

next year. Conventional wisdom is, in election years you don't get much done. That's not necessarily so. I can remember we got a great deal done in 1996 in the election. In '98, we got a lot done in the 11th hour, simply because Congress wanted to go home. [Laughter]

So stay with me, keep focused on this, too. We can get quite a lot done next year if we have the discipline to do it and the will.

The last thing I want to say is, I am very grateful for having had the chance to serve and to work with you and to be President at this particular moment in history, when doors were being opened and a new chapter in the civil rights history of America was being written, and I hope we can do more and do better.

But I'm very grateful for having had the chance to do this, and I have said many times I wish we could have done more, but I'm glad

we did what we did. And I feel very fortunate just to have had the chance to serve at this moment, thanks in no small measure because of the progress we've made on these issues, and I thank you for that, too.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:55 p.m. in the Colonial Room at the Mayflower Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to luncheon cochairs Peter Amstein, software developer, Microsoft Corporation; Mark Fox, finance strategy adviser, FOX Group; Charles Nolan, fashion designer, Ellen Tracy, Inc.; and Andy Tobias, treasurer, Democratic National Campaign Committee, who introduced the President. The President also referred to ENDA, the proposed employment non-discrimination act.

Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel and Foreign Minister Farouk al-Shara of Syria December 16, 1999

Middle East Peace Process

Over the past 48 hours, Israel and Syria have taken a critical step in the journey toward peace. That journey will be a difficult one, but with courage and perseverance on both sides, the result will be deeply rewarding to the people of Israel and to the people of Syria.

In the course of their meetings with Secretary Albright and with me, Prime Minister Barak and Foreign Minister Shara agreed to make every effort to reach peace between Israel and Syria as part of a just, lasting, and comprehensive Middle East peace, based on United Nations resolutions 242 and 338 and the Madrid terms of reference. To that end, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister agreed to return to Washington to continue their negotiations on an intensive basis beginning January 3, 2000, about 2 weeks from now.

They have requested the United States to participate in these negotiations, and we are honored to do so. They agreed to take steps to ensure that these negotiations will be conducted in a productive and positive atmosphere.

We are witnessing a new beginning in the effort to achieve a comprehensive peace in the

Middle East. With Syrian-Israeli negotiations off to a good start, Israeli-Lebanese negotiations expected to begin soon, and the Palestinian track well underway, we can truly set our sights on a new and different Middle East.

As I emphasized from the outset, the journey will be tough. Nothing in the past 48 hours should lead us to believe otherwise. But the parties are embarked on this path. They have agreed there should be no looking back, for the sake of our generations and generations yet to come.

I thank the Prime Minister and his team. I thank Foreign Minister Shara and his team. I thank Secretary Albright and those on the American team. All of them have worked hard. And I want Israel and Syria to know they can count on the United States every step of the way.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:40 p.m. in the West Portico at the White House.