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NOTE: The President spoke at 10:15 p.m. at the Sheraton Bal Harbour Hotel. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Telephone Remarks to Lighthouse Elementary School in Jupiter, Florida

March 14, 1997

Dr. Joan Kowal. Good morning, Mr. President.

The President. Good morning, Joan.

Dr. Kowal. And good morning—I know that the President is saying good morning to all the boys and girls here that are gathered at Lighthouse. We're very pleased to at least have you on the phone and we wish you were here in person and we know you do, too.

The President. Oh, I really wish I were there. I wanted so much to come and visit because I've heard so much about the school. And I know about the problem of growth and crowding in Florida, and I wanted to use the work you're doing there as a strong argument for passing this program in Congress to help school districts like this one and throughout the State of Florida to do the building they need to do.

And I'm very grateful—and I also wanted to thank all the students and the educators for showing up. I know the student body president there, Marcy Haylett—I've been told this is her birthday. I hope you will tell her happy birthday for me.

Dr. Kowal. I will tell you she also has the title of president. I was going to get to introduce that president this morning. And she is, indeed, celebrating an 11th birthday at this time. And I think one of the things—we know you didn't choose Lighthouse quite by accident. When we think of the symbol of a lighthouse and the fact that what it offers is a real symbol of hope on the horizon and helps navigators, and we know that one of the things that as you're looking for growth, that it's a real sense of hope for us. And we're very pleased that you've recognized the challenge here as we talk about rebuilding America's schools.

Can you tell us just a little bit more—and let me just say, Marcy wants to—she had a long introduction here, but I want to ask her just to say a couple of words out of her introduction, because she wanted the opportunity to do that. Is that okay?

The President. Sure, I want to hear her.

Marcy Haylett. Hey, Mr. President. It is an honor and a privilege to have the 42d President to come to Lighthouse Elementary School to speak to us and to help us to solve our problem of overcrowded schools.

The President. Thank you, Marcy.

Ms. Haylett. You're welcome.

The President. And happy birthday again.

Ms. Haylett. Thank you.

The President. Hope you have a great day.

Ms. Haylett. Hope you feel better.

The President. Oh, I'll feel better, and I hope I get to come and visit you later, okay?

Ms. Haylett. Okay.

The President. That's great.

Dr. Kowal. Mr. President, can you give us a few words—you are now on loudspeaker, and let me just mention that standing here with me is Commissioner Brogan, and he's grabbing the phone out of my hand. But I'll tell you what, he is one of the most visible commissioners we've had here in Florida. He just wants to say howdy.

The President. Hello, Frank.

Commissioner Frank Brogan. Mr. President, how are you?

The President. I'm great. I heard you and Joan talking on the television a few moments ago. It was very good, and I appreciate what you had to say.

Commissioner Brogan. Well, Mr. President, we are certainly sorry to hear about your accident. The good news is they'll have to give you two strokes a side in the future, I suppose.

The President. Right. I saw Greg Norman this morning; I told him my handicap is going up by the minute.

Mr. Brogan. Well, we are disappointed, as I'm sure you're well aware, but I told all of the wonderful children and teachers and parents here at Lighthouse Elementary that I'm sure you're considerably more disappointed, having had the accident and not being able to visit this great school.

The President. I'm so disappointed because I really looked forward to coming. As

soon as I heard about the school and how the principal, Una Hukill, and all the teachers were working hard to cope with the growth, and I really wanted to come there because I thought that Lighthouse would be a symbol of what we need to do, of the best in our education system and how we need to respond to the growth issue.

We have more young people in school today than ever before in the history of America, and we don't have enough facilities. And in many places, the facilities that are there are deteriorating. And what my proposal would do is simply say to the local community, if you're out there trying to do your part to build or repair facilities, we want the National Government to put some money aside, to lower the interest rates so that you can get more money for building for less effort as long as you're making an appropriate effort on your own.

It's a way of using our national funds, which are more limited, to leverage far more money all across America to help deal with this growth issue. And I'm looking forward to passing it, and I just want to encourage everyone there to talk to the Members of Congress and the Senators from Florida and ask them to support this.

Commissioner Brogan. Well, Mr. President, we appreciate that. And I've spoken personally with both Senator Graham and Senator Mack, who obviously recognize some of the overcrowding that we're facing in what we believe is a very special State, with 2.3 million schoolchildren who come to us not just from around the country but all over the world. And we believe that facilities is an issue for both the local and the State government. But we also believe because of our special circumstances, as do Senators Mack and Graham, that we need some special consideration from the Federal level.

Your proposed visit here today has really made a statement. We're sorry that you couldn't be here personally, but believe me, it has made a statement. And we're working in Tallahassee right now, in the legislative session, drawing some attention to this issue of overcrowding. They're working on it at the local level. And we thank you for bringing some national attention to a very special State with very special problems.

The President. Thank you. I was glad to do it. I talked to Congressman Foley today—he came by the hospital to see me—I was glad to see him. And I think if we can get all the legislators from Florida behind this in Washington, we've got a good chance to pass the program.

Commissioner Brogan. Well, you take care of yourself. I had surgery similar to that when I was a little bit younger, and I seemed to have come through it. I run every day, and I know you'll be back on the golf course very soon.

The President. I want to be back running soon, and that's encouraging. And again, I want to thank Joan Kowal and all the people from the school there. Please forgive me for not being there, and give me a raincheck. I can't wait to see you, and believe me, you've done a lot of good for this program today, just by the national publicity you've achieved. Perhaps you'll even get more, in addition—than I heard that you would have had otherwise.

Commissioner Brogan. Well, that's very possible. You know how these things work. I'm going to turn, very quickly, the telephone over to the chairman of the school board here in Palm Beach County, and also the principal, because I know they want to say a quick "hello" and "get well soon" to you, Mr. President.

Thank you. Take care of yourself. Fly safely.

Paulette Burdick. Good morning, President. My name's Paulette Burdick from the school board.

The President. Good morning.

Ms. Burdick. Well, we certainly wish you well. We're sorry that you're not here, but all the children wish you a speedy recovery. They're all busy addressing and making get-well cards for you.

The President. Oh great.

Ms. Burdick. And we thank you for bringing a national recognition to the fact of school overcrowding. I've just returned from Tallahassee and your visit down here to south Florida certainly has increased the dialog up in Tallahassee and also at our local level. And certainly, on behalf of the nearly 135,000 students in Palm Beach County, we do want

to extend another invitation to come back to our glorious county.

The President. Thank you very much. I'll try to do it without incident next time. [*Laughter*]

Ms. Burdick. Well, okay. Thank you. I'm going to turn you over to our wonderful principal here, Ms. Hukill.

Ms. Una Hukill. Good morning, Mr. President. This is Una Hukill, the principal of Lighthouse Elementary. And on behalf of all of our students and our staff and our parents, we wish you a very, very speedy recovery. All of our thoughts and prayers are certainly with you this morning.

The President. Thank you. Thank you for all the effort you put into this visit. I'm so sorry I can't be there. I'm looking at the children on television now. They look wonderful. And I hope I get a chance to visit with you in the future.

Ms. Hukill. Well, I truly want to extend that offer to you. Anytime that you happen to be anywhere near our area, our door is always open and welcome to you, and any impromptu time, we would be happy to have you here with us.

The President. Thank you very much.

Ms. Hukill. And have a very speedy recovery, and you'll be receiving packages from us very soon.

The President. I can't wait. I'll need it.

Ms. Hukill. I need to just tell you that we have some wonderful lemon cake and your Diet Coke in sterling silver waiting for you, and we'll keep it.

The President. [*Laughter*] Just save them all. I'll be there.

Ms. Hukill. We'll save it. We're hoping that we'll be able to just put it on hold for a very brief time.

The President. Hi, kids. I can see them waving on the television. That's great.

Ms. Hukill. Let me give this to Superintendent Kowal who will also introduce to you Congressman Mark Foley. Okay, I guess he just spoke at you. I'll give you back to the Superintendent. Thank you so much, and for a speedy recovery.

The President. Thank you. Goodbye.

Dr. Kowal. One more time we want to let Marcy, who introduced you, say goodbye. We really appreciate—I know when you are in pain it's sometimes hard to have a smile on your face, but everybody tells us you do right now.

The President. Thank you. I'm doing fine.

Dr. Kowal. That's really good. Just reechoing what the Commissioner said. We have a school board that has been committed to doing the right things for children in providing the very best in teaching and learning. And I know that you would have liked to have seen that, classroom to classroom. But you're certainly here in our spirits.

I'm going to let President Haylett say goodbye to you. Okay? Hello?

The President. Yes, I can hear you.

Ms. Haylett. Hi, hope you feel better.

The President. Thank you, Marcy. I'll feel better. And you tell all your classmates that I'm sorry I missed them, and I thank them for their good wishes, okay?

Ms. Haylett. Okay. Hope to see you next Friday in Washington.

The President. Oh, great. I'd like that.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:06 a.m. from Air Force One. The President canceled his scheduled visit to the school when he injured his knee during a visit to professional golfer Greg Norman's residence on the evening of March 13. Participants in the telephone conversation included: Joan P. Kowal, superintendent, Palm Beach County schools; Florida Commissioner of Education Frank Brogan; Marcy Haylett, student body president, and Una Hukill, principal, Lighthouse Elementary School; and Paulette Burdick, chair, Palm Beach County School Board.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

March 10

The President announced his intention to nominate Linda Tarr-Whelan, who currently serves as U.S. Representative to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, to the rank of Ambassador.