Remarks Announcing the Appointment of Abner Mikva as White House Counsel and an Exchange With Reporters

August 11, 1994

The President. Good afternoon. I am delighted to announce that Chief Judge Abner Mikva of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia will become the new White House Counsel, effective October 1st.

I am very pleased to have a man of Judge Mikva's stature, integrity, judgment, and experience join us in our efforts. He's had a long and distinguished career in public service, and he will make a vital contribution to the operations of this White House. A World War II veteran, and a member of the Illinois Legislature for 10 years, Judge Mikva was elected to the Congress in 1968. He served with distinction on the House Judiciary and Ways and Means Committees and built a reputation as a remarkably thoughtful, fair, and progressive public servant. In 1979, Judge Mikva went to the Federal bench on the highly regarded Court of Appeals here in Washington, where he has served as Chief Judge for the last 2 years. During the time that he served on this court, he's come to be regarded, justifiably, as one of our Nation's leading jurists.

With his new post Judge Mikva will have served his country now in all three branches of our National Government. I expect that his broad experience, his deep understanding of our country, our people, and our institutions will make him an extremely valuable member of the White House team.

He is a man of great decency who loves his country very much. And I am very grateful that he's willing to give up his lifetime appointment to the Federal bench to serve the White House as Counsel.

The White House Counsel advises the President on matters of law and justice, ranging from the appointment of judges to the application of law throughout our society. He must ensure that the White House meets the highest standards of ethics and trust. Judge Mikva, a man of uncompromising integrity and judgment, is the right person for this job.

Let me also say a special word about the man whom Judge Mikva will replace. Lloyd Cutler came to the White House 5 months ago for the second time in his distinguished career to serve for a limited time as my Special Counsel. Once again, he has served his Nation magnificently. Mr. Cutler is a wise counselor, and I and all of us have benefited immensely from his contributions here at the White House. I thank him for all he has done here, and I look forward to his continuing good advice in the years to come.

It's a measure of the seriousness with which we view this office that we have turned to Abner Mikva as Lloyd Cutler's successor. And so I want to say to Judge Mikva, welcome to the White House.

Before I call Judge Mikva up, I'd like to make a special note of the debate now underway in the House of Representatives on the crime bill. As you know, this has been very hard fought. And there are many interest groups arguing that the Members of Congress should vote against the so-called rule to keep the crime bill from coming to a vote in the first place so that they can kill the crime bill without getting credit for killing the crime bill.

The choice is still the same: Are we going to put another 100,000 police officers on the street? Are we going to ban assault weapons? Are we going to ban ownership of handguns by minors? Are we going to make our schools safer? Are we going to give our young people something to say yes to, even as we make punishment stiffer and build more prisons?

The average violent criminal goes free in 4 years. This crime bill has been taking shape and has been up to the gate and thwarted for 6 years. There is something wrong with out national institutions when we can't do that. And I want to urge the House to pass the rule and the bill and do it today.

Judge Mikva, the microphone is yours.

[*At this point, Judge Mikva made brief remarks.*]

Baseball Strike

Q. Mr. President, can you tell us about the baseball strike which is about to start? As a fan, is there any reason why these negotiators should not be sitting down and at least trying to resolve this? They're not even meeting.

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Would you call upon them to at least sit down and have some talks?

Q. And don't go away, Mr. President. [*Laughter*]

The President. I've got to go away, because I've got to get back on the phone. If I don't—I'll have lots to talk to you about if we pass the rule today, but if I don't make some more calls, then I'll always wonder.

Let me make one comment about the baseball strike. First of all, I think that you should know that since the Secretary of Labor first contacted both sides, we have been in continuous contact with both sides and have done what we could to make some constructive suggestions about how to avoid the strike. It appears that both parties are determined to let the strike proceed. We will do what we can to be of help and to get things back on track if there is anything we can do.

Today I would like to speak on behalf of the country because this is an unusual situation. You know, when a company goes on strike, the right to strike is protected and the workers go on strike because they and the management can't reach agreement. But they always have to consider in the end their customers and what will happen if they lose their customers. In a great event like the baseball strike, I think there's an assumption that the customers are always there. But the only thing I'd like to say to both sides is that there are a lot of little kids out there who don't want to see this season come to a close. And there are a lot of not-so-little kids out there who know it's the most exciting baseball season in 40 years.

And I hope that in the days ahead they will search for a way to get back together, finish this season, extend it by a few days so that all the games can be played, and the feelings of the American people that this could be one of those seasons that occurs once every four or five decades could be vindicated. I think the people really ought to be taken into consideration here, and I hope they will be.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters on Anticrime Legislation

August 11, 1994

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, under any circumstances I would be disappointed if the House of Representatives turned its back on the toughest and largest attack on crime in the history of our country, at a time when the American people say it is the most important issue to them. But it is especially disheartening to see 225 Members of the House participate in a procedural trick orchestrated by the National Rifle Association, then heavily, heavily pushed by the Republican leadership in the House, and designed with only one thing in mind, to put the protection of particular interests over the protection of ordinary Americans.

I don't know how many people in the run up to this vote—of both parties, unfortunately—told me, "I'll vote for that bill, but I just have to vote against this procedural bill." "Oh, I'll vote for it if it ever gets to the floor, but I just have to vote against this rule," because of the assault weapons ban or because they had decided, many of them after the fact, that there was too much money in here for preventing crime and to give our children something to say yes to instead of something just to say no to, even though two-thirds of this money is for police and prisons and punishment.

Well, tonight a majority of the House attempted to take the easy way out. But they have failed the American people. And now I say to them, the easy way out is not an option. Fear and violence, especially among our children, will still be there tonight when they go home to bed. So I want them to come back tomorrow and the day after that and the day after that and to keep coming back until we give the American people the essential elements of this crime bill, until we put 100,000 police on the street and take our children and the guns off the street with the assault weapons ban and with the ban on ownership of handguns by juveniles, until we make "three strikes and you're out" the law of the land.