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MAYOR

PRESIDENTIAL REMARKS: U.S. CONFERENCE OF MAYORS
CAPITOL HILTON HOTEL
FRIDAY, JANUARY 26, 1990
10 A.M.

President Whitmire, __, Distinguished Mayors, Ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for that reception, and for the pleasure of being here. In particular, thanks to my fellow Houstonian and President, Kathy Whitmire, for that warm introduction. //

((Kathy and I go way back. Maybe that's why even though I'm a Republican and she's a Democrat, the last time I was in Houston she presented me with the key to the city. // Only one problem. I found out later that the city was Anchorage, Alaska.)) //

((But you know me -- I don't hold grudges. So I picked up the phone when she called a couple weeks later. She asked me to declare a disaster area. // I told her I didn't think the Houston Oilers were that bad.)) //

((I'm also glad, of course, to see the "Mayor's Mayor." // When I first heard you were honoring a famous Jewish Mayor for his years of service in turbulent times, I thought you meant Ed Koch. // Instead, all my best to Jerusalem's best -- the one and only Teddy Kollect.)) //

Teddy, Kathy, and all of your colleagues -- it is an honor to address this 58th annual U.S. Conference of Mayor's winter meeting. And to give you my ideas on how between us -- the White

House and the Mayors -- we can build a better America for all.

Nineteen months ago, I sent you a letter expressing my thoughts on urban policy. And wrote, "As we prepare to enter the 1990s, it is clear that America needs a new working relationship between the Federal government and the cities."

Well, I meant it then. And mean it now that the 1990s have arrived. We need to forge a new relationship. // A relationship which is a partnership. // A partnership which realizes who mans the front lines -- you -- and that urban problems fall directly at your door. A partnership which can achieve that Thomas Wolfe called "The Promise of America."

The Promise of America means, first, utilizing our economic resources. As we have during the longest peacetime boom in American history. Here is the box score since 1982. Interest rates down. Inflation down. Today, the lowest jobless rate in 15 years. And more than 20 million new jobs. And this week, we released a budget for Fiscal Year 1991 that builds on these beginnings. Together, let's support policies which create more opportunity for all. //

The Promise of America also means safeguarding our natural resources. So we have sent the Congress legislation to slash acid rain, air toxics, and urban smog -- the first rewrite of the Clean Air Act in over 10 years. I appreciate your support of that Act's amendments -- now, let's finish the job. And together, protect our environment for decades to come. //

Then, there are human resources. And here, too, togetherness counts. Today, an estimated ___ million urban families are led by working parents. But when it comes to child care, Washington -- unlike Robert Young -- doesn't automatically Know Best. So I urge the Congress to pass my child-care legislation to put choice in the hands of low-income parents. //

Each of these initiatives will nurture the Promise of America. For the problems of the inner city must never occupy the outer limits of our concerns. Yet even so, those problems will endure until we meet the four challenges I discussed in 1988: Drugs and crime, education, housing, and the plight of our homeless. ((We must meet them, and will. For in America, nothing is impossible. Perhaps an ex-baseball player put it best. // "When I was a little boy," Craig Nettles said, "I wanted to be a [big-league] player and join the circus. With the Yankees, I've accomplished both.")) //

First, the challenge of urban violence. To curb it will require nothing less than an urban Delta Force -- rescuing our kids from the terrorism of crime, crack, and cocaine. //

Eight months ago, I sent psoposals to the Congress to win the war on crime. For eight months, they've been sitting there. The clock is running. America's patience is running out. So I ask you to support our legislation to take hoods off the streets -- and thereby take back the streets. // We need mandatory time for firearms offenses. No deals when criminals use a gun. And for anyone who kills a law enforcement officer -- no legal

penalty is too tough. That means the death penalty. Not someplace. Not some time. But here -- and now. //

Think of crime as a snake. Drugs form its head -- spewing venom at your cities and their kids. Last year, 23 million Americans used illegal drugs on a "current" basis -- at least once in 30 days. And eight million people used cocaine. A Nation with those numbers cannot long preserve its soul. //

We have to act, and are. Through America's first national comprehensive strategy to win the war on drugs. It's a war to save that little boy tormented by crack. Or the pregnant mother -- alone and desperate -- whose drug use maims her child. It's a war we have only begun to win -- and can't afford to lose.

America's Mayors don't intend to lose. So you've urged a frontal assault -- both here and abroad. In __, you're holding an International Mayors Conference on Drugs in Columbia -- next month, I'll be there, too. And begun a national campaign against the use, sale, and flow of drugs.

And we in Washington -- we don't intend to lose. So we have asked the Congress for \$__ billion in Fiscal Year '91 for education and prevention -- from grade school to graduate school. And \$__ billion for treatment. And \$__ billion for more prosecutors, prisons, and judges. In all, \$__ billion to help us win this war -- home-by-home, block-by-block. Let's use those funds to smash Public Enemy Number One. Let's help America get clean, and stay clean. //

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America's Mayors don't intend to lose. So in __, you're holding an International Mayors Conference on Drugs in Columbia. You've urged tougher laws and tougher sentencing. And begun a national campaign against the use, sale, and flow of drugs.

And here in Washington -- we're not going to lose. So we have asked the Congress for \$__ billion in FY '91 for education and prevention -- from grade school to graduate school. And \$__ billion for treatment. And \$__ billion for more prosecutors, prisons, and judges. Let's use those funds to smash Public Enemy Number One. Winning home-by-home, block-by-block. The war on drugs is unconditional: Let's help America get clean, and stay clean. //

Erasing drugs will not only save lives. It will spur the stability crucial to that second concern I talked about: the

Erasing drugs will not only save lives. It will spur the stability crucial to that second concern I talked about: the education of our kids. In that context, let me recall a story about a teacher -- physicist James Franck, a university professor -- and his student -- Robert Oppenheimer, then only 23. Oppenheimer was being examined for his doctorate. Whereupon, emerging from the oral exam, Frank remarked, "I got out of there just in time. He was beginning to ask me questions." //

We want our students to ask questions. But what good are questions if our schools don't have answers? You know what I'm alluding to. A too-high drop-out rate. Erratic standards. Unsafe schools wracked by drug use and trafficking. Kids ill-equipped to read, write, or understand new technologies. The truth is that our educational system isn't making the grade. //

To convert this "fail" to "pass" will require a partnership of local school boards, teachers, and parents working with all levels of government. For although education is primarily a local and State responsibility, the Federal government has a role. // So last September I met with a group of Mayors including Kathy Whitmire. The same month, incidentally, you held "Education Day." We, too, asked some questions. And I think we've found some answers.

I'm referring to the "Educational Excellence Act of 1989" that is now before the Congress. Legislation which has four objectives. First, to reward excellence. Second, to see that Federal dollars help those most in need. Third, our program

demands educational accountability. And fourth, it supports greater flexibility and choice.

For example, we want to create a \$500 million program to reward schools that improve the most. And to reward schools which create a drug-free environment and reduce the drop-out rate. // Then, there's our new Magnet Schools of Excellence program -- letting parents choose which public schools their kids will attend. And Urban Emergency Grants to help urban schools hit hardest by drug use and trafficking. // In a world, increasingly, on the side of peace, our proposals will help America win the battle not on the fields of war -- but in the international marketplace of ideas. //

"The Promise of America" means making our classrooms veritable situation rooms for the trustees of the future. It also means meeting the challenges I mentioned earlier: Making housing affordable and accessible -- especially for the homeless.

You know, a few months back I spoke to the National Association of Realtors. Where its President said to me, "It's not often we're addressed by someone who lives in public housing." // In response, I said we understand the private side as well. // Barbara and I have moved 28 times in 45 years of marriage. // What a dream client we'd make for any realtor. //

Clearly, "The Bushes Know Housing." // Sorry, Bo. // And how basic shelter is a right of each American. Two months ago I unveiled a project called America's HOPE, Home Ownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere. HOPE addresses the cities'

umbrella of concerns. Whether shelter for the homeless or jobs for the poor -- affordable housing for low-income residents -- or achieving the dream of home ownership for increasing numbers of Americans.

Look, first, at the income that can make that dream reality. Especially at the Enterprise-Zone legislation now before the Congress which will create new businesses and jobs within disadvantaged areas. We need cities where battle zones are replaced by Enterprise Zones -- at least 50 over the next four years. And the jobs they'll create for the long-term and structurally unemployed. // And we also need the investment that produces income. So I ask Congress to give America a capital gains tax cut. And an end to that tax -- altogether -- in America's pockets of poverty. //

Next, look at home ownership -- and that oft-ignored party: the first-time homebuyer. HOPE aims to help them by allowing them to draw, without penalty, an IRA savings as a down payment for that first home. // We want FHA to increase the more than 9 million Americans who live in FHA-insured homes. And, above all, for low- and moderate-incomes to have access to housing. So we want Congress to renew the low-income tax credit. And I have asked Secretary Kemp to convene a blue-ribbon commission to see how we can lower housing costs by slashing regulations.

These initiatives will spur housing -- private and public. For many HOPE reforms will directly benefit tenants. That's why we want Congress to approve housing vouchers that empower low-

income families to choose where they want to live. And why HOPE is helping tenants become home-owners. Think of East Los Angeles. Or Kenilworth-Parkside here in Washington. Or Cochran Gardens in St. Louis. All public housing sites with tenants in control. Let's repeat these successes. And help low-income Americans know the pride and dignity of owning a home. //

For others, of course, first things first: They need the self-respect and self-reliance of regaining their life. I mean those whose roof is the sky above and whose floor is the street below. The homeless.

We see them everywhere -- next door on 15th Street, in our suburbs and small towns. They are black and brown, red and white. They need emergency shelter, food, and medical care. So two months ago I signed a bill that increases funding under the McKinney Act to reduce homelessness. And we want to find new ways to put part of our FHA foreclosures into the hands of non-profit groups. And to coordinate basic needs like shelter with other social services.

It won't be easy: We know that. But we also know the real answer to the homeless -- those with mental problems, or dependent on drugs or alcohol -- is shelter plus care. And we know that to help the homeless -- like improving education, or stopping crime -- will require a partnership -- a combined Federal, State, and local effort. Only then can we unleash the resources of the profit and nonprofit sectors. And show, as a writer said, how "America is a willingness of the heart."

Last week marked the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. He would have been 61 years old. Dr. King knew that only opportunity could realize the Promise of America. He expressed that often -- and moved a Nation. Listen, even now: His words -- they move us still. "I have a dream that one day sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood." //

The table of brotherhood knows neither bank account nor bigotry. So let us sit down together -- the White House and the Mayors; Democrats and Republicans -- and do what needs to be done to make this a land of which each of us is proud. Thank you for this occasion. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America.

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