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Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters on the Major League Baseball Strike

February 7, 1995

The President. Good evening. Sorry to keep you here so long tonight. I had hoped that tonight I'd be coming out to tell you that baseball was coming back in 1995, and for a good while this evening, I thought that that might well be the case. Unfortunately, the parties have not reached agreement.

The American people are the real losers, the major league cities, the spring training communities, the families of thousands of Americans who won't have work unless there's a baseball season, and of course, the millions of fans who have waited now for 6 long months for the owners and the players to give us back our national pastime.

I have done all I could to change this situation. At my request, Bill Usery, the highly respected former Secretary of Labor, has been working very hard in mediating this dispute. He has certainly gone the extra mile, and we all owe him our thanks. But the players and owners still remain apart on their differences. Clearly they are not capable of settling this strike without an umpire. So I have now concluded, since I have no legal authority in this situation, as all of you know and have known for some time, that I should send to the Congress legislation seeking binding arbitration of the baseball dispute.

This is not a request for a congressionally imposed solution. It is a request for the only process we have left to us to find a solution through neutral parties. And the only way to do this appears to be for Congress to step up to the plate and pass the legislation. Unless they do, we may not have baseball in 1995.

I know that the people in Congress say they have other pressing business, and they certainly do have other pressing business. I regret very much having to send this legislation there, but spring training is just 9 days away, and I think many Americans consider this pressing. At least when the bill goes to the Congress, the American people can make themselves heard one way or the other on the legislation and Congress can consider it.

Clearly, the best solution is still one that is voluntary. I still call again on both sides to work with Mr. Usery to narrow their differences. Hopefully, they can reach agreement. If not, then Mr. Usery's recommendations as to where the parties are at the time can be made available to the arbitrators.

I urge the parties to embrace this course themselves. And as I said, I had hoped for a while tonight that they would. We have done the best we can. The American people have been frustrated by the strike. I think all the parties who were here tonight have now been frustrated by the strike.

There is something the American people can do. They can tell their Senator or Representative whether they feel this is a proper case for binding arbitration. Last fall, for the first time in 90 years, there was no World Series. If something goes on for that long without interruption, seeing our Nation through wars and dramatic social changes, it becomes more than a game, more than simply a way to pass time. It becomes part of who we are. And we've all got to work to preserve that part.

So again I say, I call on the players and the owners to go back, to keep talking, to work through this. There is still time. I will send the legislation to Congress with the full expectation that Congress will consider it in light of what they believe their constituents want, which their constituents will have the opportunity to tell them.

Q. Mr. President, you've met now with the players and the owners. In your opinion, who is more to blame for this impasse? And why don't they simply accept voluntarily binding arbitration?

The President. Well, I think both sides have their share of blame, and I think it would be wrong for me to characterize it at this time. I don't think that would help to settle the suit. You should ask them why they won't accept what they won't accept. They will both have different explanations for that, and I will leave it for them to put it out there. I did urge that course strongly.

Q. Mr. President, what gave rise to the optimism you felt during the course of the evening that a settlement might be possible?

The President. Well, I don't want to do anything to weaken either side's position or characterize it in a way they might later think is unfair. Let me just say, I thought that we were about to get agreement on a process which would permit the next season to be played, that would permit spring training to occur, and that would lead to the resolution of these issues. I thought that we had worked our way through—there were some new ideas presented tonight as we discussed, as we talked.

That's why, you know, when they didn't reach agreement, when they came over here at 4:30 p.m., I thought I was going to come out and make the statement I just made to you. But then I said we ought to try one more time. And the Vice President sat with Mr. Usery and both sides, and then about 7 p.m. I began to meet with them. Now, we've worked hard for more than 3 hours now, and we could not agree on a process that both sides thought was fair to their interest which would immediately permit me to announce that baseball would be played this season. But we did have some new ideas offered that had not been on the table before that I thought would lead to that. Unfortunately, it did not, at least it has not tonight.

Q. Mr. President, when will you send up your legislation? And are you asking Congress to make this their top priority, putting aside their other business until they complete action on this?

The President. I'm going to send it up tomorrow, and I would like to have it considered expeditiously, yes. I haven't looked at the congressional calendar; I don't even know what their options are for that. But I think it should be considered expeditiously. I think, obviously it can't be done in a day or two, anyway, so the Congress will have time to hear from the American people, pro and con. This is an unusual request; I realize that. There is no baseball commissioner. We lost the World Series. Millions upon millions of dollars in lost income is at stake, and a lot more as well. So I hope they will consider it expeditiously. I think that's the only way it could lead to a season in '95.

Q. How do you compare this, Mr. President, to, say, President Kennedy acting on steel prices and former uses of the office and the Oval Office for labor dispute?

The President. Well, I think it's a little different in the sense that the steel price issue could have sent inflation through the economy and shut the economy down. I've tried to explain that if it weren't for the unusual nature of this case, I would not be intervening in the baseball case because the economy of the country won't go down as a result of it. The inflation rate of the country won't go up as a result of something that could or couldn't happen.

This is far more in the nature of a unique set of circumstances where there isn't a commissioner and there should have been to resolve this, and where there is immediate substantial threat to a large number of communities affected by spring training and the communities that have baseball teams, and where I think the country would be well served by resolving this. So it is different in that sense.

I was looking at the history of Presidential action in these areas, going back to the first one, which I believe was under President Theodore Roosevelt, which unfortunately was also unsuccessful. Just 3 years before he settled the Russo-Japanese War and won the Nobel Peace Prize, he found difficulty in settling a labor dispute here in the United States.

I still think this can be settled. The parties are just going to have to decide whether they want to have a baseball season in '95 and what the long-term damage to baseball will be and therefore the economics of both sides if it doesn't happen.

Q. Mr. President, if the season begins with replacement players, would you throw out the first ball?

The President. I am encouraging these parties to go back and work out their differences. Until I am convinced that they have exhausted all opportunities to do that, the less I say about all other issues, the better we're going to be. I do not want to be yet another force undermining the possibility of an agreement. I want to be a force to create an increased likelihood of an agreement, and that's what I've done so far. I'm sorry I don't have a success to report tonight. I'm not sorry I tried, and we'll keep working at it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:51 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House.

Remarks Announcing Community Policing Grants
February 8, 1995

Thank you so much, Sheriff Kelly. He spoke so well I hardly want to say anything. [*Laughter*] Chief Viverette, thank you very much for your work and for coming here and for what you said. I thank Attorney General Reno and Lee Brown for their outstanding work for our country. I'm very proud that they're a part of our administration. And I thank Chief Brann and John Schmidt for the work they have done on this police program, and of course, the Vice President for what he said and for what he does and for clarifying the nature of public spending under the LEAA program. If they bought me an airplane I'd still be Governor. [*Laughter*] I want to thank the Members of Congress who are here for what they did on the crime bill last year. And I want to thank many who are not here, but I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge Senator Biden, without whom we might never have had this crime bill. I thank him especially in his absence.

This is security week at the White House, I think you could say. We talked about immigration yesterday and the need to protect our borders from illegal immigration. Today we're releasing our drug control strategy and talking about police officers. I'd like to put it briefly in the context of what I have been trying to achieve here.

I ran for this office with a vision that at the end of this century we need to be preserving the American dream for all of our people and making sure that as we move into the next century we're still the strongest country in the world. I think our strategy should be what I have called the New Covenant, creating more opportunity but insisting on more responsibility and strengthening our communities at the grassroots level.

The role of government and specifically the role of the Federal Government at this time, it seems to me, is to do three things: to expand opportunity while shrinking bureaucracy, to empower Americans to make the most of their own lives, and to enhance our security at home and abroad.

In ways that are obvious, the crime bill we passed and the drug strategy we pursue furthers all of those objectives. We are working hard to help communities to arm themselves to fight crime and violence. We are working hard to help people to defeat the scourge of drugs, both by enforcement as well as prevention and education and treatment. The crime bill makes the most of the resources that we have achieved by shrinking the Federal bureaucracy dramatically, to the point where, when we finish, it will be the smallest it's been since President Kennedy was in office.

Now, that leaves a lot up to you. It's up to all of you to hire and train the police officers. It's up to you to deploy them as you see fit. It's up to every citizen in every community in America to take responsibility to join the fight.

I am all for more flexibility for States and localities. This crime bill, particularly as it was changed—and I want to thank some of the Republicans who are here for your contribution for that—we said, "Hey, we ought to give the local communities more flexibility in deciding which prevention programs to fund; they know what works and what doesn't." That was the wisdom of the Congress, but there is a national interest in having 100,000 more police officers. There is a national interest in doing that because we know enough to know that when crime triples—violent crime—over 30 years, and the size of our police forces only increase by 10 percent over 30 years, and more police get off the street and into the cars, that becomes a national problem. And when all the police groups in the country come to us and say this is in the national interest, then we have to respond to that as well.

Today we are here to award grants to over 7,000 new police officers in over 6,600 small cities, as the Attorney General said. It's an astonishing thing to me that more than half the communities in our country said, "We want to be a part of this." If ever there was evidence that there is a national interest here, that is it.

I wish that violence were a stranger to small towns. I wish that this really could have been just a problem for big cities where all the criminals in the country are congregated. But we all know that's not true. Indeed, we all know that most of our big cities have seen a decline