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But you're not just painting a school today, you're painting a very different picture for America's future, and it's a beautiful one because of you.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:49 p.m. in the cafeteria. In his remarks, he referred to Reginald C. Ballard, principal, and Terri Green, Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) president, Cardozo High School; Wilma Harvey, president, District of Columbia school board; former Presidents Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, and George Bush; and Gen. Colin Powell, USA (Ret.), chairman, America's Promise—The Alliance For Youth. The President also referred to the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) program of the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Message on the Observance of the Lunar New Year

January 14, 1998

Warm greetings to all those celebrating the Lunar New Year.

This joyous occasion celebrates the blessings of family, community, and a rich and ancient heritage. It is a special time to reflect on the events of the previous year and to embrace the challenges of the year ahead. Vibrant with color, lights, dancing, parades, folk music, and delicious food, the Lunar New Year reminds all of us of the beauty and variety of Asian culture and of the strength, character, and achievement that Asian Americans bring to our national life.

As we join you in welcoming the Year of the Tiger, Hillary and I extend best wishes to all for a new year full of health, happiness, prosperity, and peace.

Bill Clinton

NOTE: This message was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 20.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel

January 20, 1998

Cuba-U.S. Relations

Q. Good morning, Mr. President.

The President. Good morning.

Q. Mr. President, Cuba is about to be in the news. What does the United States gain from pressing the embargo?

The President. Well, let me say, our position on that is that we want Cuba to move toward freedom and openness, and if they do, we'll respond. That's always been our position, and I believe in the end it will prevail.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, on the Middle East, Mr. Arafat is talking with some threatening phrases, speaking of maybe the intifada will be resumed. And of course, the Prime Minister said last night that's no way to negotiate. How do you feel about——

The President. I agree with that. I think if he makes an observation that if this whole thing fails, that it won't be good, then that's understandable. But I don't think it should be encouraged. I've really looked forward to this week. I've worked hard to get ready for the meeting. I'm anxious to begin my sixth meeting with the Prime Minister and then to see Mr. Arafat in a couple of days. And I think we have to have a positive attitude. We need to be reassuring to people. We don't want to undermine any confidence. We need to keep working.

Q. Mr. President, you said yesterday that you had high hopes, and that seems out of step with some of the views of your top officials here. What makes you have high hopes for these talks?

The President. Well, I've often been out of step, in having high hopes, with a lot of people. It may be a defect in my nature, but I think—for one thing I think that Israel wants peace and a resolution of this. And I believe that it's very much in the interests of the Palestinians and Mr. Arafat to seek to resolve it, and we're working very hard. I've just found that, more often than not, you ultimately have success if you stay at something and keep working at it in good faith.

Q. Mr. President, could you just tell us what you believe a credible withdrawal would be? And does Chairman Arafat need to do anything before such a withdrawal should take place?

The President. I think that's a conversation I need to have with the Prime Minister first. I don't—and I will do that.

Prime Minister Netanyahu's Cabinet

Q. Mr. Netanyahu, may I ask you one question, please? Are you in a more difficult situation because of the new makeup of your Cabinet, because it's a smaller coalition? Is it more difficult for you to make concessions and to negotiate?

Prime Minister Netanyahu. This is a difficult day for me because I've lost a good friend, the Deputy Premier and Minister of Education. But the composition of the government is irrelevant. The people who could topple the government before Mr. Levi departed could topple it after he departed. And I say to them what I say to everyone here and to President Clinton: We made a decision to go to peace. This is what this government is about, peace with security. And I am sure that I can muster the necessary support across the government and across the coalition for something that will move the peace process forward and maintain secure and defensible boundaries for Israel.

Q. And you believe you have enough support within your now more limited government to pass any sort of vote for withdrawal, for further Israeli withdrawal?

Prime Minister Netanyahu. For a withdrawal that will ensure our defenses, that is what we're prepared to do. We're prepared to move forward, but not to jeopardize the security of the State of Israel.

[*At this point, one group of reporters left the room, and another group entered.*]

Prime Minister Netanyahu's Visit

The President. Welcome. Let me just briefly say that I am delighted to see the Prime Minister again. This is our sixth meeting. I'm looking forward to it. We're working hard to make progress, and I want to reaffirm to the people of Israel the strong support of the United States for Israel and the strong support of the United States for the security of Israel and a peace process that proceeds within that commitment. And I think we can succeed.

Q. Mr. President, what are your expectations from the meeting with the Prime Minister?

The President. That we're going to have a good-faith, detailed, frank discussion and do our best to make some progress. And I think we've got a chance to do that.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Are you going to pressure Mr. Netanyahu to give concessions to the Palestinians?

The President. I'm going to have a discussion with him about where we think the peace process is. I wouldn't use that word. Israel has to make its own decisions about its own security and its own future.

Q. Who do you think is breaching the agreement more severely, more seriously, the Israelis or the Palestinians?

The President. I don't think it's fruitful to discuss that. I think what we ought to talk about is what both sides can do now to get the peace process moving again. That's the most important thing.

NOTE: The exchange began at 10:19 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, Prime Minister Netanyahu referred to the late Zevulun Hammer, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education and Culture of Israel, and David Levi, former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks on Presenting the Congressional Medal of Honor to Major General James L. Day, USMC (Retired)

January 20, 1998

The President. Hillary and I are delighted to welcome all of you here today, including our Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Togo West; the National Security Adviser, Sandy Berger; Senator Robb and Congressman Evans; Deputy Secretary of Defense Hamre; Secretary Dalton; General Shelton and other members of the Joint Chiefs; General McCaffrey; Deputy Secretary Gober; Mr. Bucha, the president of the Medal of Honor Society; and General Foley and other recipients of the Medal of Honor who are here; to all the commanders of our veterans service organizations and proud members of the United States Marine Corps and former marines; to the friends and the large and