

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY
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THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESS CONFERENCE
OF
ALBERT J. SMITH
MAYOR OF THE CITY OF SKOKIE, ILLINOIS
JAMES T. RYAN
MAYOR OF THE CITY OF ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, ILLINOIS
GEORGE M. BERSTED
MAYOR OF THE CITY OF MONMOUTH, ILLINOIS
LYMAN PARKS
MAYOR OF THE CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN
JIM FALK
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF THE DOMESTIC COUNCIL
AND
RON NESSEN
PRESS SECRETARY TO THE PRESIDENT
NORTH SHORE HILTON HOTEL

11:03 A.M. CDT

MR. NESSEN: The mayors' meeting was running a little late, and I know everybody doesn't want to miss another motorcade, so I thought what I would do is begin to tell you what happened there and then Jim Falk will bring some mayors down here when and if the mayors' meeting is over.

I believe your poolers gave you a pool report on the opening remarks by the President, which had to do with the support of the extension of the revenue sharing program and his concerns that unless the mayors -- could the folks who want to talk go elsewhere so the people who want to hear the briefing can hear the briefing?

The President, as your poolers told you, told the mayors that they need to bring pressure on their Members of Congress and Senators to vote an extension of the revenue sharing program with annual increases to keep up with the cost of living or else this program could be in danger both from simply lapsing through lack of action by Congress, or through modifications which the President feels would cripple the program.

At that point, your poolers left.

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I would say that to describe the meeting in general terms, in the areas that were discussed, I think it would be very fair to say that the President and the mayors almost 100 percent shared the same views. There was a great deal of agreement between the President and the mayors on the proper approach to various issues, which I will tell you about, and little or no disagreement.

There was a discussion of the New York City financial problem that was raised by one of the mayors. Not many of the mayors spoke out on that issue, so I would be reluctant to express an opinion for the mayors.

The President restated his views on New York City, which I believe you are familiar with.

Q Can you tell us what he said, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: He said the long-term ramifications of the Federal Government stepping in at this point would be very serious, it would encourage fiscal irresponsibility and discourage good financial management of cities.

At a later point, he said that "Your constituents wouldn't tolerate it if you ran your city as badly as New York City has been run."

He also said that for the Federal Government to step in at this point would, in the long run, destroy the basic American philosophy, that the best Government is the closest Government, was the way he expressed it.

In other words, the level of Government nearest to the people, that philosophy would be destroyed by the Federal Government coming in and taking over New York City's financial problems.

The President pointed out that under one of the proposals for curing New York City's financial problems, the mayor, many of his powers as mayor have been taken away from him and the President said "I am sure none of you mayors would want anything like that."

You know this board that is to oversee New York City's financial problems, the majority on the board represents the State.

Here is Jim with some of the mayors.

Let me quickly tell you the areas discussed, and then we will introduce the mayors.

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The President and the mayors generally agreed about the need to reduce the amount of regulation and red tape that is imposed on small cities by the Federal Government. EPA regulations were especially mentioned.

There was a discussion of the interest rates on bonds that small towns need to pay, and the President said that his own program of fiscal responsibility in holding the Federal deficit down was designed just for that reason, to help keep the interest rates down since the Federal Government borrows money first.

One of the mayors raised the question of crime, and the President reiterated his position on crime, both as spelled out in his crime bill and in his Yale speech, and those were the general areas discussed.

Let me introduce the mayors who are going to talk to you.

Q Did gun control come up?

MR. NESSEN: It did not, Jim.

Q What did he say about crime and who asked about crime and what was his concern?

MR. NESSEN: It was raised by Mayor Miller of Michigan City, Indiana, who said the rate of increase in crime is higher in small towns than anywhere else, and he said that his own feeling, which was one of the areas in which the mayors agreed with the President -- was there needed to be mandatory sentences so people who are convicted or accused of crime are not simply allowed to continue on the streets.

Mayor Miller, I might say, probably won the award for the quote of the day. He said, "Conservatives on the crime issue are former liberals who got mugged the night before."

Let me turn you over to Jim Falk. I think what we will have to do is in about 15 minutes the White House press needs to go to the bus. The local press, I think, could stay here and continue to talk to the mayors.

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MR. FALK: Ron, I apologize. I had written down some names but they were not all the right names.

First, I would like to introduce the mayors we have asked to come up and talk with you for a moment.

Our first mayor is Albert Smith of Skokie; then Mayor Lyman Parks of Grand Rapids; Mayor Bersted of Monmouth; and Mayor Ryan of Arlington Heights. We will let Mayor Smith open and then let each of the mayors say a couple of things and you can go on from there.

Mayor Smith.

MAYOR SMITH: Good morning. We would first be remiss if we didn't express on behalf of the people of Skokie our sincere appreciation to the President for having selected our community for what I consider one of the finest meetings that I have attended in my 10 years in office. This is the first time that we mayors have had the opportunity to sit down with the President of the United States and discuss with him in depth the problems that we face in the everyday operations of our communities.

The President was sympathetic, encouraging and, above all, was here to communicate with us and we think that this is a very significant meeting, a meeting that will be long remembered in the village of Skokie and in this Midwest area.

Any questions?

Q The question is, did all the mayors agree with the President on anything, and do you feel you have had any impact on his thinking? He listens but does he take heed?

MAYOR SMITH: Yes, I think he does listen and I do feel we have had some impact. I think we have crystallized in his thinking some of the problems which most people feel are related only to the core or the metropolitan city.

We have our problems, such as crime in an ever increasing rate, the drug problem and how that relates to our local communities and what we are trying to do about it. In other words, all of our exchanges were exchanges for the purpose of informing the President. He took that information and in many instances said that in the bills that will be coming before Congress, he will be making recommendations based on those suggestions and the input that we made today.

Yes, sir.

Q What did you think about what the President said about the New York City situation? Did you agree with him?

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MAYOR SMITH: Yes, I am afraid I do. I think the municipalities who have been responsible in the operation of their communities should not be penalized because of the actions of municipalities that have not acted on a fiscally responsible basis.

Q You think New York City has not acted on a fiscally responsible basis?

MAYOR SMITH: I don't think there is any question in anyone's mind about that.

Q To what party do you belong?

MAYOR SMITH: I guess I am a Democrat.

Q Don't you think New York has special problems?

MAYOR SMITH: Yes, I think New York has special problems but I think every community has special problems. We in Skokie were quite interested in the input by the President regarding EPA because our major problem in this area is one of back-flooding of sewage, raw sewage, if you will, into at least 20 to 30 percent of our homes every time there is a reasonably hard rain. So we were very concerned about what he had to say about EPA and what is being done to help us with our problems in the metropolitan sanitary district in solving those problems.

Q Did the President say he would encourage EPA to go a little easier on enforcing local auto emissions standards?

MAYOR SMITH: No, there was no conversation regarding that.

Q Do you think the Federal Government is doing enough about crime?

MAYOR SMITH: I think the Federal Government has done more than enough in certain areas in the fight on crime. We gave some input to the President that we don't think the emphasis now should be where it has been in the past. We think the emphasis should be switched to the matter of the courts and the adjudication of the arrests after they are made.

It is the impression of the mayors assembled, if I may speak for them, that the problem is out of 100 arrests you don't get enough convictions to make any impression and you put these people right back on the streets and your crime continues.

Perhaps the Federal Government's emphasis in the fight on crime now ought to be the expansion of the facilities so these criminals can be housed and rehabilitated.

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Q What is the strongest impression you believe came about from the mayors?

MAYOR SMITH: Thank you, gentlemen, we have three other mayors here and I would like you to talk to them.

Q What is the strongest impression you think the mayors left with the President?

MAYOR SMITH: The strongest impression I think we left with the President was we appreciate his concern about municipalities and their problems, and that we are going to continue to let him know where we stand on various issues before the Federal Government.

MR. FALK: Thank you very much, Mayor.

There was one question asked about whether the mayors came together on any particular issues and I think it is fair to say the mayors were unanimously in support of general revenue sharing and the discussions that were had on that subject.

I would like now to introduce Mayor Parks of Grand Rapids and then perhaps we could have each of the mayors make a statement of a few words, and then you can ask questions of the ones you want to ask questions of after they have all had a chance to talk.

MAYOR PARKS: Thank you, Jim.

My concern -- and I am sure all of the mayors present feel the same -- was the re-enactment of general revenue sharing, and we heard the President this morning voice again his concern and support for this re-enactment, notwithstanding the fact, though, that we have our homework to do in getting on top of our Congressmen and Senators to get their support for the re-enactment of this legislation.

Q Mayor Parks, is there concern Congress might put some new restrictions on this?

MAYOR PARKS: We certainly recognize the importance of getting the re-enactment passed, and we feel that there are some people in Congress who would like to go back to categorical grants as over against general revenue sharing. We can't afford to let up.

Q Is there any special concern over President Ford's security in his travels?

MAYOR PARKS: Certainly we are always concerned about the security of not only President Ford but all of our Presidents.

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Q Mayor, you raised Title VI as an issue. Are you satisfied with the President's response on that?

MAYOR PARKS: Yes, I was. I raised the question and he is having it looked into. We do have some concerns in this area.

Q I would like to ask the other mayors, also, about that same question. What would be the impact of a lapsing of the public employment program?

MAYOR BERSTED: As far as cities my size are concerned, of 11,000, basically we have not had need of that program, and I would have to defer to the larger cities who have used it. But most cities of our size, of which there are over 1,200 in the country, I don't believe they have to use that program.

Q What is your name, sir?

MAYOR BERSTED: Bersted of Monmouth. I am of the Illinois Municipal League.

Q What about the other mayors? Could the other mayors answer that question?

MAYOR RYAN: Your question was directed insofar as Title VI was concerned. As far as Arlington Heights is concerned, where I am mayor, it doesn't have that much impact.

I think as far as a nationwide basis is concerned, there are communities that rely very, very heavily on that program. There were a couple of communities represented today at the meeting that did rely and expressed their concern about it.

The one thing that I think has been touched upon somewhat earlier is the unanimity of feeling we had with respect to revenue sharing, all fully realizing there are elements in Congress that would like to see revenue sharing cease.

If revenue sharing were to cease or were to be changed in any substantial fashion from what it is now, so it would become more restricted, it would work nothing other than an ultimate disaster on the communities such as mine and those that were represented. It cuts across the whole web and fabric of the communities across the country, in my judgment.

MR. FALK: I just want to interject at this point that I have just been asked that anyone who needs to file can go ahead and file now. We are going to continue with this conference and we will stay here as long as anybody wants to ask questions, but I was asked to say you may file.

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Q May the mayor of Skokie answer that?

MAYOR RYAN: He certainly may, but the question on Title XI I perhaps can help you with a bit, also, because Mayor Parks asked that as one of the very first questions in the meeting. The response was that we do have sufficient funding in the Title XI program to continue to fund all of the programs being funded through FY 1976.

It is a supplemental program. It is supplemental to the Comprehensive Employment Training Act. It is a one-year emergency appropriation authorization.

The President has not made any decisions about FY 1977 but there isn't any fear or shouldn't be any fear of termination of that program earlier. It will continue through FY 1976.

Q Did anybody ask about the Child Nutrition Act?

MAYOR RYAN: We discussed the child nutrition bill that is presently headed for the President's desk and there was a discussion both on what the President had recommended to the Congress and on what the Congress had actually enacted.

Q What about his signing it?

MAYOR RYAN: The President indicated that it is very, very difficult to be against child nutrition--it is a very attractive title--but that the bill that the Congress passed is approximately \$1 billion 100 million over his recommendations.

His recommendations would have not only have saved \$800 million but have helped every child that would have needed help blow the poverty line with child nutrition assistance. So it is really a question of the President's proposal which would have saved \$800 million versus the Congressional authorization which is \$1 billion 100 million over.

Q He didn't say what he is going to do?

MAYOR RYAN: He indicated, and I think that I can give you almost an exact quote -- he said, "I can hear the speeches in the Congress now if and when I veto it, and they won't be very complimentary."

Q Can we take a poll with the rest of you on New York aid? Are all of you against Federal assistance to New York?

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A MAYOR: I would say generally the consensus of the mayors there were that they would be against Federal aid for New York. Am I correct?

A MAYOR: I think it would tend to penalize those communities which have acted in a fiscally responsible manner over a period of time. That is not to say we are not feeling the rippling effects of what is happening in New York. We are feeling it as far as our long-term financing is concerned, about the lack of confidence people have in governmental securities. But I don't think it would be well taken to bail New York out.

Q Jim, did any of the mayors have any concern about those large amounts of Federal revenue sharing monies the townships have amassed, some of which can't spend it?

A MAYOR: That particular point didn't come up. I think quite clearly there is some concern, at least for myself, as far as payments to some units of Government that have not been wisely spending it, but that specific point --

Q What besides townships?

A MAYOR: I think there are other units without getting specific. I am not really pointing a finger at townships.

I think the other side of revenue sharing is for local governments to use the money wisely. I think a better way to use it wisely is to have less governmental restriction on the manner in which it is used; that is, the form-filling, the delay and so forth involved. It has become an integral part of our revenue, there is no question about it.

Q Does any other mayor want to say anything about what he thinks the Federal Government should do in regard to crime?

MAYOR PARKS: I think first we recognize that through LEAA funds that have helped many of our municipalities to sophisticate our system, we have had great aid. Now, I think there is another phase in that the recent allocation of funds be directed toward seeing to it that judges have the latitude to make these sentences that are imposed mandatory and see to it that they are enforced, that people do go to jail who commit crimes.

A MAYOR: I would just have one comment on the Federal situation as far as crime is concerned. We talked about it in a variety of fashions. We are all asking for the Federal Government to spend more money to alleviate crime at the local areas, which is just as bad in the suburbs as in the inner city.

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Of course, the biggest area is really handgun control. I don't think there is any two ways about it. We go through a national catharsis time and time again as far as the mobility of handguns are concerned. Yet, the only entity of Government that can do anything long-lasting as far as handgun control is the Federal Government. Local government and State governments have shown an amazing inability to face that problem.

Q What should Government do about handgun control?

A MAYOR: I think with the mobility of handguns, that are crossing State lines, of the 400,000 hard core criminals referred to upstairs that are committing the serious crimes, the one thing that links them together is the handgun, and I don't know what more it really takes to have strong Federal legislation, as far as handguns.

Q Are you for registration or licensing them?

A MAYOR: I am for anything to eliminate people walking the streets with almost gay abandon as far as handguns are concerned.

Q Did you ask the President why he doesn't sponsor stronger legislation?

A MAYOR: The question was not asked, no.

Q No handgun discussion at all?

A MAYOR: There was no discussion on handguns.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END (AT 11:30 A.M. CDT)