

Statement on the Death of Menachem Begin of Israel and an Exchange With Reporters

March 9, 1992

The President. We're going to have just a little statement here. Thanks for helping with the logistics here. But what I want to do now is to send our most sincere condolences to the people of Israel and to the family of Menachem Begin, former Prime Minister. His historic role in the peace conference, peace process, will never be forgotten; particular emphasis, of course, will always be on his historic and I would say very courageous and foresighted role at Camp David. And now people are talking peace, but people will remember Menachem Begin as the man that made a significant, courageous breakthrough, just as they will remember Sadat for the same thing. So, we send our most sincere condolences to the people there.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. How do you think the peace talks are going now?

The President. Well, it's hard to tell. They're talking, though. A year ago nobody would have thought that possible. And it's very important that they keep talking. And that's what our whole policy is about; that's a lot of what post-Desert Storm was about. And I think there's a real chance just as long as people keep talking at the peace table.

Arms Shipments in Persian Gulf

Q. What's the latest, sir, on this Korean ship that—

The President. I have no recent information. I talked to General Scowcroft this morning, but nothing to say publicly on that.

Loan Guarantees for Israel

Q. Do you think Israel will drop its press for the loan guarantees?

The President. I have no idea.

Q. Do you wish they would agree to—

The President. We're perfectly prepared to, in accordance with U.S. policy, to go forward.

Presidential Primaries

Q. Why do you think Pat Buchanan would stay in—

The President. Look, I—

Q. —even when it's numerically impossible for him to take the nomination?

The President. I haven't been trying to analyze that up until now, and I don't think I'll start now, if you'll excuse me. We're waging a pretty good campaign. It's high-level. It's keeping my sights on the major issues. A lot of them, such as world peace, seem to be obscured by the hue and cry of the campaign trail. But that's still a very important issue and—

Q. You're not going to attack anybody?

The President. Not now, Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International]. I might get on your case if you—[laughter]—no, I would never—well, it doesn't matter. [Laughter]

Health Care Reform

Q. The Democrats are saying that your health plan is simply a theory that you're not getting, any way that it's paid for. How do you respond to those charges?

The President. I'd say that that's crazy. They haven't looked at it. What most of them want to do is have a nationalized health care. And that would result in far less quality health care. We have a plan that makes insurance accessible to all; that's the key to it. And there's 30 pages of how it's being paid for. I'm surprised to hear—not surprised really because I think most of them are committed to plans that have failed in other places.

Q. Basically, how does it get paid for?

The President. It gets paid for through a lot of things. I'll tell you one main way it gets paid for is by cutting down on these frivolous malpractice suits. Somebody estimated that would be \$40 billion. And we're having great difficulty getting it through the trial lawyers' lobby on Capitol Hill. The American people want action on this kind of proposal so—

Q. This is going to take care of 90 million people without health care?

The President. It will take care of \$40 billion. No, our plan takes care of the 90 million by giving—90 million? Come on, that's too high a figure.

Q. That's what they're saying.

The President. No, no. That's way high. It will take care of it through giving everybody access to health care.

Presidential Primaries

Q. Mr. President, the Democrats are now down to three. You've got two or three on your side. How do you feel about how it's shaping up?

The President. Let the process work. I thought Saturday was fantastic, and I think we'll have a good day tomorrow. Just keep your sights set on the ball; don't get irritated, be pleasant. I've been through the other side of that drill over a period of years, so I don't intend to react. Act, not react.

Q. So you're changing your modus operandi?

The President. Well, I have over the last 3 or 4 years, yes. [*Laughter*] My modus operandi is to be pleasant with you people when you ask me irritating questions. And that isn't always easy. But I think you'll have to give me good marks for having done that, and I don't plan changing now.

Q. Well, you say you're willing to do anything you have to do to win.

The President. But I think being pleasant is the way to do it and keeping your sights set on the major issues facing this country, challenging the Congress to move.

And incidentally, I get credit for a full press conference here because I was only going to make one statement. Making the 231st since I've been President. Ready ac-

cess.

Q. But you haven't had any lately.

The President. No, I know it. Ask Marlin why.

Q. Mr. President, Michael Dukakis didn't respond, and look what happened to him.

The President. Well, look at the results of the election so far. Anytime you beat somebody by 40 points, that used to be considered a landslide. Now we've changed the—I don't know what different ground rules are being used, but I think it's fair in my own defense to say 40 points, 40-point victory over the nearest competitor is a pretty good size win. I will settle for that in the fall over the Democratic candidate.

Q. Buchanan is hoping to upset you in Michigan, Mr. President, a week from now.

Q. Is Pat Buchanan upsetting your agenda, Mr. President?

The President. No way. What?

Q. Michigan is where Buchanan wants to beat you.

Q. Is Pat Buchanan upsetting your agenda?

The President. We've spelled out our agenda over the last 3 years. What we want to do is get this country's economy moving and preserve and strengthen world peace. And I think we'll do it, plus better education, fighting against crime by trying to get some reasonable crime bill passed, winning the fight against drugs where we've made a good start. There are so many issues, but they're all obscured by the noise of the campaign. But that will be in focus in the fall; you watch.

Note: The President spoke at 7:58 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks to the National League of Cities

March 9, 1992

Thank you very much. Glenda, thank you so much for that kind introduction, and to all of you. And may I salute the Members of Congress that have been with us here.

Let me say good morning to them, and please do what's right up on Capitol Hill. My greetings to all the special guests here at the head table; to Don Borut and Wallace