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that other gun manufacturers will follow their lead instead of excoriating them. They don't deserve to be condemned; they deserve to be applauded. And others ought to step up to the plate and do the same thing.

Now, Governor, you said the NRA ought to stop attacking me. I'll tell you what, if they stop attacking this legislation, I'd be happy for them to attack me for the rest of my life. I've kind of gotten used to it. What we say about each other doesn't amount to a hill of beans. But whether all these kids here live to have their children standing on these steps some day fighting for some other issue, that's what matters. That's what matters.

So again, I say a simple thank you. Thank you, once again, for leading the Nation to a better tomorrow. And again I say, Washington should follow Maryland's lead.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:04 p.m. in the Maryland State House at the signing ceremony for Maryland's Responsible Gun Safety Act of 2000. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Parris N. Glendening, Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, Secretary of State John Willis, and Attorney General Joseph Curran of Maryland; Governor Glendening's wife, Frances; and Maryland State House Speaker Casper R. Taylor, Jr., and Senate President Thomas V. (Mike) Miller, Jr.

Statement on Permanent Normal Trade Relations With China

April 11, 2000

Today I met with my national security team about the critical stakes in China's WTO accession and our decision regarding permanent normal trade relations.

The economic reasons for PNTR are clearcut. Our markets already are open to China; the agreement we reached to bring China into the WTO doesn't require that we open them further in any way. What it does is to open China's markets to our workers, our farmers, our businesses. That means more jobs, growth, and exports for Americans. China will join the WTO regardless of what we decide to do. The decision before Congress is whether the United States will receive the same trade benefits from China as will our trade competitors.

The national security implications are even more far-reaching. Bringing China into the WTO will entwine China in the global economy, increasing its interdependence with the rest of the world. It will bring the information revolution—with the knowledge and freedom of thought that entails—to millions of people in China in ways its Government cannot possibly control. It will accelerate the dismantling of China's state-owned enterprises—a process that is getting government out of people's lives and sparking social and political change all over China. It will strengthen China's reforms and the reformers behind them.

That is reason enough to vote for PNTR. But I am also concerned about what a vote against PNTR would do. It would have extremely harmful consequences for our national security. Because the economic case for PNTR is so strong, the Chinese will see a rejection as a strategic decision by the United States to turn from cooperation to confrontation, to deal with China as an adversary. That would undercut the reform-minded leaders who signed this agreement with us and strengthen the hand of hardliners who believe cooperating with the United States is a mistake. Those are the same forces most threatened by our alliances with Japan and Korea, the same forces that want the Chinese military to sell dangerous technologies, and the same forces that would pursue confrontation with Taiwan rather than dialog.

It's no surprise that Taiwan's President-elect Chen strongly supports China's membership in the WTO and wants us to grant PNTR. He understands the importance of the stability that will come from good U.S.-China relations and China's membership in the WTO. If both Beijing and Taiwan are in the WTO, it will increase their interdependence and, therefore, the cost to Beijing of confrontation. If China is shut out, tensions in the Taiwan Strait will likely rise. Our ability to ease them will diminish.

We will spare no effort in the coming days and weeks to make sure that the Congress and the American people understand what the stakes are. And I am confident that when the debate is over and the votes are cast, the Congress will do what is right—both for our prosperity and our security.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel

April 11, 2000

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, why did you call Mr. Barak so urgently to come to Washington? What was the urgency in the matter?

President Clinton. Well, we wanted to talk to each other. It was as much his idea as mine. I think that he wants to continue to energize the peace process, move forward with the Palestinians and with his withdrawal from Lebanon, and I strongly support that, and we're going to talk about it.

Q. Mr. President, what is the United States going to do to prevent an outburst of violence in Lebanon when Israel pulls out in only 3 months?

President Clinton. Well, if Israel pulls out in accordance with the United Nations resolution, what justification will anyone have for violence? They've been asking for this for years—years and years and years.

Q. Justification or not, there is a warning that there could be a real violent——

Q. That doesn't stop Hezbollah from doing its——

President Clinton. We'll talk about that.

Q. Is there anything the U.S. can do for Israel to make the withdrawal serene, to make it peaceful?

President Clinton. Well, "serene" is a word not normally used in the context of the Middle East these days, but we'll do what we can to help, and we're going to talk about it.

Q. Mr. President, are things as bleak on the Syrian track as it seems to us?

President Clinton. Excuse me?

Q. Are things as bleak as they seem to us, on the Syrian track?

President Clinton. Well, I got an answer back from President Asad to several of the points that I raised when I met with him in Switzerland. And there are still differences, if that's what—but that's no bleaker than it was before we met. And so I think what we've got to do is figure out where we go from there. But I think there's a lot of hope for more rapid movement on the Palestinian front, and that's what we're going to talk about.

Q. Is the door still open? Is the door still open on Syrian track? Is the door still open?

President Clinton. You should be asking him, but I think so. But there's got to be a willingness. So we've got to bridge some of these divides, and so we need to make progress where we can.

Q. Are you going to discuss a new proposal on the Syrian front?

President Clinton. Today we're going to discuss, I think, mostly the Palestinian track and Lebanon.

Q. Are you satisfied with the pace of Israel's withdrawal on the Palestinian track?

President Clinton. I think you should wait and see what happens in the next few weeks before we talk about that.

Q. Well, the——

President Clinton. We're going to talk about what's going to happen from here on in.

Israeli Weapon Sales to China

Q. [*Inaudible*]—Israel's view of China? Can you talk about that issue, when you come back from the Prime Minister, Israel's sale of weaponry to China? Is that going to affect things?

President Clinton. We're going to talk about that. I'm concerned about it; you know I am, and we'll talk about it.

Q. [*Inaudible*]—on the Palestinian track today?

Prime Minister Barak. We have a variety of ideas to discuss about how to move to give new momentum and energy to the Palestinian track