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NOTE: The President spoke at 8:15 p.m. in the International Ball Room at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Dorothy, Height, chair, Wade Henderson, executive director, and Rabbi David Saperstein, executive committee member, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights; Julian Bond, chairman of the board, NAACP; Monsignor Raymond G. East, pastor, Nativity Catholic Church, Washington, DC; award presenter Justin Dart, Jr.; Frances Humphrey Howard, sister of Hubert Humphrey; Judy Shepard, mother of Matthew Shepard who was murdered in a hate crime in Wyoming in 1998; award recipients Gov. Gary Locke of Washington, actors Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, Jeannie Van Velkinburgh, who was shot while aiding a hate crime victim in Denver, CO, in 1997; Renee Mullins, daughter of James Byrd, Jr., who was murdered in a hate crime in Texas in 1998; and former mayors Maynard Jackson and Andrew Young of Atlanta, GA.

Remarks Announcing the Proposed "21st Century Law Enforcement Safety Act"

May 12, 1999

Thank you very much. Please be seated; and good afternoon. Madam Attorney General, Mr. Holder, Officer Hall, Senator Leahy, Congressman Stupak, Senator Biden, Senator Specter. There are now over 50 Members of Congress here, I think; at least that many had accepted to come. And we see our mayor there, Mayor Williams; Mayor Schmoke; Mayor Rendell, and other officials: Associate Attorney General Fisher; Treasury Under Secretary Enforcement Jim Johnson; and the Director of our COPS Office, Joe Brann. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for being here today, and welcome.

Five years ago this summer, after a remarkable effort in Congress which required, among other things, the breaking of an intense filibuster, with the support of many of the people here today, I was able to sign into law a crime bill that was the first of its kind: a comprehensive bill that funded local solutions to local problems and enhanced the promising practice of community policing; a bill that also banned assault weapons and demanded tougher punishment for the toughest criminals and provided innovative prevention strategies to keep our young people out of trouble in the first place.

It was a crime bill that brought our laws into line with our oldest values, requiring all of us to take responsibility at every level of government and every community in America to prevent crime and protect our families. I'd like to say a special word of thanks to Senator Biden who is here today for his extraordinary efforts in what seems like, at once, a long time ago and only yesterday.

Today we know that the strategy embodied in the crime bill, which was really written by local police officers and law enforcement officials, is working. The murder rate is down to its lowest level in 30 years; violent crime has dropped 20 percent in the last 6 years alone; and in many smaller ways, reducing crimes like vandalism and littering that undermine the quality of life. We are beginning to repair the social fabric and restore civility to everyday life.

There are many reasons for this success. The Brady bill has stopped over 250,000 illegal handgun sales to felons, fugitives, and stalkers. The assault weapons ban has helped; so have tougher penalties and the waning of the devastating crack epidemic.

But police chiefs, politicians, and people on the street all agree that the most important factor has been community policing. After all, until the crime bill passed, the violent crime had tripled over the preceding 30 years, but the size of our police forces had increased by only 10 percent. Where police officers, therefore, used to cruise anonymously through the streets, now community police officers walk the beat and know the people in the neighborhoods, becoming involved in the lives of the people they protect and involving them in the fight against crime.

Community policing has worked miracles in many of our cities, where violent crime once was out of control and law-abiding citizens mistrusted police often as much as they feared gangs. Now, in cities and communities all across America, residents work with police officers forming neighborhood watches, banding together against drug dealers, building connections that are the core of community life and the heart of civil society.

When I signed the crime bill I pledged to help communities all over our Nation fund

100,000 community police officers by the year 2000. Today we are keeping the pledge.

Since 1994, the COPS program has funded 99,000 new police officers, over half already on the beat. Today I am pleased to announce the latest COPS grants, over $96 million for nearly 1,500 police officers in more than 500 communities. This will bring us to over 100,000 community police officers funded, ahead of schedule and under budget. And I thank you for all of your efforts in that regard.

In making America's thin blue line thicker and stronger, our Nation will be safer. But you and I know our job is far from finished. Last week I sent new legislation to Congress to close the loopholes in our gun laws, raise the age of handgun ownership to 21, hold adults liable for keeping, recklessly keeping guns and ammunition within the reach of children, and asking for background checks for the purchase of explosives.

Today I will send to Congress a new crime bill for the 21st century, to advance our crime-fighting strategy in several respects and build on the successes of the 1994 crime act. We know what works, and we should make certain that those efforts continue and are expanded.

We know, too, that crime is still too high in too many communities. And the next stage of our crime-fighting strategy must focus with renewed intensity on the high crime areas, to break the cycle of violence on our meanest streets. Finally, we know we face new threats as a result of the new technologies of the information age.

So here's what the bill does. First, and most important, it expands the COPS program, helping communities to hire up to 50,000 more police officers, especially those hardest hit by crime. It will help them hire local prosecutors who work much as community police officers do in the neighborhoods where they can make the biggest difference. The bill will also give 21st century tools to our police officers to fight the criminals who, themselves, increasingly use technology to commit crimes and to avoid capture. The bill will provide grants to help communities encourage schools, faith-based groups, and citizens, themselves, in restoring peace to our neighborhood. School districts can use the grants for preventive efforts that will reduce the likelihood of tragic violence.

The second thing the bill will do is to help steer young people away from crime and gangs by strengthening antitruancy and mentoring programs, by cracking down on gang members who intimidate witnesses.

Third, the bill will help to break the cycle of crime and drugs. Three out of four people in the criminal justice system have drug problems. If we treat those drug problems, we can cut the crime rate dramatically. The bill says to prisoners, ''If you stay on drugs, you stay behind bars; to those on parole, if you want to keep your freedom, you must stay free of drugs.''

Fourth, the crime bill will do more to protect our most vulnerable citizens. It will punish retirement rip-off artists, nursing home operators who abuse and neglect their residents, telemarketers who prey on older Americans. It will toughen penalties for people who commit violent crimes in the presence of children and reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act.

Finally, the crime bill will strengthen our efforts to combat international crime and terrorism. The threat of weapons of mass destruction is real and increasing in an age of technological change and open borders. The bill will make it a Federal crime to possess the biological agents used in such weapons without a legitimate, peaceful purpose.

This is the kind of comprehensive approach that has brought crime down 6 years in a row now. It is the kind of tough but smart approach we need in the new century. I am pleased that so many Members of the Congress are committed to move this agenda forward this year. I thank the Democrats who have come out in support of the legislation, and I hope that, as in 1994, we will enjoy strong support from Republican Members who share our objectives. And I thank those who are here today. I look forward to working with members of both parties to protect our families and to make our communities safe.

Now, as you all know, this is Police Week, and you see a number of police officers behind me and out in the audience. It's a week where we pay tribute to our Nation's law enforcement officers. Without their courage,

commitment, and ability to meet the challenges of our time and to help keep our streets safe, life would be much more difficult in America.

It is fitting, therefore, that the next speaker is a young community police officer from the Wilmington, Delaware, Police Department, funded through our COPS program, who used to be, I might add, a fifth-grade teacher and who truly represents the changing face and the bright future of policing in America. Officer Jonathan Hall was a teacher when he decided to become a police officer, but he still finds time to be a mentor to at-risk young people. And he takes every chance he can to talk to children about how they can protect themselves from crime.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming a man who symbolizes what we have been working to bring to America for the last 6 years, Officer Jonathan Hall.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:05 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Anthony A. Williams of Washington, DC; Mayor Kurt Schmoke of Baltimore, MD; and Mayor Edward Rendell of Philadelphia, PA.

Remarks on the Secretary of the Treasury Transition

May 12, 1999

The President. Please be seated. I'd like to welcome all of you here today, especially the families of the people who are at the center of this announcement, and members of the Cabinet, Members of the Congress, Mr. Greenspan, ladies and gentlemen.

For 6½ years now, I have worked hard to build an economy that gives all of our people a chance to prosper and to live out their dreams. When I took office in 1993, it was a time of record deficits, high unemployment, decades of stagnant wages. It was clear then that we needed to make difficult and too long deferred choices.

So we put in place a new economic strategy rooted in the realities of the emerging information age. By now, the elements of that strategy are tiresomely familiar to those of you who have been a part of this: fiscal discipline, investment in our people, expanded trade. But the results are plain: over 18 million new jobs; the lowest unemployment and inflation in three decades; the strongest economy in a generation, perhaps ever, ushered in by new technologies; the productive energies of the American people; and sensible policies.

In 1992 I told the American people I would focus on the economy like a laser beam. The first step was to establish within the White House a National Economic Council, modeled on the National Security Council, and then to pick Bob Rubin to lead it.

As the first Chair of the National Economic Council, Bob forged a true team and built an enduring and vital institution, now ably led by his successor, Gene Sperling.

Four years ago, when Secretary Bentsen resigned, I appointed Bob to be Secretary of the Treasury. Alexander Hamilton, our first Treasury Secretary, insisted that the United States pay its debts and practice fiscal prudence. That then-controversial proposal gave the new Nation a chance to grow into the powerhouse it is today. Bob has been acclaimed as the most effective Treasury Secretary since Alexander Hamilton, and I believe that acclaim is well deserved. I thank again the Members of Congress who have come here, both Republicans and Democrats, in testament to that.

He has upheld the highest traditions of the office. He has merged old-fashioned fiscal conservatism with new ideas to help all Americans benefit from the new economy and to maintain and enhance America's leadership in the world economy. He understood the importance of fiscal discipline and the accountability and the impact that it would bring, not only low interest rates but also intangible economic confidence, both of which have brought us more jobs, more businesses, higher wages, lower mortgage rates, and a rising standard of living for all Americans.

He cares very deeply about the impact of abstract economics on ordinary people. I can tell you that for all these years, he has always been one of the administration's most powerful advocate for the poor and for our cities, for the investments that we put into the empowerment zones, for the earned-income tax credit, for the community development