

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, what's the outlook for a Camp David-style summit?

President Clinton. Well, I want to wait until Secretary Albright gets back. As you know, I saw Prime Minister Barak when I was in Europe, and I'm going to see Mr. Arafat, Chairman Arafat—I think about a week from tomorrow, something like that—soon, anyway. And of course, His Majesty and I are going to talk today. So after that, we'll make some decisions about what to do next.

But you know, we're down now to the difficult issues and to the difficult decisions. And those of us who are not charged with making them but are charged with helping them get made just have to try to create the best possible environment. I'll do whatever I can. I have for over 7 years, and I'll continue to do that.

Q. Your Majesty, do you foresee any possibility for resuming talks between Israel and Syria?

King Abdullah II. Well, we have a series of discussions about the peace process in the next half an hour, so we'll see what comes out of that.

Q. Your Majesty, would you say that both parties, both the Palestinians and the Israelis, need to maybe limit their expectations in these talks? There's a lot of talk now on the Palestinian side; people are recommending to the Palestinians to go for it all and get everything, 100 percent, the same way that Lebanon did.

King Abdullah II. There are healthy discussions between President Arafat and the Prime Minister, and we have to give them the benefit

of the doubt and see what unfolds in the next week or so.

Q. But do you expect either side to get everything they want, or will—would you suggest that maybe the Palestinians will only get 90 percent, or 90-something percent, of the West Bank? Or do you expect them to get everything?

King Abdullah II. Well, I've been told by an old friend of mine that the best solution is one that both sides are a bit unhappy with, which means that both sides have had to give up something. And I think that when we look at final status, both sides have to be very open-minded about the other people's positions.

Q. Mr. President, Jordan will face several challenges from final status peace talks, including refugees and water. Will the U.S. offer support—financial, moral support, et cetera—towards us?

President Clinton. Well, I think to have any kind of complete agreement on this, there has to be a provision made for dealing with the refugee problems, including some sort of fund, international fund, which would deal with the financial burdens of the displaced refugees everywhere, including Jordan. That's what I'm in favor of.

Thank you.

NOTE: The exchange began at 10:40 a.m. in the Colonnade at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks on Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Legislation and an Exchange With Reporters

June 6, 2000

The President. Today is the first full day back to work for Members of Congress since Memorial Day. Three weeks from now they leave again for the Fourth of July recess. Those 3 weeks provide a critical window of opportunity for Congress to make real progress on some of our Nation's most vital priorities. I urge congressional leaders to seize that opportunity.

They can get off to a strong start by passing without delay the emergency budget supplemental request I sent to Congress back in February. This is funding for pressing national needs, where delay means putting American families in hardship and our national interests at risk.

The legislation includes funding for crucial safety maintenance on the air traffic control system. Without this funding, we could see more flight delays as we enter the peak summer tourist season.

It includes housing assistance for victims of Hurricane Floyd, many of whom still are living in temporary shelters. These families will have to spend yet another winter there if they cannot begin rebuilding their homes during this summer's construction season.

It includes money to battle the record number of forest fires that have been burning across America last year, especially out West. Delaying this funding could erode our capacity to fight further blazes this summer.

It includes emergency assistance for families who have struggled all winter with high heating oil costs and who now face a scorching summer. Without this assistance, these low income Americans, many of them elderly and infirm, may not be able to afford the fans and air conditioning that can literally save their lives.

It includes funding to keep illegal drugs out of our Nation by supporting the Colombian Government's courageous fight against drug traffickers. Delays in this funding come at a time when cocaine production is increasing in Colombia, where more than 80 percent of the cocaine on United States streets comes from. It also comes at a time when Colombia, Latin America's oldest democracy, is fighting to preserve its very system of government and way of life in the face of intense pressure.

It includes funding to lift crippling debt burdens from the world's poorest nations, funding for our troops in Kosovo and for building civilian institutions there. Delaying this funding may force the Army to put off regular maintenance of tanks and other weaponry or even to cancel combat exercises crucial to the readiness of our troops around the world. It will also delay the day when we can bring our troops home from Kosovo.

Each and every one of these investments is urgently needed, and the package as a whole enjoys strong bipartisan support. Leaders in the House clearly understand that. That's why they put the emergency spending bill on a fast track for passage. But in the Senate, instead of taking swift action, the emergency spending bill has been attached to next year's spending bills. The Senate weighed them down with further unrelated provisions, such as one that would block

our efforts to get the tobacco companies to pay back the Government for health costs caused by tobacco products.

This process is not the right thing to do when the needs of the country covered by the bills are so urgent. The emergency spending bill should have been passed months ago. Let's do it now, so that we can move on to other pressing business that we can and should pass this summer.

That includes the Senate following quickly the House's example in providing normal trade relations with China. It also, I hope, will include raising the minimum wage by a dollar over 2 years; passing a strong, enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights; reforming Medicare and adding a voluntary prescription drug benefit; passing commonsense gun legislation to close the gun show loophole, require child safety locks, ban the importation of large capacity ammunition clips.

I hope it will include education reform, demanding more from our schools and investing more in them, including modernizing 6,000 of our schools that are now falling apart. I hope it will include strong, fair hate crimes legislation. And I hope it will include clean spending bills that I can sign, not those loaded down with anti-environmental riders, special interest provisions for the tobacco industry, and other add-ons I have vetoed in the past and would have no choice other than to veto in the future.

Now, we can do all of this in short order if congressional leaders will stop delaying and start voting. Almost every one of these issues has been thoroughly debated, and almost every one of them enjoys strong bipartisan support. We could pass them if they could just be brought up for a vote. It's time to put progress ahead of partisanship.

When Congress adjourns this summer, we ought to be able to look back and say we took real steps to make our country better. We ought to be able to say we made the most of this historic moment of unparalleled prosperity. That's what the American people sent us here to do, and they deserve no less. As I have said repeatedly, the fact that this is an election year should not have an impact on that. If we just pass the things that there is strong bipartisan majority support for, there will still be plenty of matters over which there are honest disagreements that can be presented to the American people to resolve. All I'm asking for is a vote on the things that are urgently needed in the

national interest and those things that clearly the majority of Congress supports.

Thank you.

Q. Mr. President, could you explain a little more about the urgency for the Colombia funds? And why not ask for that money as part of a foreign ops bill?

The President. Well, we asked for it in an emergency supplemental bill. And that's where we think—we think it should be passed on an emergency basis because the Colombian Government is under great stress now, and because they can't begin to deal with the challenges posed by the drug traffickers in Colombia without extra support—not only to build up their forces, their police forces in the country but also to give alternatives to those who are growing the plants, the coca plants, to find another way to make a living, and to do other things that will deal with some of the border problems we have in the countries that border Colombia.

But I think most of us have seen that democracy itself is under great stress throughout the Andean region, in no small measure because of the power of the drug traffickers. And I say again, Colombia is the oldest democracy in Latin America, and I believe their very way of life is under stress because of this. And I think that if we were to pass this quickly, and then send a clear signal to the Colombians that we support democracy and we support their efforts against the drug traffickers, you would see a big response from other countries of the world to help them. The world would rally behind them. It would, I believe, change the entire psychology of the drama that is unfolding down there.

And if it's a battle that we lose to the drug traffickers, the price would not only be more drugs on the streets of America but also potentially destabilizing the entire Andean region and the whole move we've seen these last 15 or 20 years toward democracy in South America and throughout Latin America. It's very troubling to me. And I think there are people in the Congress—I know there are, in both parties—who strongly agree.

We all know that the Senate operates differently, on different rules, than the House. We

all know there are all kinds of problems and conflicting interests. But this is something we really ought to put beyond that. And I think that what happened is that this emergency supplemental got caught up in a whole lot of conflicting pressures in the Senate and the ability of those who disagree with one thing or another to use the rules to delay it. But somehow we've got to cut through all this. The national interest in Colombia and in the other things that I itemized just cries out for action. It's just imperative that we get it as quickly as possible.

Q. Mr. President, have you talked to Senator Lott directly about this, in trying to move some of these things? And what —

The President. I have, I have. I've talked to him on more than one occasion. I have not talked to him since I've been back, because I haven't had a chance to this morning; I've been working all day. But I will talk to him.

Q. What—what is his counterargument?

The President. I believe that on the merits, I think he wants to do it. And you know, it's a difficult situation. I think what is required is for everybody in the Senate to recognize that this is something we ought to just put beyond whatever the other squabbles are, and get it done and put it behind us. And so—I believe he wants to do that, and I hope we can find a way to do that.

Peruvian Elections

Q. Mr. President, would you like to see the U.S. take any action toward Peru—possible sanctions, or anything—regarding irregularities in their recent election?

The President. Well, we just got back from my trip. I think I ought to have a chance to talk about all that. I haven't—I don't feel—I may not know enough to answer that. I'm disappointed, obviously, that the election didn't unfold as we thought it would after the first round. And I have to figure out exactly what all the reasons are and get a briefing before I can make a comment beyond that.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:28 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.