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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

March 19, 1990

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ATTORNEYS GENERAL

The Roosevelt Room

10:51 A.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: I did want to thank you all for coming. And Bill, I think, has had a chance to outline National Drug Strategy II. I want to thank you, Tom, for working so closely with the federal effort, heading the attorneys general task force on all of this, and it is very, very important.

I needn't say it with him here, but I will -- I am very proud of our Drug Czar -- we don't use the name anymore with all the changes going on in the world, but -- (laughter) -- he's done a superb job. We've tried to approach it on a totally nonpartisan manner, recognizing that this problem is national and that nobody's going to make it by dealing just at the federal level. The more I think of the solutions, the more I think the states and localities and, yes, those private points of light have to be involved.

And I don't know whether I should reflect Bill's optimism, but I must say I have been encouraged because as he's looked at this -- he and Judge Walton and others all over this country -- he senses, and I think I do, too, a certain turning around at least in terms of public opinion on this question. I think there was some wondering whether all of us -- and this means you all -- were going to stay with the antidrug fight. And when we see the numbers going down in terms of high school usage, of seniors using cocaine, it's encouraging.

And I was able to reflect, when I went to Cartagena, to the three presidents that, yes, we recognize that our demand for these horrible narcotics was causing them enormous problems. We've talked about it -- Bill and I and others -- going there -- John Sununu -- and we decided that right up front at that meeting, we said, we know we've got a demand problem. I'm surprised they thought we had to reiterate that because I've tried to make it clear to all of them that we recognize that. But there has been some feeling in South America that we didn't recognize it. And so once we got that -- say, look, there's a demand problem. Here's what we're trying to do about it. Now let's talk about the supply. I think we made a little headway on that.

In any event, that summit I think was good because we had three very strong-willed presidents -- one of whom is leading a tremendously courageous fight against the drug traffickers -- come together and join us in a communique or a statement of purpose that I think is very helpful.

So I would say that I'm beginning to feel a certain sense of optimism on it. We are getting marvelous support in the private sector -- in the media, for example, some wonderful pro bono advertisements that -- we've got a task force -- have you talked about the Jim Burke effort here? Jim Burke, of Johnson and Johnson, heading a media task force. The goal -- \$1 billion dollars -- \$1 million a day for three years -- \$1 billion of pro bono advertising

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to fight drugs. And it's coming along.

I went out and -- Bill and I -- Bill, I think, set it up, and I went out and talked to the National Academy of Television Arts and a group of other leaders out there. And -- in the media -- and they're taking a market -- 20 million kids watch cartoons every Saturday. I don't know what that says, but nevertheless, 20 million kids watch cartoons. And they're taking all these cartoon characters, including Ninja the Turtle and Mickey Mouse and all of these, and working in not only -- not to disrupt the entertainment, but working in an antidrug message. Now, that couldn't have happened, I don't think, if it hadn't been for the focus that you all are putting on the drug problem. And it couldn't have happened without -- I think -- without the focus that Bill Bennett and others are trying to put on it from here.

So I stand here a little bit optimistic about how we solve it. I would say that I would like to see the Congress move forward on our crime package. And I think it's a tough one. I know there are probably disagreements in this room with certain parts of it. But I feel -- we've got education on the demand side of the equation; we've got interdiction, but we also have to back our law enforcement people. And you know our administration's position on things like the death penalty for drug pushers and all. And I don't want to see that reversed out in well-intentioned negotiation by certain members of the United States Congress.

So we're going to fight for our crime package. And I think it's -- I think, inevitably, we're going to succeed on it. I think we will be successful. But I'd like to -- for those who do agree with it, I'd like to ask for your help.

We've gotten some of what we've asked for -- new agents, new prosecutors, new prison space. We're getting some good support already on certain parts of the package. But I must confess to a certain frustration. I really believe we have to back up our lawmen, and we're talking about an exclusionary rule that is designed to protect the truth and punish the guilty -- changes there. We're talking about habeas corpus reforms to stop frivolous appeals and to allow punishment be meted out in a timely fashion. And as I say, we still favor constitutionally sound death penalty provisions.

There's some battle in Congress, and maybe you've talked about this, to fight -- Congress coming on to overturn retroactively certain state death penalty sentences. We're not sympathetic to that.

So I would ask your support -- this much horsepower in town -- to work -- for those of you who believe in our goals there -- to work with us on getting this crime package through. (The President sneezes.) (Laughter.) That's news. (Laughter.) A little hay fever in the air around here. I'll tell you, I got hit with it yesterday. But they've got their job to do and I've got mine. (Laughter.) Sorry. (Applause.) Come on, you guys.

So anyway, Bill has proposed a conference with state officials, local officials. I would urge, Tom, as many of your members that feel they can break away to participate in that, please do.

And again, thank you. I'll be glad to take a couple of questions if I haven't overstayed my welcome here. Or I'd be glad to hear from you all. I mean, this is a good chance to have at least a few shots at a two-way street and tell us what you're upset about. Don't say "send money." (Laughter.)

Tom, why don't you just come on up and tell me what's on the minds of your associates.

MR. MILLER: Thank you. Thank you for being with us and thank you for the education in Washington that, when the President sneezes, that is news. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: It's not. They just like to -- particularly this center row. They like to needle me a little bit. I'll get even. (Laughter.)

MR. MILLER: Before you arrived we had a very productive discussion with Dr. Bennett, a good give-and-take and I think the building blocks for some very strong cooperation between Dr. Bennett and the attorneys general. We're developing a pattern of some very close relationships with your administration in the antitrust area, the environment in particular, and see the possibilities with Dr. Bennett. As he sat down, he suggested we get together sort of an executive group to work with him in a session in June.

So that we have so much in common here. We have the bipartisanship. This is an extremely bipartisan organization. We have the drug war, and we know what that means to America and what we can accomplish. So what we need to do is really channel the abilities, the strengths, the resources, and the goodwill in this room to even greater activity. And that's what we're trying to do.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, it is very important. And we have no complaints in terms of the cooperation at all from the state and local -- the very fact that we -- shift the gear from drugs a minute to education -- met with the governors and came up with six national goals. Some might not think that's enough. Some might have in mind a larger role for the federal government in terms of spending on education. But all of that was set aside at Virginia, at Charlottesville -- Mr. Jefferson's university -- to come up with some major national goals. They will not be -- we are not going to dictate, try to, through a lot of complicated legislation that mandates certain performance.

But the thing that impressed me about the education summit was that, though there were enormous differences in political philosophy amongst the governors and the President, we came together and set these goals. And now, it's my responsibility, I'm sure, to help the governors follow up on it.

The same thing is happening in the drug field, I think. And we've got differences -- maybe you and I do, Tom -- on certain facets of legislation, but I think the thing that is emerging is the need to work together to fight drugs. And you can fine-tune it in the states and I'll tell you what I think quite directly from here.

So I want to thank you all.

MR. MILLER: Well, we'll start from a common purpose and a lot of goodwill and we get a lot done in that direction. Do you have time for a few questions?

THE PRESIDENT: Sure. Or a few answers, I mean, if you guys got -- seriously.

Q Mr. President, on another issue. As you know, particularly in the Northeast, the environmental matters continue to be a matter of great concern. As Chair of the Attorneys General Nebraska Committee, I want to thank you and your administration for putting the environment on the front burner, and particularly, for the relationship that the Environmental Protection Agency has redeveloped and sustained over the last eight or nine months with the Attorneys General.

Sir, there have been conflicting reports out of Washington as to the respective roles of Administrator Reilly and Governor Sununu in terms of environmental issues, particularly in the context of the Clean Air Act. I wonder if you might address their participation in this.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, one thing I've learned over the years, and I'm sure it's true in state governments, is everybody loves a battle -- trying to figure out who's up and who's down --

who's in, who's out, who's listened to, who's not. And in this case, they're both right; Sununu and Reilly. And they're working together. And they're strongly supportive of the clean air amendments. They've worked side by side in hammering out the compromises that are necessary to get legislation through.

And so it isn't a question of one being up and the other being down, or one being in and the other being out. But it's -- I can understand the speculation on it, and where there are nuances of difference, we do it like I expect you do in the states -- get everybody sitting around together and say, now, wait a minute. Here's the way it's going to be. And the President makes the decision.

So when you see that Sununu is putting words into the mouth of the President, that is the endless, inside-the-beltway speculation that a lot of people thrive on. And it happens not to be true. And so I think they are working very well together. And I mean it. Because it is essential that they do. And Bill Reilly's got enormous credibility in the environmental community. And I think John Sununu, very respectful of where I want to see us go in terms of federal participation in environmental matters, also knows that I am determined not to shut this country down and throw everybody out of work.

And so, in this field as in others, there's compromise involved. But you get to the heart of it on the personnel side, and I would simply say, don't believe all this big feuding that's going on between EPA and the White House. And in the final analysis, I will and do take the responsibility for it.

And they're moving, Jeff. They're moving on this clean air bill. And what I say to those that want to come at us from either the right or the left on clean air is, look, pass what we've got. George Mitchell has compromised -- a very noted environmentalist, a leader in the Senate -- others. Bob Dole has been extraordinarily helpful in trying to reach compromise. And so save your fire -- you that want to move it one way or another -- and let's pass the first major revision of the Clean Air Act since the act was written. Then we'll sort out the further amendments.

So we've come a long way, and we still got a ways to go.

Q Mr. President, I'd like to -- back on the subject of drugs -- to, first of all, thank you and let you know that the federal drug strategy is alive and well in Maine. We're working closely together with the federal and state officials. There have been more arrests. And the teachers, including those at Kennebunk High School, are telling me that it makes a real difference and enforcement really drives the education. And I think the only comment I'd like to share with you is that I encourage you to continue to work with the private sector -- not just in terms of education and publicity, but also to develop more meaningful employee treatment programs for their own employees as a way to help address the treatment side of this.

THE PRESIDENT: Let me ask you while you're on your feet, if you would, because I have been concerned about the interdiction regarding the Maine coast with that enormously complex craggy coastline. Is that still as serious a problem as it was, or do you think the interdiction efforts have resulted in less coming in?

Q We've been successful in terms of the old marijuana shipments which were much easier to eradicate. As the drug of choice moved towards cocaine, it's much more difficult to detect, not just coastally, Mr. President, but also across the Canadian borders. But we're working very closely with the provincial and federal governments in Canada and have had increasing support. It's very difficult to --

THE PRESIDENT: It's hard to measure, too, I find, but I don't know how you all --

Q I hate to make your mind shift in so many directions, but agriculture is very important to North Dakotans, and I know the administration has not as yet submitted a new farm bill, and I just wondered what thoughts you'd have on the shape of the federal farm legislation?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, generally speaking, I've been pleased with the way the agricultural economy has bounded back from abysmal lows. And Clayton Yeutter is working now with the Senate and the House on a new farm bill. I am not for one of these managed farm economy farm bills. And we could probably discuss what that means, but I think, in broad terms, matters like the former Harkins bill, for example, will have total opposition from this administration. A farm bill that is market-oriented and gives flexibility to the farmers will have the strong support of the administration.

But it is coming along, I think, in terms of negotiation. I feel a great burden to do more in the field of agricultural exports. And we've been successful in getting ag on the table for the Uruguay round, but we're still running into a tremendous resistance from some countries in terms of getting access to foreign markets. We've made some encroachments -- proper encroachments -- into the Japanese market, as you know. But I'm not relaxed about it, and I think you will see in whatever emerges, in the domestic side of the farm bill, it will be -- continue to be -- as was with the '85 bill -- market-oriented. But in terms of emphasis, we've got to expand our markets abroad, and that means we are not going to have our negotiators lighten up at all on this.

And I'm troubled about Eastern Europe -- I mean, the EC -- Western Europe, on this. Because we're having difficulty getting them to understand; we've got to let them take a whole new look at their farm program. I think we'll have a more harmonious negotiation. Some of it because of where this farm economy stands, and some of it because I think there's general agreement on the international aspects of it.

Well, thank you all very, very much for coming by. Nice to see you. (Applause.)

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