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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.

Economic Stimulus Plan

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. ——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, Columbia, 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 a Meeting 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