

Remarks on the Middle East Peace Process and an Exchange With Reporters September 4, 1999

The President. The new agreement which will be signed today between the Israelis and the Palestinians represents a wonderful opportunity to move the peace process forward. It is a product of hard work and the growing understanding by Israelis and Palestinians alike that the fulfillment of one side's aspirations must come with, and not at the expense of, the fulfillment of the other side's dreams.

The two sides have both strong positions to be reconciled and shared interests to be pursued together. They know there's no sense in an endless tug-of-war over common ground.

The United States has been honored to support these efforts for peace, from the signing of the Oslo agreement on the White House lawn almost exactly 6 years ago, to the Wye River accords achieved with the help of the late King Hussein, to the peace between Israel and Jordan itself in 1994, down to the present agreement. Our success in these endeavors, of course, goes back to the Camp David accords under President Carter in 1978.

Today I want to pay tribute to Prime Minister Barak for fulfilling his promise to seek a just and lasting peace for the people of Israel and to Chairman Arafat for his courage in taking yet another step toward mutual respect and recognition. I am grateful for Egyptian President Mubarak's extraordinary efforts in this instance. He had a critical role in facilitating this agreement. And, of course, I want to say a special word of thanks to Secretary Albright and her team for going the extra mile to help the parties bridge their final gaps and reach consensus.

There is much hard work ahead for all of us. The United States pledged in the Wye River accords that we would help both sides minimize the risks of peace and we would help to lift the lives of the Palestinians. I ask Congress now to provide the funds we need to keep that promise.

Final status talks are now set to begin. We will do everything we can to be supportive all along the way and to achieve our larger goal: a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace in the entire region, including Syria and Lebanon. I hope today's progress is seen by leaders in the

Middle East as a stepping stone toward that larger goal. Our commitment to reaching it will never waver.

Thank you very much.

Reinvestigation of 1993 Waco Incident

Q. Mr. President, were you concerned that incendiary devices were used at Waco—or are you concerned?

The President. Well, let me say I support the Attorney General's decision to seek an independent investigation, and I think that's what ought to happen, and we ought to see what the investigation turns up. We ought to find out what the truth is and let you and the American people know.

Q. Do you still have confidence in the Attorney General and the Director of the FBI?

The President. Yes, I certainly have confidence in the Attorney General. You know, she's told us what happened; and she's told us she asked some questions that she didn't get the right answers to.

And I think that with regard to the Director, I don't think that it's—there is going to be an independent investigation, which she supports and which he has said he supports. I don't think it serves any purpose for the rest of us to assign blame until the investigation is conducted and the evidence is in. I think he did the right thing in saying he thought there ought to be an independent investigation, and I think that that's all we can ask of him. And she is now going to appoint an appropriate person to do it, and I think we ought to let them do their job.

East Timor

Q. Mr. President, are you pleased at the outcome of the voting in East Timor?

The President. Yes, I'm pleased because so many people voted, and I'm pleased because the outcome was so unambiguous. I believe it's 78½ to 21½; that's about as clear an expression of public opinion as you could ever expect.

Now, I'm very concerned about the continuing violence. The people who lost the election should recognize that they lost it fair and square, and we should now find a way to go

forward peacefully. I respect the fact that the Government of Indonesia supported the referendum and has said that it will abide by these results. It isn't often that a country is willing to do such a thing. But I think it is also important that the Indonesians do everything they can to keep the peace and to prevent the bloodshed that we now see in East Timor. They have a capacity, I think, that would enable them to do that.

We will work with the United Nations; we will do everything we can to support it. But this was a truly historic occurrence and one that may provide some guidance, some indication, some hope for people throughout the world. It would be tragic, indeed, if the referendum, which was so heavily supported by the people—not only the 78 percent who voted for independence but just the huge percentage of the citizens that showed up to vote—it would be tragic if all that came out of it was more and more violence and killing of innocents.

So I think it's important that they, the United Nations, and all of us who support them do everything we can to minimize the bloodshed and to facilitate an orderly and honorable transition. And we will support that.

Legislative Agenda

Q. Now that you're—[inaudible]—your vacation and Congress is going to come back, what are you hoping to accomplish as far as the legislative agenda?

The President. Well, I'm quite optimistic, actually, in view of some of the developments of the last few weeks. I hope we can pass the Patients' Bill of Rights. There is now a bipartisan bill that has been supported by the American Medical Association and 200 other health professional, health consumer groups. I hope now that those who have been opposing it in the congressional leadership will change their position and let us go forward.

I'm very hopeful that we will pass juvenile justice legislation that will adopt the common-sense measures to keep guns out of the wrong hands that the Senate adopted. I'm very hopeful that in the end we will get a budget agreement that will enable us to extend the life of Social Security, extend the life to the Medicare Trust Fund, and provide for prescription drugs and pay down the debt of the American people. And there are many other things that are going on.

I would like to emphasize, since this is Labor Day and all the children are going back to school, I'm also especially hopeful that we can be successful with our education agenda. This is the occasion, this year, 1999, as we see in every 5-year period, when we have to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. And back in January, at the State of the Union Address, I asked the Congress to change the terms in which we give money to States and school districts to stop subsidizing failure, to end social promotion, to dramatically increase our commitment to after-school and summer school programs and to proven strategies that turn around failing schools.

We've seen all over the country where there is a systematic effort to turn these failing schools around, they work. And if we do that, plus the charter schools, plus the school modernization program and hooking them all up to the Internet, and our continuing commitment to hire more teachers, I think that this could be one of the most productive years that we have had since I've been President.

It's in the nature of divided government that things that happen that are positive tend to happen late in the process. So I am not at all pessimistic. I'm quite hopeful that we can get over this difference we have over the tax issue, that they will accept an affordable tax cut that will provide—my tax proposal provides about as much relief to middle class Americans as theirs does at a much, much lower cost and permits us to achieve these other objectives.

So I'm going to work as hard as I can with members of both parties to get that done as they come back. I'm looking forward to it, looking forward to talking to the leaders of the Senate and the House in both parties and going back to work.

President's Vacation and Home Purchase

Q. Mr. President, after all you have done in the last 2 weeks, do you need a vacation? [Laughter] And how do you like your new house?

The President. Yes, even by my standards this was a fairly active vacation, you know. Hillary is keeping me busy, and we had a lot of—we also had finalized the house. I love this house. It's a beautiful old house, and the older part of it was built in 1889. The people who lived in it for the last 18 years have taken wonderful care of it. It was obviously a place that

has been lovingly tended to, and it will be a good place to wake up in the morning—lots of light. I like the neighbors; they were nice. And so I'm looking forward to it. I know that Hillary is, and I'm very pleased that we were able to find it.

And I'd also like to say, since you asked me the question, a special word of thanks to all the people who opened their homes to Hillary or to Hillary and me, to people on our behalf, as we were looking for a place. As you might imagine, the circumstances for them were somewhat unusual; the publicity for them—most of them—was somewhat—was unprecedented, and

I was very touched by the way we were received.

And I had a wonderful vacation. I liked it all. But I had to come up to Camp David to get a little rest this weekend.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4 p.m. at Camp David, MD. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; and President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt.

Remarks at Coleman Place Elementary School in Norfolk, Virginia September 6, 1999

Wow! Let's give her a hand. [*Applause*] She was great. Come on, more. [*Applause*] I asked Le'Shia when we went up here, I said, "Are you going to have a good time?" She said, "Yes, I am." [*Laughter*] I think she's got a good future in politics if she keeps it up.

Well, good afternoon to all of you and happy Labor Day. I want to thank you for coming out today. I want to thank those who are here: my longtime friend and former colleague as Governor, Senator Chuck Robb; and Congressman Scott and Congressman Sisisky. They are working to pass legislation in Washington which would make what we do today part of a national movement so that all of our children could have what Le'Shia says she wants and the children here deserve. And I think we owe Senator Robb and these Members of Congress our support for their leadership for our children.

I also want to thank our wonderful Secretary of Education, Dick Riley, who, as Chuck Robb said, worked with us nearly 20 years ago; the three of us were working together. He just finished a big bus tour all across the South, celebrating the start of a new school year and the rededication of the American people and our educators and our families to higher standards and better performance for all of our children.

I want to thank your mayor; your superintendent; your board president; our principal here, Jeanne Tomlinson, who showed me around; and the teachers who visited with me;

the great labor leaders John Sweeney and Bob Georgine, who are here; and the presidents of the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, Sandra Feldman and Bob Chase; the Norfolk Federation of Teachers president, Marian Flickinger; the Tidewater Central Labor Council president, Jerry Hufton; the Virginia State AFL-CIO leader, Jim Leaman; Cheri James of the Virginia Education Association; and all the State legislators who are here. Will you raise your hand, all the members of the legislature who are here? We've got a ton of legislators who are here. I wanted to do that to show you that what we are here about—the education of our children and the modernization of our schools—has broad and deep support, and I am profoundly grateful to all of them.

Tropical Storm Dennis

Before I get into my remarks—most of what needs to be said has probably already been said—but I want to just say a word, if I might, about the harm that Virginia has sustained from Tropical Storm Dennis and from the tornadoes that have devastated parts of your State.

On Saturday in Hampton, which is quite near here, 150 homes were destroyed and 6 people were injured. As we pray for their swift recovery, we are also already working on those who lost their homes and to help them get their homes and their property back. FEMA is on the ground in Hampton, and I want to say a