

the communities involved.

So I don't feel under siege. I wanted to do this today. I think you could make a compelling case if it hadn't been for the people of California, I wouldn't be the President of the United States. And I told them that I would work on these problems, and I will. But I cannot walk away from my responsibilities to continue this base closing process. And in the end, California is going to be better off if we preserve the capacity for high-tech employment in the defense industries and if we speed up the diversification process.

Thank you.

East Coast Winter Storm

Q. [Inaudible]—about your response to the storm?

The President. What was that?

Director Panetta. There was a question on the storm.

The President. On the storm, we've got two FEMA people in every State now with a State operation. We're in touch with the State officials in every State involved, and we will be spending the remainder of the day trying to assess the damage that has been done, the damage that might be done, and what other resources we should perhaps bring into play. I don't want to say any more about it than that because we're monitoring it as it goes along.

I will say that I just came from a meeting with press people on the east coast, and I would just urge our people to exercise caution as the center of the storm moves closer to their community and because what looks like a very enjoyable late-winter snowstorm—and it's not enjoyable maybe if you're from the South and you're

not used to seeing it. But as you move from here on up, a lot of people will be used to seeing snows of this magnitude. And I don't want them to get careless in it, because behind the snow are very, very high winds. And so that we're trying to do is just prepare as best we can and deal with it. And we may have more to say later today.

Defense Conversion

Q. Mr. President, laid-off workers in California think this is too little, too late.

The President. I just got here. It's not too little, too late. This is a good program. It is very aggressive. The Congress appropriated \$1.4 billion last year, and none of it was spent. And we're going to spend it and move aggressively. Twenty billion dollars over 5 years is a lot of money to put into defense conversion.

Q. People will have lost their houses by then.

Q. [Inaudible]—in California.

The President. Well, maybe people who were affected by decisions made before I got here will be, but these decisions we announced yesterday are going to take effect 3 to 5 years from now and we will have our programs in place and we'll be working on it. And we're going to do our best to reach out to those who have already been adversely affected.

That's one of the reasons the stimulus package ought to pass. California will get more than a billion dollars worth of benefits out of this.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:25 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. Following the interview, Office of Management and Budget Director Leon Panetta continued to answer questions from reporters.

Statement on Disaster Assistance for Florida

March 13, 1993

On March 12 and 13, excessive rainfall, tornadoes, flooding, high tides, and gale force winds caused death, serious personal injury, and property damage in the State of Florida.

In a telephone call to me today, Gov. Lawton Chiles requested individual assistance and public assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for Alachua, Citrus, Co-

lumbia, Dade, Duval, Hamilton, Hendry, Hernando, Hillsborough, Lake, Levy, Manatee, Marion, Martin, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, Putnam, Sarasota, Taylor, and Volusia Counties.

The situation is of such severity and magnitude that effective response is beyond the capabilities of the State of Florida and local governments. Therefore, I concur that supplemental

Federal assistance is necessary, and FEMA is directed to provide such assistance.

Individual assistance can include temporary housing, grants, low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses, and other programs to help individuals and business owners recover

from the effects of the disaster. Public assistance is available to eligible local governments on a cost-sharing basis for the repair or replacement of public facilities damaged by the flooding.

Additional areas may be designated at a later date, if requested and warranted.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel

March 15, 1993

Middle East Peace Talks

Q. Mr. President, what do you think are the chances of resuming the Middle East peace talks if deportees are not returned immediately?

The President. I think the Secretary of State's done a commendable job on his trip, and he's worked with the Prime Minister on that issue. And I think we've got a good chance to resume the talks. I certainly hope we will.

Q. Do you think all the parties will come back?

The President. I certainly hope so.

Q. Sir, as you prepare for the first peace talks under your guidance, what do you think the prospects are for a lasting peace in the Middle East?

The President. I think there are a lot of reasons to be hopeful. Obviously, there's difficulty, and there are those who would prefer that it not be done, but I think we have a real shot.

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

Q. Mr. President, do you think the United States could be helpful in bringing peace between Israel and Syria? Are you optimistic that peace between these two countries can come during this year?

The President. Well, I hope that the peace process will resume shortly. And I'm hopeful that it can produce a good result. I think there's a chance.

Q. What is your reaction to terrorist action in Israel today and the day before? If you've heard about it, what do you think about it?

The President. Yes, I've heard about it, and I'm disturbed about it. I hope it won't deter any of the parties involved from seeking a genuine long-term peace. But the larger security interests of all the nations involved still argue for trying to have a good-faith effort at the peace process.

NOTE: The exchange began at 10:35 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel

March 15, 1993

The President. Good afternoon. It's a great pleasure for me to welcome Prime Minister Rabin back to Washington. Since we first met here last August, much has changed. But one thing I can say definitely will never change is the unique bond that unites the United States and Israel. It is a bond that goes back to the founding of the state of Israel and beyond, based on shared values and shared ideals.

Israel's democracy is the bedrock on which our relationship stands. It's a shining example for people around the world who are on the frontline of the struggle for democracy in their own lands. Our relationship is also based on our common interest in a more stable and peaceful Middle East, a Middle East that will