

Week Ending Friday, February 3, 1995

Remarks to the U.S. Conference of Mayors

January 27, 1995

Thank you very much. I'm delighted to be here. I see that half of the Cabinet is here. I guess they've already answered all your questions, solved all your problems. Now they can come solve ours. *[Laughter]*

Mayor Ashe and distinguished members of the organization, I'm delighted to see all of you. Is Mayor Grant from East Providence here? Your wife told me this was your birthday. Happy birthday. Happy birthday. Just wanted you to know I was checking up on you. *[Laughter]*

Let me begin by saying congratulations to all of you on the overwhelming passage of the unfunded mandate legislation by the Senate today, 86 to 10 the bill passed. I have not had a chance to look at the final version of the Senate bill. It just passed a little while ago. But I know some very good amendments were added, and I want to congratulate Senator Glenn and Senator Kempthorne. We worked very hard on this bill last year, and I was sorry we didn't pass it then. Both of them did very, very good work. And I believe the bill is a very strong one as it goes to the House. But I have not seen its final form, but I heard it was in good shape. And it must have been pretty good if it passed 86 to 10. And I think that should be reassuring to you; it certainly is to me.

I want to thank you for the resolution you passed on the baseball strike and the action we are taking. We will work very hard on that. I know how important it is to you. I sometimes think that the full economic implications of this whole thing have not been evaluated, not just for the cities that have major league teams but also for the cities that host spring training. This is a big deal, and we're working on it.

I want to thank your international committee for the vote you took on the Mexican

stabilization package that we have offered. As you know, this is not the most popular issue in America today, but it's important. And I thank you for your support. It's in the interest of our working people and our economy. And it's not a gift; it's not foreign aid; it's not even a loan. It's cosigning a note with good collateral. So it's in our interests, and I thank you for that.

When I came here 2 years ago with a mission to restore the American dream for all of the people of this country and to make sure we moved to the next century still the strongest force in the world for freedom and democracy and peace and prosperity, I said then and had said all during my campaign that I wanted a new partnership for the American people. I called it a New Covenant of more opportunity and more responsibility, recognizing that unless we had more of both, we could not hope to do the things that have to be done.

I have sought to essentially focus on three things that I think are critical to making sure we succeed in this new economy: empowering our people to make the most of their own lives, expanding opportunity but shrinking the Federal Government bureaucracy, giving more authority to State and local governments and to the private sector. And I have sought to enhance the security of our people at home and abroad. In all those things you have been very helpful and supportive, both of the specific initiatives of this administration and of your own efforts which fit so well into that framework.

As all of you know, in the last 2 years we've had a lot of successes. We now have the figures in on 1994's growth rate. We know it was the best economic year our country had since 1984. We know that the combined rates of unemployment and inflation are the lowest they have been in 30 years. We know that we have inflation at a 30-year low. We know that, among other things, the African-Amer-

ican unemployment rate went into single digits for the first time in 20 years.

So there is a lot—[*applause*—we've tried to expand more authority to our States and to our cities, and we're bringing the Federal Government down in size and reach where it's appropriate. We already have 100,000 fewer people working for the National Government than we did when I became President. And if nothing else is done, it will shrink by another 170,000. And of course, in terms of security, the most important things we did were to pass the Brady bill and the crime bill, which you were active in and supportive of, and I thank you for all that.

As we look ahead in this year, which promises to be somewhat unpredictable but exciting and I think could be very productive for our country—and I must say this passage of this bill today and the reasonable deliberation in the Senate and the way the amendments were debated in good faith is quite encouraging to me—there are some things that I think we have to do. In terms of empowering our people to meet the challenges of this age, we have to realize our job is still to expand the middle class and to shrink the underclass. And the two main initiatives our administration has this year are the middle class bill of rights and raising the minimum wage.

We want to pass this middle class bill of rights, not only to give tax relief to middle class people who have been working harder for lower wages or for at least no wage increases but to do it in a way that will raise incomes in the short term and in the long term. That's why the focus is on tax deduction for all educational expenses after high school and an IRA with tax-free withdrawal for education expenses or for health care expenses or for the care of a parent or purchasing a first-time home, and why we seek to consolidate the 70 various training programs into one huge block and let people get directly a voucher that they can use if they're unemployed or if they have a low-wage job and they're eligible for training to take to the local community college or wherever else they wish to take it to get the education and training of their choice.

I think it's important to raise the minimum wage, because if we don't next year the buying power of the minimum wage will be at a 40-year low. And the evidence is clear that if you raise the minimum wage a modest amount, it doesn't cause increased unemployed and indeed may bring people back into the job market who otherwise are not willing to come in and go to work. So I would hope you would support both of those things.

In the area of expanding opportunity and shrinking the bureaucracy, we're coming back with a second round of reinventing Government proposals—and perhaps Secretary Cisneros has already talked to you about what we're proposing for HUD—to collapse the 60 programs into 3.

I want to emphasize that we're doing this to strengthen the mission of HUD and to strengthen the partnership that we have with the cities of this country, not to gut the Department's partnership or its capacity to help you do your job.

And so I hope that you will help us as we debate this on both parts, say that you want to support a reduction in the size of the Federal bureaucracy, but you do not want to see the mission of HUD as carried out by the mayors of this country undermined and weakened because you have a job to do.

Finally, let me say some things about the crime bill. I very much hope that we will be able to work through, in this session of Congress, a good faith carrying forward of the crime bill that was passed last year. It became unfortunately embroiled in politics; you know that better than I do. And I think you also know that the prevention programs that were passed were programs that were recommended to us in the strongest possible terms not only by mayors, not only by community leaders but by the leaders of the law enforcement community and that a lot of those prevention programs that were later labeled as pork were cosponsored, the first time they came up, by people who later said they were pork.

Well, all that's behind us now, and the only thing that matters now is, what is the best thing for the people of this country? What will keep our streets safer? What will reduce the crime rate more? What is the most likely approach to actually make the American peo-

ple feel more secure? We must enhance our security at home. At the end of the cold war, I think it's fair to say that most Americans put their children to bed at night more worried about their security concerns at home than abroad.

So what we should seek to do without regard to party or region of the country is that which is most likely to make us most safe and to lower the crime rate. Many of you—I'll bet even a majority of you here—have recorded declines in the crime rate in the last year or so because of the strategies that mayors are adopting with community policing, with prevention programs, with using citizens to work with law enforcement to do things that will reach people in ways that will prevent crime as well as catch criminals more quickly. We have to take these lessons into account.

So as we enter into a second round of debate about the crime bill, I would say there are two or three things that we ought to keep in mind. First, as I said in my State of the Union Address, we should not repeal the assault weapons ban. We should not do that. [Applause] This issue, as you can hear from the response, is not a Republican-Democratic issue, it is not a liberal-conservative issue, it is overwhelmingly an urban-non-urban issue. And what we have to do is to convince all the people I grew up with—[laughter]—that we don't—we don't want to fool with anybody's hunting rifles. We don't want to stop anybody from going to shooting contests. We don't want to interfere with anybody's legitimate pursuit of happiness in the exercise of their right to keep and bear arms. But there is nothing in the Constitution that prevents us from exercising common sense. And people who live in urban settings know that the mortality rate in the emergency rooms of urban hospitals from gunshot wounds has gone up dramatically in the last 15 years because the average body has more bullets in it when it's wheeled into the emergency room. You do not have to be a genius to figure out what's happening.

And so I hope that we can put an end to this war. This is a phony war among the American people. And those of us that respect people's right to hunt and to engage in other appropriate conduct, those of us that

enjoy it ourselves, we ought to be able to ask each other again: What's best for America? And what good is it to pretend that it's a matter of principle to maintain the right of a bunch of teenagers to have Uzis on the streets of our cities.

So I hope you will talk about this in a non-partisan, nonpolitical way and realize this is one of those cultural problems that's gripping America. We got too many of them. They're keeping us apart. But we need to say to the nonurban folks in our society, this is something that—we've got to work this out. This is a fair deal. This is a balanced bill. There are 650 weapons enumerated in this bill that cannot be infringed on by the Government in any way, shape, or form. And so let's let this alone and go on about the business of the country.

I also think we ought to emphasize that at least the Attorney General is doing her dead-level best to make sure that the administration of the crime bill that passed is non-bureaucratic, nonpolitical, and efficient. If you look at what's happened so far, in October, not even 2 weeks into the new fiscal year, we had already funded 392 policing grants that went unfunded last year. Last month, at your recommendation, we gave 631 larger cities the go-ahead to begin recruiting and training more than 4,600 new officers. So they know the money will be there when their applications are handed in.

For the smaller cities, we've streamlined the application process, allowing them to apply more quickly for police with a simple one-page application. I don't know how many one-page applications we've got in the Government now, but I know you can ask for an SBA loan or a policeman with one page. You ought to be able to do more things with one page.

This cops program has now helped more than 1,000 communities to put more than 10,000 more police officers on the street in all 50 States. Within a week, when the announcement is made of the winners of the COPS FAST program, that total will be close to 15,000, well on the way to the 100,000 goal of the crime bill. That would be a 20 percent increase in the strength on the streets.

Now, the crime bills now being considered in Congress have some things that I think may be superficially appealing but need to be thought through. If you scrap the \$8.8 billion cops initiative, as some suggest, and replace it with a \$10 billion block grant which also has to include prevention programs, the good news is you'll have a block grant. The bad news is there'll be a lot less money in it than was provided for.

And keep in mind, to all those who say it wasn't funded, we did not raise one red cent in taxes to pay for the crime bill. We did not take one red cent away from any other program. We simply dedicated all the savings to be gained from reducing the size of the Federal bureaucracy to giving it back to local communities to use to fund the crime bill. That's what was done.

Now, to make matters worse, some have suggested that the \$10 billion block grant to fund police and prevention could only be funded if we first fund \$10 billion in new prisons. So that's a decision that some would make against the unanimous advice of every police officer in the country who has testified. So that—if we make that decision, that would be like people saying, "We don't care what lowers crime; we don't care what makes people safer; we don't care what people in law enforcement who vote Republican and Democrat say. This is what we're going to do. It will make us feel better, and we can claim that it was the best thing to do."

We should not do that. This ought not to become a political issue. That crime bill had a balance of police and prevention and prisons. We shouldn't take all the prevention money away through the back door and put it into prisons. And we shouldn't say that the prisons are more important than the police and the prevention. I had no objection to getting into the business of helping States with their prison construction, even though it was totally unprecedented, but there is no evidence that that is the way to lower the crime rate. The American people want to be safer at night; they want their kids to be safer on the streets and at school. And we ought to be driven by what is best for the American people.

I would also say, just parenthetically, that even last year I was concerned when the

crime bill passed that the conditions on getting that Federal money for prison construction were so restrictive and required such a large State match that a lot of that money might never be used. We cannot permit a cruel hoax to then be written into the law saying, well, you can get this block grant for police and prevention but only after the prison money is spent and then have conditions on spending the prison money so strict that it will never be spent in the first place.

So I urge you to just go up there without regard to your party or region and say, look, let's do what will lower the crime rate; let's do what will keep people safer. The American people will figure that out. They will trust their local leaders; they will trust their local law enforcement people; they will trust them. We can share responsibility now. There need be no characterization that is negative when this process is over. There need be no name-calling. There needs to be no anything. We just need to do what is right to lower the crime rate. And all of us have worked so hard on this.

Again, I would say this is like the assault weapons issue. We've got big issues to deal with. This unfunded mandates is one. Welfare reform is another. How we're going to lower the deficit and provide tax relief is another. There are major positive issues that we're going to have to face. We don't need to reopen an issue and make it worse. So I ask you to help us on that.

Now, let me say one final thing about the baseball strike, if I might. I asked Bill Utery, the Federal mediator, to get the sides back together and report to me by February 6th. Anybody know what February 6th is? It's Babe Ruth's 100th birthday. So it struck me as a good day to settle the baseball strike. I identify with Babe Ruth. He's a little overweight. [*Laughter*] And he struck out a lot—[*laughter*]—but he hit a lot of home runs because he went to bat. You are the people in this country who go to bat. You have to deal directly with people. You have to be accountable, not only for the rhetoric of your speeches but the reality of your actions.

And so I ask you to take this opportunity to join with us, and let's make the decision the American people made last November, a good decision by making it one of shared

responsibility. Let's move what we can back to the State and local level. Let's work to empower people. Let's reduce the burden of Government and increase the opportunity it creates. We can do these things, but it is very important that we not fix what ain't broke and that we not become diverted by issues that can only divide us when there is so much we can do that will bring us together.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:36 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Victor Ashe of Knoxville, TN, and Mayor Rolland R. Grant of East Providence, RI. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Remarks on Welfare Reform

January 28, 1995

Good morning. I am on my way to Blair House to host an all-day meeting that is a bipartisan working session on welfare reform. We will have Members of Congress, Governors, and local officials there from all across our country. I am determined to work with them to pass welfare reform. I think it is perhaps the most pressing social problem we face in our country, and the time has come for Congress to act.

As I said in the State of the Union, what we need in welfare reform is a New Covenant of opportunity and responsibility. People on welfare who can work should go to work. Parents who owe child support should pay it. Governments don't raise children; people do. And we must have a national campaign against teenage pregnancy and births outside marriage.

If we're going to end welfare, let's do it right. We should require work and responsibility, but we shouldn't cut people off just because they're poor or young or unmarried. We should promote responsibility by requiring young mothers to live at home or in proper supervised settings and to finish school. But we shouldn't put them or their children out on the street. I have worked on this issue since 1980. I know that the people who want to change welfare most are those who are trapped on it.

Yesterday, in preparation for this meeting, I met with four former welfare mothers who have managed to free themselves from the system. I listened again to the stories of people who have had great difficulty in trying to get the kind of support they need to get off of welfare, people who did not want to get on in the first place and were anxious to be off of it. I know that most people who are trapped in welfare will gladly take the work options if we can work out the system in the proper way. I also know that those who don't want to do the responsible thing must be required to do so.

But our job in the end is not to tear anybody down and not to use this issue to divide America, but to build people up, to liberate them, to give them the capacity they need to compete and win in this new economy. The American people want us to put politics aside and to get this done for our country. I am committed to doing it, and I believe the people who are coming to this meeting this morning are committed as well.

Wish us well. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:12 a.m. at the South Portico at the White House.

The President's Radio Address

January 28, 1995

Good morning. I want to talk to you today about the New Covenant I discussed in the State of the Union. My mission as President is to restore the American dream to all of our people. In the new economy of the 21st century, that requires a New Covenant between the people and their Government and among the people themselves.

This is something I've been talking about for many years, since I ran for President. The New Covenant is grounded in an old idea that all Americans have not just a right but a responsibility to do the hard work needed to rise as far as their talents and determination can take them and to give something back to their community and to their country in return.

Opportunity and responsibility, they go hand in hand. We can't have one without the other, and we can't have a strong community without both. We've worked hard to create