

I found President Mubarak to be an engaging, affable man, committed to peace yet struggling to maintain a very difficult political position. Given Egypt's crucial role in maintaining relative peace in the region since the Camp David Accords, it was an honor to meet him. I believe his role will be crucial in the coming weeks, months, and years if peace is to truly be reached in the Middle East.

After the meeting and press conference, we flew to Tel Aviv and then drove to Jerusalem for a series of meetings. Our time in Israel began with a discussion with U.S. Ambassador Martin Indyk who updated us on the American perspective on the peace negotiations. We examined the right of return and Temple Mount issues in some depth which quickly confirmed my impression that the issues facing the negotiators are incredibly complex.

We then traveled to the Knesset building where we had a series of meetings. We first saw Shimon Peres, a friend I have known for years. He indicated that he did not believe that the schedule imposed on the ongoing peace talks, considering the U.S. presidential transition and the upcoming election for prime minister in Israel, was realistic. I agreed.

I believe that it was a mistake and is a mistake to set deadlines on the discussions because they create unnecessary pressure. I believe that it is best to continue an active, open dialogue for as long as necessary, even if it appears that little progress is being made.

Mr. Peres commented how advances in information technology had fundamentally altered the worlds of diplomacy and warfare. He also explained that one of the keys to peace in the region that has not been properly addressed is economic cooperation.

He believes that if people have something to lose in conflict or violence, they will be less likely to fight. This is a message I had received from him several years ago and was crucial in my decision when I was Governor of Ohio to open a Middle East trade office, the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office, in Israel.

We then discussed the issues of the day in the negotiations—the Temple Mount and refugee returns. As always, I found his analysis to be insightful.

Senator Specter and I then visited with Prime Minister Ehud Barak. As my colleagues would expect, the peace process was the only matter discussed.

Mr. Barak expressed his disappointment at Camp David's failure and the various peace initiatives attempted since then. He also expressed his concern that the Palestinians may be learning the wrong lesson in recent months—that continued violence strengthens their negotiating position. Rather, he made it clear that violence is slowing the peace process and strengthening the negotiating position of the Israelis.

Mr. Barak was hopeful that negotiations would continue throughout the American presidential transition and the Israeli elections. It was clear, however, that the continued violence was putting a great deal of pressure on him.

We then met with Ariel Sharon who is widely expected to defeat Mr. Barak in the upcoming elections for prime minister. We immediately turned to his controversial visit to the Temple Mount last September and the impact it had on the peace process. I pointed out to him that many of us felt that his visit was inflammatory, that it did nothing to aid the peace process and that if

elected Prime Minister of Israel, he would have to make it very clear that he was for peace. Mr. Sharon explained that his visit was a completely normal event and that every Israeli citizen has the right to visit the Temple Mount because of its religious significance. I also expressed my opinion that in visiting Israel for the sixth time in twenty years, the situation there was more critical and explosive than I'd ever seen.

We then discussed his plans for the peace process, should he be elected prime minister. He made a number of strong statements regarding his commitment to the process. He argued that since only President Nixon could open the door to China, only he could come to a peace agreement with the Palestinians given his military background.

After the Sharon meeting, Senator Specter traveled on to Jordan to continue examining issues in the Middle East. I remained in Jerusalem to continue to examine the situation in Israel.

That evening, I joined U.S. Consul General Ron Schlicher for a dinner discussion with Faisal Hussein. Hussein is a leading figure in the Palestinian community. We had a lengthy discussion regarding the ongoing violence and tensions in Israel, prospects for peace, and the Palestinian perspective on the last 50 years.

I thought it was important that I have a balanced understanding of the current situation in Israel and was pleased to have the opportunity to meet with Mr. Hussein.

The next day (January 2), I met with Ehud Olmert, the Mayor of Jerusalem. I met Mr. Olmert on my fourth trip to Israel in 1993. He indicated how important it was to retain Jerusalem's integrity during the course of the peace negotiations.

He also argued that the various plans being considered, including President Clinton's proposal, were fundamentally flawed on this point. He strongly believes that the people of Jerusalem, his constituents, will never agree to a divided capital city. Richard Shotenstein, the Managing Director of the Ohio Department of Development's Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office, attended the meeting with Mayor Olmert.

Afterwards, I spoke with Mr. Shotenstein regarding the Office's recent activities. While there have been some great successes, he explained that the tensions surrounding the ongoing Middle East crisis have dramatically lessened the interest of Ohio companies in business opportunities in the region.

He also indicated that there is a growing anti-Americanism, largely seen in boycotts, spreading throughout the Arab world. This trend has especially impacted consumer products. Mr. Shotenstein explained that to many in the Arab world, the U.S. and Israel are intimately linked. Thus, anti-Israel trends become anti-American trends.

I then met with Mr. Jawdat Ibrahim, a young Palestinian businessman who was deeply interested in the peace negotiations. I was interested to see his view—and through him, the Palestinian view—on current events. Our discussion was interesting and it added an important perspective to my trip.

Later that day, I met with a group of Ohioans now living in Israel. After meetings with various political leaders, I wanted to have an opportunity to discuss the issues of the day with people whose lives are affected by the ongoing violence. The group made it very clear that there was a very real sense of fear living in Israel.

Some described risking their life simply driving to and from work. Others feared that their car would explode when they started it

every morning. Still others recounted phone calls from relatives living in America expressing concern about the safety of their grandchildren. I cannot imagine living with this kind of fear.

The last day of the trip (January 3), I had a telephone conversation with Benjamin Netanyahu. While I was disappointed that scheduling conflicts prevented our meeting in person, I found his analysis of the situation in the region to be very insightful. I hope to have the opportunity to meet him on my next visit to the region, although he indicated that he would make it a point to meet with me the next time he visited the United States.

Following my phone conversation, I had another meeting with Ambassador Indyk to discuss the various things I had learned during my visit to the region.

I was pleased to travel with my colleague, Senator Specter, to two of the most important regions to our national security at such a crucial time. I gained valuable insight as to the fragility of peace, and came away with a new and deeper appreciation for our American democracy.

Mr. President, as we welcome a new administration to the White House, I am hopeful that President Bush and his foreign policy team will be successful in promoting peace, stability and prosperity in these areas. We must never forget that both southeastern Europe and the Middle East are important to our national security and our nation's future.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming is recognized.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF ELAINE LAN CHAO, OF KENTUCKY, TO BE THE SECRETARY OF LABOR

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I now ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the nomination of Elaine Lan Chao, of Kentucky, to be Secretary of Labor, notwithstanding the consent of January 24, 2001, that the time of the nomination be yielded back, and the nomination be confirmed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action, and the Senate then resume the pending business.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I want to bring to the attention of all Senators that this will mean we have approved in such a short period of time 12 of President Bush's 15 nominations and that tomorrow afternoon we will approve two more, leaving only one. I want the record to be spread with the fact that that is pretty good work of the U.S. Senate. We look forward to completing all 15 in the near future.

I withdraw any objection that I have.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? If not, the nomination is confirmed.

Mr. THOMAS. Thank you, Mr. President. Certainly all of us are pleased

with the progress that has been made here and that it allows the administration to get into place and begin to move. I thank the Senator from Nevada.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, if I could say to my friend from Wyoming—

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada is recognized.

Mr. REID. Also we have had experience working with Mrs. Chao before. She is a good administrator. She has been good to the State of Nevada in the past. I look forward to working with her as Secretary of Labor. I am sure she will do a good job.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I welcome this opportunity to express my support for Elaine Chao's nomination to be Secretary of Labor. Ms. Chao is a woman of impressive talents who has achieved a great deal in her career, both in and out of government. She is an accomplished manager and a graceful leader, and she has distinguished herself and her family by her strong commitment to public service.

She knows first hand the experience of minorities growing up in the America of the 1950's and 60's. Her career is a vivid example of the triumph of the American dream. She decided to attend both college and graduate school in Massachusetts, and our state is proud of her, too.

As we all know, the Secretary of Labor has the profound responsibility for enforcing the basic federal laws and federal programs that protect workers' fundamental rights, especially in areas such as fair wages, fair benefits, reasonable work hours, safe and healthy workplaces, and non-discrimination and equal opportunity in employment. The Department's statutory mission is specifically, and I quote, "to foster, promote and develop the welfare of the wage earners of the United States, to improve their working conditions, and to advance their opportunities for profitable employment."

Ms. Chao is committed to these goals. As she stated forcefully at her confirmation hearing, "all work is worthy of respect and virtually all workers need appropriate protection." She recognizes that "the labor struggles of the early part of the last century and the laws that grew out of them are a critical part of this nation's historic commitment to justice for all." She has promised to "fully, fairly and evenly enforce the labor laws of this country." Many challenges will face Ms. Chao in her new position, and I look forward to working with her to meet them.

This Congress, once again, will have an opportunity to increase the minimum wage. Many of us have long fought for raising the minimum wage, and we plan to introduce new legislation soon to grant a long overdue increase. Eleven million workers have already waited for over three years for Congress to act.

The real value of the minimum wage has fallen dramatically in the past generation. To have the purchasing power it had in 1968, the minimum wage would have to be at least \$8.05 an hour today, not the current level of \$5.15. Minimum wage families today fail to earn enough to rise above the poverty level. No one who works for a living should have to live in poverty. So, I hope that a fair increase in the minimum wage will be a top priority for both Congress and the Administration early this year.

I also hope that President Bush and Secretary Chao will reconsider their support of proposals that would enable states or local communities to "opt out" of a minimum wage increase. In some states today, the state minimum wage is as low as \$1.50 an hour. In others, it is \$2.65 and \$3.35. The vast majority of workers are covered by the federal minimum wage, so these state rates apply to relatively few workers. Clearly, allowing states to opt out of the federal minimum wage would violate our commitment to the principle, which Congress has stood by for over sixty years, that working men and women are entitled to a fair minimum wage. Ms. Chao has said that she supports and will maintain the current federal minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour nationwide, but that level today is not sufficient to provide the economic security that every working family deserves.

Another vital labor priority is training the nation's workforce to meet the demands of the new economy. I welcome Ms. Chao's assurance that "training, developing and modernizing America's work force is one of [her] highest priorities," and I look forward to working with her to strengthen programs to address the needs of those in the workforce who are not adequately prepared. The bipartisan Workforce Investment Act, which Congress passed in 1998, reformed federal job training by creating a streamlined, one-stop approach to job training, and it was an important first step. But as more and more workers face mid-life career changes, and as even traditional occupations grow in complexity, better training for all workers—adults, dislocated workers and youth—is a necessity.

I was also encouraged by Ms. Chao's desire to see that "parents have an easier time balancing the responsibilities of home and work." Today's employees are working longer and longer hours to make ends meet. The result is significant new problems for businesses and families. I welcome Ms. Chao's recognition that the Family and Medical Leave Act "has brought about a great deal of benefit for working families that need flexibility." But we can and should do more to deal with these problems, and I am pleased by Ms. Chao's commitment to "keep an open mind" and to be "a real good listener" on further expansions in the law.

We must also guarantee strong and effective enforcement of the federal laws against job discrimination. Current laws require non-discrimination and affirmative action. The landmark Executive Order issued by President Johnson in 1965 has been in effect for more than 35 years, under both Republican and Democratic administrations, and strong enforcement is still needed. In her opening statement at her confirmation hearing, Ms. Chao eloquently testified to her understanding that barriers based on gender, race, national origin and disability have prevented many of America's workers from achieving their true potential. She emphasized that she is "against discrimination of any sort, and will enforce the law as it is enacted." I hope this is an area where the Department and Congress can continue to make progress together.

Many of us have also long been committed to vigorous enforcement of laws and programs to protect workers' health. A particular contemporary concern is the prevalence of ergonomic injuries in the workplace. These injuries are the most significant workplace safety and health issue we face today. About 1.8 million workers report that they suffer ergonomic injuries every year. Another 1.8 million workers suffer such injuries that they do not report. These injuries are painful and often debilitating, and disrupt and sometimes end workers' careers. In the vast majority of cases, these injuries are preventable. The OSHA ergonomics rule went into effect at long last earlier this month. It offers vital protections to American workers, and it benefits employers too. Recent studies should lay to rest the suggestion by special interest groups that we should wait for additional scientific evidence to deal with this serious problem.

Ms. Chao has called the ergonomics rule "the most visible issue" facing the Department of Labor, and she said she would give the issue the "greatest thought and effort and study." I commend her recognition that "any change in our labor laws or in their interpretation must be carefully and solemnly considered, giving respectful and full attention to the views of every participant in the labor-management equation." I know that she will apply this understanding to the ergonomics rule, as well as to all of the other issues before the Department of Labor.

Finally, as we know, from equal pay for women and people of color, to pension plans and health plans, to the Family and Medical Leave Act, employees depend on the Department of Labor to ensure that the nation's labor laws are fully and fairly enforced. We in Congress have our own responsibility in this area—to see that the Department has adequate resources to carry out these missions successfully.

I congratulate Ms. Chao on her nomination, and I look forward to working

with her on issues of vital importance to workers and their families. I hope that under her able leadership, the Department of Labor will be at the forefront of improving the lives of the nation's workers and their families, by ensuring that they have good jobs, good wages and safe and healthy places to work.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I am thrilled that we are today confirming Elaine Chao as Secretary of Labor. As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Employment, Safety and Training and a member of the Small Business Committee, I am very concerned about making sure all businesses in this country, even the very smallest, are able to understand the thousands of regulations they must follow and get the help they need to follow them. I know Secretary Chao shares these concerns and I look forward to working with her on these issues.

I am also extremely excited about the managerial and administrative experience Ms. Chao brings to the Department. It is so important that we have good administrative processes in the Department of Labor. The decisions of this Department deeply affect both our nations' workers and the businesses that provide jobs and incomes and help our economy grow. It is absolutely critical that both workers and employers feel that these decisions are not arbitrary and are reached in a fair and impartial manner.

I firmly believe Secretary Chao has the experience and skills to inspire confidence in the fairness of the Department's actions, regardless of their popularity. This is a crucial responsibility of the Secretary of Labor, and I believe Secretary Chao has been well trained to fulfill this responsibility. I look forward to helping Secretary Chao with this task, and I welcome my fellow members from both sides of the aisle to join us in this effort. I hope that together during this Congress we can take a careful and close look at some of the existing regulatory and enforcement procedures that Secretary Chao will inherit. We must ensure that good procedures are followed properly, and we must change procedures that are not working.

I also look forward to working with Secretary designate Chao to bring the Department of Labor into the 21st Century. We are in a very exciting time of more positive relationships between employees and employers. In this period of record unemployment, employers have learned the lesson that it makes good business sense to keep employees healthy and happy. In order to encourage this progress, we must ensure that our Department of Labor does not thwart the development of workplace arrangements and initiatives that benefit both employee and employer. This will take modern, innovative thinking and I am confident that Secretary Chao is such a thinker.

I think the President made a wonderful choice when he nominated Elaine Chao to be Labor Secretary, and I am so glad the Senate has demonstrated equal wisdom by confirming her quickly. I look forward to working closely with Secretary Chao and the Department on all the many challenging workplace issues.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I rise today to express my support for Ms. Elaine Chao to be Secretary of Labor.

This Nation can be no stronger than the men and women who get up everyday and accept the challenges to go out into the workplace and return home to care for their families, themselves, and their neighborhoods. The Secretary of Labor's responsibility is to look out for the welfare of these men and women across our country. I am confident that Ms. Chao will be a great champion of these individuals, and I commend President Bush on selecting such an excellent nominee.

Ms. Chao brings to this important position a record of accomplishment both in the private and public sectors. Among other positions, Ms. Chao has served as president of the United Way, Director of the Peace Corps, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Transportation, and Chairman of the Federal Maritime Administration. Her experience as an executive and experience in finding solutions to complex problems with limited budgets, gives her a solid foundation to lead the Labor Department.

I have personally known Ms. Chao for a number of years. I was honored to be present at her confirmation hearing before the Senate's Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, of which I am now once again a member. Throughout her career, Ms. Chao has accepted the challenges that have confronted her and pursued her responsibilities with firmness, fairness, and always with a quiet dignity.

Ms. Chao will be a great leader at the Department of Labor, and I look forward to voting in support of her nomination.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume legislative session.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I would like to proceed, if I may, under the order. I believe this time is allotted to us.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming is recognized.

NOMINATION OF GALE NORTON

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, we were talking about confirmation of appointments. Among the next ones that will take place tomorrow will be the Secretary of the Interior, Gale Norton. I want to spend a little time talking

about the Secretary, but perhaps more as a preliminary matter, I want to talk about the importance of Federal lands and the impact they have on the West in particular. Of course, they are national lands.

First of all, I am very hopeful and confident that Gale Norton will be confirmed. I think she has done an excellent job in responding to the legitimate questions she has been asked. That is the role of the Senate: to inquire, ask questions of these aspiring nominees. She has done, I believe, an excellent job of responding.

She is a superb candidate for this job. She has experience. She has experience as attorney general of the State of Colorado, during which time, of course, she had to deal with a good many land, water, and air quality issues and I think dealt with them professionally.

She is knowledgeable, certainly, about the West. The West is unique—I will talk about that in a moment—where, in many cases, more than half of a State belongs to the Federal Government. It is very important to all of us.

Gale Norton has a background in land use and park use, not only from her experience in Colorado but also her experience in the Interior Department as an associate solicitor for the Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as the Park Service. I have had some occasions to talk with her as chairman of the parks subcommittee.

I certainly have an interest in this job in that this Secretary has jurisdiction over the National Park System. She is certainly a conservative conservationist. We have sometimes gotten into the position where those things seem to be an oxymoron; they seem to be conflicting. Indeed, it seems to me they are not.

She is a conservative and I am a conservative, but we are conservationists in that we want to protect the resources so they will be there in the future for our kids and future youngsters. These two things are not incompatible. Under most definitions, they would be quite compatible. I would substitute conservationist—at least to some we have to be an environmentalist. That perhaps is another step.

In any event, I do believe Gale Norton will be confirmed as Secretary, and I certainly support her nomination. I do want to talk about public lands, since we have some time today.

In my State of Wyoming, nearly 50 percent of the land belongs to the Federal Government in various categories. Some was set aside for national parks. We have two of the most famous national parks, Yellowstone and Grand Tetons. We also have Devils Tower and other facilities as well. Some of the land was set aside for U.S. forests. Much of the land, on the other hand, is BLM land, which really was remaining