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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE
STATE LEGISLATIVE LEADERS

THE EAST ROOM

2:08 P.M. EDT

Let me thank each and every one of you distinguished legislators. It is a privilege and a pleasure to have the opportunity of saying a few words and looking around and seeing some familiar faces.

It has been a great experience for me over the last year or more to speak to joint sessions of four State legislative bodies -- Louisiana, Kansas, New Hampshire and, of course, my own State of Michigan.

I have been very grateful for the warm welcome and the opportunity, and I thank you very much. I look forward to an opportunity in other States in the months ahead.

Obviously, I want to welcome all of you to the East Room here, and to just kick off, I guess, the meetings that we will have here, with members of my staff following my observations and comments.

I know it will be informative, and, I trust, it will be very productive.

Let me say without any hesitation or qualification that I know and certainly sympathize with the enormous problems that all of you are wrestling with in trying to revitalize State government, especially in the Legislative Branch.

As a former legislative leader myself, for a little over 25 years in the Congress, I have some scars to prove it. (Laughter)

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Actually, as I look back, those were wonderful years, despite the occasional frustrations and the sure knowledge that no matter how long and how hard you work, there would always be more problems than there were solutions.

I am sure you have found this similarity at the State level. The legislative problems, whether they are at the Federal or State level, in my judgment, are very nearly identical. I am sure that you would also agree that despite the frustrations, the opportunity to do the job or to try and accomplish the results were worth it in every way possible.

There is nothing more satisfying than the knowledge that, even in a small way, you may have made life a bit better for the people you were elected to serve. I don't have to tell you that. You have gone through it on a day-to-day basis and obviously, you wouldn't be here if you didn't feel exactly the same way now, and in the future.

The purpose of this meeting today is to let you know some of the things we are trying to do at the Federal level to help make your State government as vital and as responsive as possible. I hope it will also serve to keep up the very close, personal relationship that I have tried to develop with State legislative leaders since I have been President.

As I said at the outset, I have had the honor and the privilege of meeting with joint groups in four State legislative bodies and I have had the privilege of meeting with many State legislative leaders in other States throughout the Union. I assure you that on a personal basis, I will continue it and members of my staff, my Administration, will expand it.

Now, some of you were here with me last year when I had the opportunity to make some observations and comments. As a matter of fact, it was one of my first meetings as President of the United States, just 20 days after moving into the White House. Since then, I have sought to keep our dialogue alive.

I have met with, as I have indicated, individual members of legislative bodies as well as groups in joint sessions. And I can assure you those opportunities will be expanded as we move ahead.

Let me say that I am more interested in substance than in dialogue. In my judgment, actions are more important than words. For too long a time power, expertise, initiative and -- most important of all -- revenues have been drained away from your State capitals to the national capital in Washington. With this in mind, I have an announcement I would like to make at this time.

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Immediately before meeting with you today I signed the transmittal letter for a message to Congress and a draft bill to extend and revise general revenue sharing.

In brief, this proposed legislation will do the following: retain the present revenue sharing formula; secondly, authorize funds for 5-3/4 years; three, increase some cities' share by easing per capita restraints; four, improve the protection of individual rights; five, increase citizen participation.

And it would also include the following: permit a more flexible system of reports -- and from what I have heard, this is something that is badly needed -- and lastly, require renewal consideration two years prior to expiration.

Now, I am convinced that this legislation is in the best interests not only of State governments, but of the American people. It takes a good concept, revenue sharing, and extends it, at the same time, including some very important improvements, and it provides the taxpayer with a very strong voice on how his tax money is spent on a local basis.

In proposing the legislation, I am trying to do my part for State and local government and I think in a very constructive way. And I hope I can count on all of you on State legislative leaders, on Governors, mayors and county officials to do your part to get behind the program and to have your voices heard in the Congress of the United States.

And if I might add a postscript in this area, as long ago as 12 months before this date, I was warning mayors, county officials, State officials, that there would be an effort made -- I don't challenge their motives -- but there would be an effort made to not extend general revenue sharing, or if it was extended, to so restrict it and so tie it down, so limit it, that the whole character of the program would be changed.

Now we have, in my judgment, a hard battle ahead of us, but if you join with me and we get the mayors and the county officials to join with us, we can extend this program along the lines that I am recommending.

It is not going to be easy; you will have some people who will want to change its character, reduce its money, put all kinds of limitations and restrictions on it. We cannot afford to have that happen.

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This program has justified itself. We had a hard time getting it in the first instance and we will probably have a difficult time in the months ahead for its extension. But on its merit, it can be justified and I am confident that the American people will support your efforts and mine as we join with others.

I think I understand the importance of State government and some of the problems you face. And I can assure you that I and my Administration will do everything we can to be helpful. It is a mutual responsibility we have to our respective constituents, and if we work together, we can get the job done.

Thank you very, very much.

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(AT 2:19 P.M. EDT)