

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:37 a.m. in the Mellon Auditorium. H.R. 3450, approved December 8, was assigned Public Law No. 103-182. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Exchange With Reporters at Blair House

December 8, 1993

Violent Crime

Q. Give us your reaction, sir, to the shootings on Long Island—[inaudible]—in the shootings.

The President. First of all, it's a terrible human tragedy, and my sympathies go out to all the families involved.

I will say, I think we have to note that the gun that was used contained, apparently, two 15-round clips that were expended while this man in a manic state was walking down the subway aisle. And one of the reasons we ought to pass the crime bill is that Senator Feinstein's amendment to limit assault weapons would make those 15-round clips illegal. They're not necessary for hunting or sports purposes, and it simply allows you to shoot and wound more people more quickly. So I hope that this will give some more impetus to the need to act urgently, to deal with the unnecessary problems of gun violence in the country.

The second thing I would say is that while no one believes that there is anything we can ever do to solve every problem of someone who snaps mentally and does something terrible like this, and we have to acknowledge that honestly, there are a lot of things that we're going to have to do in this country to get violence under control that relate to rebuilding our communities and healing across racial lines and economic lines. But we need to start with public safety. Put those 100,000 police officers on the street. Pass this ban on assault weapons and these multiround clips. And let's get about the business of making the country safer.

Q. [Inaudible]—requirement for licensing and testing to purchase a gun?

The President. Well, that was recommended to me, as you know, by the Mayor-elect of New York and the Mayor of

Los Angeles, and I've asked the Attorney General to review it and make a recommendation to me on it. I think I should wait to hear from her on it. It is interesting how we regularly have requirements, for example, for getting and driving cars that don't apply to the use of guns. When I was a boy and first started to hunt, you know, one of the first things I was told was you have to learn how to use a gun safely and responsibly. And it's something I think we ought to look at. But I want to ask the Attorney General for an opinion before I discuss it further.

Lobbyists

Q. Sir, Roy Neel and Howard Paster are getting very lucrative jobs in PR and lobbying. Doesn't that, at the very least, give the impression of a revolving door that you spoke against?

The President. What I spoke of was not that citizens should go back to their private lives from Government and not that they shouldn't be able to use the knowledge and experience they have, but they shouldn't be able to abuse it.

What we did was to erect bigger walls against abuse. Neither one of them can ever lobby for a foreign interest and neither one of them can lobby the Executive Office of the President for 5 years on any matter even though the law only requires one year. So we've raised the wall higher, which is exactly what I promised to do.

Now if, in addition to that, the House will follow the Senate's lead and pass the lobby bill, lobby restriction bill, which will put restrictions on the activities of lobbyists and disclose more of them, and if the House and Senate will agree to a good campaign finance reform bill and the Congress will agree to live under the laws it imposes on private employers—if they'll do all that, which is on our agenda, then I think the public confidence will be much, much higher.

Surgeon General Elders

Q. Dr. Elders, obviously, has said a lot of things that have created a controversy, but unless I'm mistaken, this is the first time I can remember her making a comment that was a fundamental disagreement with you and that a member of your administration

talked about reining her in—that she needs to only speak for the administration.

The President. I just don't agree with that position. When you have someone as outspoken and energetic as she is, there's going to be times when she'll be outspoken and energetic in a way that I don't necessarily agree with.

Q. Is she allowed to disagree with you?

The President. But I certainly stand behind her foursquare as Surgeon General. I think she's done a good job, and she's beginning to really focus the country on a lot of these public health problems. So, she needs to make it very clear that—and I think she did, to be fair—that I just disagree with that. I have thought about it a lot, and I think the cost of legalizing drugs would far outweigh the benefits. But I think the fact that everybody in America feels overwhelmed and determined to do something about crime and violence and drugs and gangs is a very positive thing. So we'll just go from here.

President's Health

Q. Mr. President, how's your back?

The President. Much better, thank you. It just happens every couple of years. I wait for it to heal up, and I go back to running. It's fine.

NOTE: The exchange began at 2:11 p.m. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks to Mayors and Chiefs of Police on Violent Crime

December 9, 1993

Thank you, Mayor Abramson, and thank all of the rest of you for coming here. I have looked forward to this meeting and to receiving this plan ever since the first discussion we held.

I believe that this Nation is really prepared in a way that it has not been before, at least in my experience, to do something about violent crime, to do something about all of its causes, and to try to come together across the lines of region and party and the size of the units in which we live to deal with these things that are tearing the heart out of our country. I think the rapid change of

opinion and movement on the Brady bill at the end of the last session is an example of that. I think the size of the margin by which Senator Feinstein's amendment was added to the crime bill in the Senate to ban 35 kinds of assault weapons was evidence of that. And so I think we are prepared to begin.

I would just like to make a couple of points, and then I came here, I'm sure along with the Attorney General and FBI Director and Dr. Brown, our Director of Drug Control Policy, as much to listen as to talk. I want to listen to you. But I would like to just put a few things on the table.

The first thing is that it is important that we get a good crime bill out early when the Congress comes back. And we'd like your help in defining what that is. The Senate and the House versions are different. The most clearly manifest difference is that the Senate version has more money in it and therefore would enable us to fund in this crime bill the full 100,000 extra police officers that I have supported since I began running for President.

As you point out in your report, it will take some time to train and deploy those people, but I know that it makes a difference. I think the margin of Mayor Lanier's reelection is evidence that people know that if you properly deploy trained personnel, it just doesn't serve to catch criminals quicker, but because of the relationships they develop in the community and their visibility, it actually reduces crime. I think there should be some alternative punishment for youthful offenders, boot camps and perhaps other things. I think that is very important.

Beyond that, we ought to talk about what else we do and where we go. But I want to emphasize that even with intense commitment in this city, you have to do the things that are before you. You have to get done what you can do at the moment and then move on to what's next on the agenda. So I think it is imperative that we move on the crime bill and the 100,000 police officers in the street and the boot camps as soon as we can when the Congress comes back.

I also think we ought to recognize that we don't have all the money in the world, and we don't want to spend a lot of money on