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Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion on Community Policing in Louisville, Kentucky

January 24, 1996

The President. Let me first of all thank the chief, the mayor and Governor Patton, Congressman Ward for making us feel so welcome. The Attorney General and her entire team who work on this are here, and we want to thank all of the citizens and the police officers who want to meet with us.

I'd like to make just a couple of brief points. First of all, when I ran for President and I began to travel the country looking for ways to bring the crime rate down, when I realized in every community I visited that ordinary citizens were worried about crime and violence, the one thing that came up over and over in all parts of the country that seemed to be working was what is now known generally as community policing. And when we finally passed the crime bill in 1994, which had been debated in Congress for 6 years, we had added to that crime bill a specific title to give funds to communities all across our country to create 100,000 new police officers. There was a reason for that.

Between 1965 and 1995, more or less, the violent crime rate in America tripled, but the number of police officers on our street increased by only 10 percent. And that's why we did that. Now, we're about a third of the way home. Louisville's gotten 16 police; I think Jefferson County has gotten a total of 36, something like that. But we're working hard to try to get more people out here.

It is now being recognized. I know one of the major news magazines had a cover story where the New York City Police Chief the other day, talking about how crime was coming down in America because of community policing. One of the things I asked the Congress to do last night was to support this program until we finished it.

I just want to make two other points if I might. This, in my opinion, is the way the Federal Government ought to relate to American citizens. We put up the money, and we say this money is for police, and you have to put up some. We'll put some, and here it is if you want it.

And then we developed a—I want to compliment the Attorney General and the Justice Department, they developed a pretty hassle-free way of applying for the money; there's not a lot of bureaucracy in it. And then we don't tell anybody how to train the police; we don't tell them how to deploy; we don't tell them how to relate to the community. That's all things that have to be decided here at the local level. That's none of our business. We just know that we have to do what we can to give you the resources necessary to achieve the goal.

The second point I want to make, just to emphasize what has already been said, it is obvious to me that there are basically three components to success. One is having the police out there properly deployed. And the second, and maybe the most important, is having some relationship with the community. That's why I asked the American people last night to respect and work with their police officers, because if you don't have that then this won't work.

The third thing I want to say—I want to compliment the mayor—is that within this whole framework our biggest problem now is rising levels of violence among juveniles nationwide. And the mayor also is participating in another one of our programs and got some funds to start, I know, some sports teams and other things here to make a special effort with young people. And that's the last thing I want to emphasize. You know, we just got so many of these children out there that are in trouble, having difficulties. And the police cannot do that alone. They need people to support them in organizing and coming up with the resources to give the children in areas with high rates of crime something positive to do. And I think that Louisville's got a lot to be proud of on all fronts. I'm glad to be here, and I've already said more than I meant to. I'd like to listen to you now.

[*At this point, Mayor Jerry Abramson introduced Carolyn MacLuton, past president, Community Oriented Policing Board, 4th Police District, and Nick Altieri, president, Mayor's Block Watch Council, who discussed community involvement with the police in Louisville.*]

The President. Let me ask you a question. You said—and I appreciate you saying that, but you couldn't be doing this without the Federal funds. But it's also true that you couldn't be doing it if you didn't have the citizens involved——

Mr. Altieri. Absolutely. Absolutely.

The President. And that's the point I was trying to make in the State of the Union last night, that when you're dealing with problems that are these people problems that—whether it's crime or the—you know, trying to get jobs into places, move people off welfare, you deal with all of these people problems, you've got to have a partnership. There is no Government program to solve this. You've got to have grassroots citizens involved in it; otherwise, there is no way to get it done.

I sort of liken it—we strike the match and you stoke the fire; you have to do it.

Mayor Abramson. And every district is different, so they can tailor things for what is unique to the district in their neighborhood, because the citizens and Ms. MacLuton understands her district and Nick understands his, and they can tailor their situation to the specifics right in their neighborhood; and that's what's been so successful.

The President. Since you've been doing this, do you think the general feeling of the people that live in your neighborhood about the police has improved?

[*Ms. MacLuton indicated that there had been a great deal of improvement in police-community relations. Mayor Abramson introduced Officer Charles Waters who discussed the importance of partnership between the community, the residents, and city agencies. Mayor Abramson then introduced Peggy Dawson, a member of the COPS Board and the Mayor's Block Watch Council, who discussed increased community understanding of problems police face through the Citizens Police Academy*.]

The President. Is this being done anywhere else in the country that you know of? Chief?

Mayor Abramson. Is it?

Police Chief Doug Hamilton. San Francisco?

The President. I must say, this is the first person I ever heard talk about that, but it makes a world of sense that it would be very good for citizens if one person on every block in a big city, for example, knew how the police department worked, what the police were up against, how the structure was, what the budget was. I think it would make a huge amount of difference. That's a wonderful idea.

Ms. Dawson. Mr. President, I think we have a manual that we can give you, or some of your staff, that you can take back with you.

The President. Great. That's a wonderful idea.

Mayor Abramson. Yes, we've got that right there. You want us to just bring it up and put it on the——

The President. Go ahead.

[*Mayor Jerry Abramson introduced Stephen Kelsey and Robin Cook, District Resource Officers, who discussed police outreach efforts in the community which build grassroots support for community policing efforts.*]

The President. But it looks to me like what is happening in the—and, by the way, law enforcement is not the only place where we need to do this, as I said. But you know, to go back and organize people on a community basis is a very important thing in this country. I mean, if you think that's—really, we've gotten away from that in a lot of ways. And that's why so many organizations and so many Government programs fail, is because there's no structure underneath it that's capable of actually carrying the load. So I'm very impressed by this.

General Reno, do you want to say anything, ask any questions?

[*Attorney General Janet Reno stated that the Citizens Academy Manual was an excellent tool for community relations. The participants then discussed giving area youth positive activities in the community and economic growth as a factor in improving the community*.]

The President. If I could just make one observation about it, because I think it was Officer Waters that mentioned he could get business back into the neighborhoods when

the crime rate goes down—if you look at the American economy now, basically there are two problems. I talked about one of them last night, and that is that most Americans have jobs, but it's hard for them to get a raise in the global economy because there's always so much pressure to hold down the wages. And so that's a different question. I've tried to deal with that.

The other big problem is that the national unemployment rate is 5.6 percent, but with the exception of a few States like California still getting over the terrible blow they took when the defense budget went down, for example, and the recession of the late eighties, most other places have an unemployment rate that's about 4 percent or 4.5 percent generally, and then there will be these pockets where the unemployment rate is 10 or 12 or 15 percent.

Q. Thirty percent.

The President. Or 30 percent, yes. And you can't—so that, if you look at it in this way, that is the number one potential market for the rest of the American economy. If you look at it that way. There are all these people living in our country that if they had jobs and they had any money, they would be growing our economy faster. They would be, in effect, if you added another one percent to the work force, that would give everybody else a raise, because they'd be buying everything everybody else produced; they would be generating a higher level of growth.

And that's another thing that I think has been overlooked. One of the main economic strategies we could follow to grow the American economy from inside would be to make all these places that have high crime rates safe so investment that now might go, oh, south of the border, or anywhere else could easily flow in there to put people to work and create opportunity. I think it's something that we've really underestimated, the economic aspect of this. I wanted to ask one other question mostly of those of you who have worked on the community boards and the crime watch. Would you say that this policing strategy makes your neighborhood safer, primarily because you can catch people who commit crimes more quickly, or because it prevents more crimes from occurring in the first place?

[*The participants indicated that the program is most effective in preventing crime but that it also fostered a sense of community empowerment. The last speaker indicated that it contributed to the stronger families and discussed education in the family, concluding that because his grandmother corrected his grammar, he spoke well.*]

The President. I was so afraid you were going to say good. [*Laughter*]

[*Gov. Paul Patton stated that the program had shown strong results in empowering the community and thanked Mayor Abramson for the enlightening program.*]

The President. Let me just say in closing that—I want to go back to the last question that I asked. What our goal is, you know, and all of the—I want to thank the police officers around the table who participated, as well as the citizens—when I ask is the primary benefit of this system that it helps you catch people quicker when they commit crime so it helps prevent crimes in the first place.

I think in the end it will do both, but the answer of prevention is very important. I mean, we have to get back to a point in our country when the crime is the exception rather than the rule. I mean, and I thought it was so perceptive when you said that some police officers were wondering, well, are they going to turn me into social workers, or is this right or wrong.

We don't want police forces to be occupying armies in our cities. We want them to be skilled. We want them to be able to shoot. We want them to be able to protect themselves. We want them to be able to protect other people. But we should be working toward a goal in America where the crimes are the exception, rather than the rule. We can't be in a position anymore where the fastest growing job category in the United States are prison guards and where the fastest growing part of the State budget is investing in more prisons. And I say that as a former Governor who has built as many prisons, I guess, as anybody on a per capita basis.

And you have to put people in jail, and if they're dangerous, you've got to leave them there a long time. But every child that you keep from committing that first armed rob-

bery, from firing that gun the first time, from doing that first drug deal—every child you do that to, you've done 10 times as much than you even do when you make an arrest.

And I think what you see here—to go back to what the Congressman said—is that the further you get away from this neighborhood toward Washington, DC, and the more distance there is between Washington and you, the harder it is to communicate. And so simple messages tend to come through even though they may be wrong. And you say, well, this person says the answer is personal responsibility, and this person says somebody ought to help solve it. And the truth is, the answer is both. The answer is both. And that's what you all have done here. I take my hat off to you. And I've been very moved by what I've heard today and I must say I'm very encouraged. And we'll keep trying to help you and you keep carrying the load and we'll keep cheering.

Mayor Abramson. Thank you, sir.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 2 p.m. at the Louisville District 4 Police Station.

Remarks to the Community in Louisville

January 24, 1996

Thank you. Thank you very much. Governor Patton, Mr. Mayor, Congressman Ward, Judge Armstrong, Chief Hamilton: Let me say on behalf of not only myself but Attorney General Reno, who is here with me, and our team from the Justice Department, we are honored to be in Louisville today. We are honored to be your partners in the search for a safer community. And I, personally, was honored to spend a few moments this morning with some of your community leaders and your police officers. And I think any community in America would be proud to have a community leader like Carolyn MacLuton and a police officer like Stephen Kelsey, and I thank them.

I want to thank Mr. Burks, your principal here at the Louisville Male High School. I thank the orchestra quartet and the band for playing, and the people for singing. Some of my staff was in here listening, and they said I missed a pretty good show. And since I like music a lot I hope I'll get a rain check to hear what I missed, because I heard they were terrific. Let's give them a hand. Thank you, sir. [*Applause*]

Since I am in this high school, too, I could not leave without acknowledging a graduate of this high school who is making a contribution of signal importance to the United States. Thomas Graham, Jr., is serving today as my special Representative for Arms Control and Disarmament. His picture hangs in the school hall of fame here, and I just want you to know he's in my hall of fame, too. He's doing a great job for the United States of America.

Last night I had the privilege to deliver the State of the Union Address to the United States Congress and to our country. I came here today to continue to work on the themes and the issues that I discussed with the American people last night. And I did it because Louisville has done so much to make community policing a reality, and because without safe streets the American people cannot be free.

Without the fear of crime and violence it is going to be hard for us to get investment and jobs and opportunity back into some of our most distressed neighborhoods all across America. Unless we can prove that we have the discipline, the values, and the intelligence to organize ourselves into a safer society that gives our young people a better hope for the future, it's going to be hard for America to reach its other objectives and for all of our people to live out their dreams.

So I came here today to follow up on the work of the State of the Union. As I said, our Union is strong. In many ways our economy is stronger than it's been in 30 years. We have the lowest combined rates of unemployment and inflation we've had in 27 years. In the last 3 years there have been over 7.8 million new jobs coming into our economy. We have all-time high trade numbers. We have all-time high numbers of small business formation. We have an all-time high number of self-made millionaires, not people who are inheriting their money, people that went out there and earned it and made it on their own.

All these things are good. But we also know that most Americans are out there