by the distilled spirits industry. We will do what we must do to support our parents to help them do their jobs. We dare not do anything less.

Thank you.

Q. Mr. President, the industry is saying, why not beer and wine, also?

The President. Well, for one thing, let's just focus on where we are now. The FCC is going to look at this whole issue, if they respond positively to my suggestion. But at a minimum, there should be no backsliding. Look at the evidence. If the evidence is as I suspect it will be, that a great deal of problem is caused by hard liquor ingestion already among young people and that advertising would cause it to be worse, then I think the FCC has grounds to act. But I think we ought to start with the principle of no backsliding. Let's don't make it worse.

Q. Sir, the industry, in a sense, considers this a solution in search of a problem, because they have done so very little advertising on television at this point. How would you respond to that?

The President. That's right, they have. And that's what we're trying to do, we're trying to nip it in the bud. We're trying to make it a dog that does not bark, if you will. It's not a solution in search of a problem; there was no problem before the announced intention to abandon the 50-year ban. And what we're trying to do is to nip it in the bud, hopefully and most importantly, by persuading them to stay with their policy.

This is an area where—you know, the liquor industry has really been remarkably responsible for five long decades when it would have been easy for financial reasons for them to try to take another course. And I understand the financial pressures they're under, but I hope that they will agree to go back and embrace their original position. If they don't, I think it's only responsible for the Federal Communications Commission to explore what the likely impact of this is and if it is appropriate for the FCC to take action. That's what I've asked them to do in my letter today.

Q. Mr. President, both the liquor industry and the advertising community say that you are wrong, that they are opposed to this. Don't you expect a major fight from them?

The President. Sure. I mean, I guess I do expect a major fight if they've changed their position. And I would expect them to take the opposite position, but that's why we have—that's why we have public debate, and that's also why we have institutions like the FCC to try to determine what the public interest is here.

Q. Mr. President, how was your meeting with King Hussein?

The President. One at a time.

Q. Alcohol is alcohol. If it sends a bad message to put ads on television that kids will see urging them to drink Seagrams, why wouldn't it send just as bad a message—the ads that they're seeing to urge them to drink Coors Lite or——

The President. Well, again I will say, first of all, let's—there's something to be said for not making matters worse. And most of us, every day, make decisions in an imperfect environment in which we make responsible decisions. This is one thing adults have to do for their children all the time, in which you say, ''Well, I'm not going to make a perfect decision here, but at least we're not going to make things worse.'' And that's the position we have taken.

I think the liquor industry itself once thought that there was a distinction to be drawn if, for no other reason than alcohol content, between beer and wine and hard liquor, which is why they observed this distinction for 50 years. They thought there was a distinction for 50 years; otherwise, they would not have observed it. That was their opinion for 50 years, and I think they were right. And so I would say, the FCC—if there is no difference, if there are problems—the FCC can evaluate whatever evidence comes in, and the liquor industry would be free to present that information to the FCC.

But I believe there is a distinction, and I think there is a very powerful argument for doing no harm. Why make things worse? Why backslide?

President's Meeting With King Hussein

Q. How was your meeting with King Hussein? What was his response to your ideas on ways of reviving the Middle East peace process? And having met with him, are you in a position to now give us more detail on what those ideas are?

The President. The meeting was good. He responded well to the things that I suggested; I responded well to the things that he suggested. And no, I'm not in a position to be more specific, because—let me just say—all of you know this—this is a very difficult time in this process. We have got to reestablish the sense of—on the part of the Israelis that the Palestinian Authority has committed to security. We have to reestablish on the part of the Palestinians that the Israelis are committed to continuing to build confidence by doing concrete things as contemplated by the Oslo agreement.

This is not an easy time. The more I say about it specifically, the more difficult it will be for me to succeed over the long run. I can tell you this: The United States is prepared to take significant efforts—I am prepared personally to do anything I can to get this process back on track and to move it forward. But I think the less I say about it, the more likely I am to have some success in doing that, particularly in the next 2 to 3 weeks when we have got to try to keep the lid on things over there.

As you know, we had some other incidents this morning. We've just got to work at it. It is not going to be easy, but I am encouraged by what I would have to call creative thinking on the part of all the parties involved, and I would include the Israelis and the Palestinians in that right now.

Visit by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu

Q. [*Inaudible*]—Netanyahu when he is here this weekend?

The President. Yes, he—I understand he's coming, and I certainly hope to see him. I expect to see him. If he is able to keep his travel plans and come on over for the AIPAC meeting, then I will certainly clear some time to see him. I think it's important for us to talk, and I'm glad he's coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:24 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

Letter to the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission on the Advertising of Distilled Liquor

April 1, 1997

Dear Chairman Hundt:

I write to ask your assistance in addressing a new and emerging challenge to parents struggling to raise safe, healthy children: the decision by manufacturers of hard liquor to advertise on television.

For half a century, these companies voluntarily refrained from such advertising. They understood that advertising over the uniquely powerful and pervasive medium of broadcasting could reach children inappropriately, encouraging them to drink before it is even legal for them to do so. Until now, these companies have shown appropriate restraint. For as long as there has been television, they have known that a voluntary ban was right and they lived by it.

Now, some companies have broken ranks and started placing hard liquor ads on TV. I was greatly disappointed by their decision. I have previously expressed my dismay at this action and called on the industry to urge all its members to return to their long-standing policy and stand by the ban. I am gratified to learn that, according to one survey, the vast majority of television stations are declining to air these advertisements. I applaud that stand.

I firmly believe that we have a national obligation to act strongly to protect our children from threats to their health and safety. That's why I have fought so strongly to impose appropriate regulations on the sale and distribution of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco and tobacco advertising that appeals to adolescents, to ensure that our schools and children are safe and drug-free, and to combat gangs and violence afflicting our youth.

I applaud your public remarks calling on the industry and broadcasters to reactivate