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Glucksman, president, and Kingsley Aikins, executive director, American Ireland Fund; former Senator George J. Mitchell, who chaired the multiparty talks in Northern Ireland; U.S. Ambassador to Ireland Michael J. Sullivan; Irish Ambassador Sean O'hUiginn; Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Peter Mandelson and Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; and Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland. Prior to his remarks the President received the American Ireland Fund's Millennium Peace Award.

Remarks on the Gun Safety Agreement With Smith & Wesson and an Exchange With Reporters

March 17, 2000

The President. Good afternoon. For 7 years, our administration has worked on every front to reduce violence and to keep our communities safer. That's why we've pushed for commonsense gun safety legislation, why I've taken executive action to crack down on bad gun dealers, and why in December I said we would engage gun manufacturers in ways to seek changes in how they do business.

Today I am pleased to report that a key member of the industry has decided to set a powerful example of responsibility. Earlier today Smith & Wesson signed a landmark agreement with the Federal Government and States and cities across our Nation.

For the very first time, a gun manufacturer has committed to fundamentally change the way guns are designed, distributed, and marketed. Under the agreement, Smith & Wesson will include locking devices and other safety features and will develop smart guns that can be fired only by the adults who own them. The company will cut off dealers who sell disproportionate numbers of guns that turn up in crimes and will require all its dealers not to sell at gun shows unless every seller at the shows conducts background checks. The company has also agreed to design new firearms that do not accept large capacity magazines and will work with ATF to provide ballistics fingerprints for all its firearms.

This agreement is a major victory for America's families. It says that gunmakers can and will share in the responsibility to keep their products out of the wrong hands. And it says that gunmakers can and will make their guns much safer without infringing on anyone's rights.

It has taken courage and vision for Smith & Wesson to be the first manufacturers to negotiate. And I applaud their determination to do right by their company and their country. As I've said all along, there are responsible citizens in the gun industry who do want to make progress on this issue. I hope today's announcement will encourage others to respond in kind.

This agreement could not have come to pass without the leadership of many mayors, city attorneys, and State attorneys general. I'm glad to be joined today by Attorney General Eliot Spitzer of New York and Attorney General Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, as well as Mayors Alex Penelas of Miami, Bill Campbell of Atlanta.

In a moment, I'll be telephoning some other mayors, Joe Ganim of Bridgeport, Dennis Archer of Detroit, Roosevelt Dorn of Inglewood, California, Marc Morial of New Orleans, Jimmy Yee of Sacramento, as well as city attorneys Jim Hunt of Los Angeles and Louise Renne of San Francisco and the city attorneys of Berkeley, California, Camden, New Jersey, and St. Louis, to congratulate them as well on joining this agreement and to urge them to continue to work to keep our children safe.

I would also like to express my appreciation to former Congressman Mike Barnes, the new president of Handgun Control. I thank them all, as well as the members of our administration team who worked so hard on this: Treasury Secretary Larry Summers and Deputy Secretary Eizenstat, Attorney General Reno and Deputy Attorney General Holder, HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo, and my Domestic Policy Adviser, Bruce Reed. They have also worked very hard to bring us to this historic moment.

Let me say again today, the effort to reduce gun violence, to protect our children, to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and children,

is not about politics. It is about saving lives. This agreement shows we can get so much done when we find the courage to find common ground.

Thank you very much.

Q. What's the chance of other companies falling in line?

The President. Well, I don't know. You know, Smith & Wesson is a real giant in this field. And as I said, it took a lot of courage for the company and its leader to do this. But I think the American people will have such an overwhelmingly positive response to what they have done, that I would hope the other manufacturers would follow suit.

We have had some success, you know. A number of other manufacturers are already embracing the idea that new handguns ought to have child trigger locks. So I hope that they will do these things, the—continuing to work on smart gun technology. And I think saying that they won't continue to allow their guns to be sold by dealers that don't clearly follow the law and that they won't participate in gun shows that don't do background checks, that's a big deal. That's a very important thing.

So I really—I'm very pleased by what they've done, and I think, as I said, I hope the American people will express their appreciation to Smith & Wesson, and I hope that others will follow suit.

Oil Prices

Q. Mr. President, on the issue of oil, do you expect to announce any of the measures that you talked about yesterday that you hope to do in the next couple of days to reduce the effect of high oil, gas, and diesel prices before leaving for India? And the second question, if I may, on the same subject, did you discuss the oil market with Saudi King Fahd when you spoke to him yesterday or with any other Saudi officials, and did they give you any assurances regarding production increases in the March 25th OPEC meeting?

The President. Well, the answer is yes, I expect to have something to say before I leave for India, and yes, I talked about the markets with His Majesty King Fahd. And I think it's appropriate for me to let the OPEC members make their own decisions. But the Saudis have already expressed their support publicly for a production increase.

I think everybody's struggling now to find a consensus. The point I've been trying to make is that it is necessary, in order to get the oil prices down to an acceptable level but still have them at a high enough level to earn a fair return to the producing countries and to keep them from precipitously falling and destabilizing the world economy again as they did a couple of years ago—it's necessary to have a substantial production increase that will not only close the gap between production and consumption on a daily basis but also enable the stocks to be rebuilt, because a lot of the oil price stocks have been drawn down too low, and that's one of the things that spiked the market so significantly.

But I think that in terms of the decision they will make, that's for them to make, and they'll have to announce it. I think they're struggling to try to get a consensus. But they are, I think, concerned because the last time they increased production, there was this really big fall in the oil prices to a level that even those of us in the consuming countries thought was too low.

But the problem is, that time they increased production just as the global economy went down, the Asian financial crisis and other problems. This time, we had the reverse effect. Just as the global economy was coming up in Asia and the Europeans were growing, they cut production, which had exactly the reverse impact. So first, prices went too low. Now, they've gone way too high.

In our country, for example, lower income motorists, other motorists who live in rural areas and places where they have to drive a long way to work, and a lot of truckers, particularly independent truckers, have really, really been hurt by this situation.

So there is a stable, win-win situation here that—where the fuel prices will be affordable by the American people and others, and they will still be able to have a fair return on their production and not risk the precipitous fall that they endured over the last couple of years. So they've got to find the right balance. They can do that, but as I said, we need to have enough to meet daily consumption requirements and to rebuild the stocks.

China and Taiwan

Q. Mr. President, any thoughts on China and the elections, on Taiwan?

The President. Well, we've already said publicly that we want to see a resumption of the cross-state dialog as soon as the election is over. But the election in Taiwan is for the Taiwanese people, and I don't think I should comment on it until they have all their votes in. And they'll elect a new President, and then we'll go from there.

Northern Ireland/South Asia

Q. Mr. President, from a foreign policy standpoint, what is your best hope for this series of meetings this afternoon with Irish leaders, and what is your best hope on your upcoming trip to India and Pakistan?

The President. First of all, the good news about Ireland is that even though the institutions have been taken down over the difference between the parties on decommissioning, no one wants to go back to the way it was or give up the peace process. The voters in Northern Ireland in both communities have overwhelmingly voted for it. And I think there's no sense that I got yesterday, in my first round of encounters with the leaders, that there's any desire to go back to the way it was.

I think what we've got to do is to find a formula by which the institutions can be restored, the people can get back to governing. They actually found out they were quite good at working together, and they were getting a lot done. And we need to restore that process, and we need to restore a process that will eventually lead to all the requirements of the Good Friday accord being observed. And we'll just keep working on it until we find that answer.

And on South Asia, obviously what I hope to do first is to rekindle the relationship between the United States and India. It's the world's largest democracy. No President has been there in 22 years. We have a lot of things that we can do together, a lot of mutual interests. I want to do what I can to reduce tensions on the Indian subcontinent to reduce the likelihood of weapons proliferation and the likelihood of conflict. And I want to do what I can to support the restoration of democratic rule in Pakistan and to continue our cooperation with them against terrorism and in many other ways that we have both profited from over many decades. I also will be going to Bangladesh, and I'm looking forward to that. I have seen a lot of the initiatives taken in Bangladesh, particularly for the empowerment of poor people, that I think are important there and throughout the world.

And if you look at the size and the potential of the Indian subcontinent, if they could find a way to manage their difficulties, there's probably no other place in the world with the capacity for growth and modernization over the next two decades that you will find there. If you look at the success of Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis in the United States, that's clear evidence of that. So I'm going to do the best I can.

Syria

Q. Do you have a meeting coming up with the Syrian President?

The President. I don't have anything else to say about my foreign policy agenda today. But I will, in the next several days, continue to talk to you about all this stuff. And I thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:20 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to city attorneys John A. Misci, Jr., of Camden, NJ, Manuela Albuquerque of Berkeley, CA, and Dee Joyce-Hayes of St. Louis, MO; King Fahd of Saudi Arabia; and President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria.

Teleconference Remarks With Mayors on the Gun Safety Agreement With Smith & Wesson

March 17, 2000

The President. Hello.

Participant. Hello, Mr. President.

Participant. Hello, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you all for joining us. I'd like to start by asking everyone here on the phone to say their names and the city and the State they represent.