

Statement on the 100th Birthday of George Burns

January 20, 1996

Hillary and I extend our warmest wishes for a wonderful birthday to one of the most talented entertainers of our time. George Burns' knowing smile and dry wit have touched the hearts and funny bones of three generations. His impeccable timing breathed life into the mundane, and his clever humor crystallized many ageless skits. His youthful attitude, now a century old, continues to inspire us today. We send him all our best on this happy occasion.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Foreign Minister Ehud Barak of Israel

January 22, 1996

State of the Union Address

Q. Is your State of the Union all ready, Mr. President?

The President. Just about ready.

Q. Some people are expecting a campaign-style speech.

The President. I don't think so. What I'm going to say tomorrow night is that the state of the Union is strong, but it can be stronger, that I am absolutely confident and optimistic about our ability to meet the challenges that our country faces, and I'm going to say what I think they are and what I believe we should all do about them.

Q. Are you going to reach out to the Republicans to try and get things done?

The President. Absolutely. I did last year, and I will again. I think, you know, we have differences, but we should attempt to resolve those differences. And we should attempt, where we can't resolve them, to set them aside and do what we can do. Remember, throughout our history, the system that the framers of the Constitution set up demands honorable, principled compromise.

Public Debt

Q. Did Dick Arme's comments concern you?

The President. Well, I don't think we should default on the debt. I think that would

be a terrible mistake. It's an unacceptable thing for a great nation to do, and we've never done it.

State of the Union Address

Q. Is this going to be longer than last year?

The President. Tune in. I suppose it depends on the applause, doesn't it? [Laughter]

[At this point, one group of reporters left the room, and another group entered.]

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, I'm a correspondent of the Israeli television. Do you hope to reach an agreement between Israel and Syria by the end of '96?

The President. Well, of course, that's up to Israel and Syria. All the United States has tried to do throughout this process is to try to do whatever we could to encourage the process of peace. And I think the timetable has to be driven by the progress that is made. That is entirely up to the parties.

Q. What are you doing in order to speed up such an agreement?

The President. We will do whatever we can, whatever we're asked to do, within limits to—within the limits of our ability, to try to make it possible for the parties to succeed. But the timetable is entirely up to the progress of the substance of the negotiations, and that is entirely up to the parties. The United States—I think we've had some success in the last 3 years because we have not tried to dictate terms or anything of that kind. We have only tried to be helpful and to try to support the parties as they search for peace. And if you look at the results of the last 3 years, that is the appropriate posture for the United States.

Q. Do you hope to initiate a meeting between President Asad and Prime Minister Peres of Israel? Is it one of your wishes for the months ahead?

The President. Well that, of course, will be up to them. If it is helpful in getting them to the point where they can make a peace, obviously, that would be a good thing. But that is a—like every other part of this process, ultimately that is up to them.

NOTE: The exchange began at 2:15 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks,