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So I don't know what's going on there. I know one thing—again, that's just like gun violence—you go out into this country and you will find 70 percent of Republicans, Democrats, and independents who believe in the provisions of the Patients' Bill of Rights. And you tell them that Congress says it will cost 2 bucks a month, the Federal Government experience is it costs less than one dollar a month, and the numbers will stay solid.

So there's something else going on here. And all I can say is I'm going to keep working for a good one. And I just—this is—this one is truly beyond me. I figure when the Congressional Budget Office came up after they had nourished it as the end-all and be-all of financial wisdom for 5 years, or nearly 5 years, that we would be home free and we could pass this in a bipartisan fashion. And the health insurers won't let them do it—that's really what's going on. They won't let them do it. And I think it's a sad day for health care in America. But we're not done yet, and this won't die.

Thank you.

2000 Election

Q. Are you being overly protective of Mr. Gore's campaign, sir? You've agreed to raise funds for him, and you took a shot at Mr. Bush yesterday. How do you respond?

The President. That's—I have nothing to say about that. Everything I said yesterday was in complete good spirits, and everyone that was there knew that we were all having a very good time—that we were all having a good time. And I think we ought to lighten up here on the politics and focus on the work.

You know, we're going to have an election in November and then you'll have somebody else to chew on after 2001. But between now and then, everyone who is in Congress and everyone who is in the executive branch is drawing a paycheck every 2 weeks—from them and their parents. They're paying us to go to work. And what we need to do is to be less obsessed with the politics and more obsessed with substance and deal with these issues.

And what I was trying to do yesterday was basically cut the atmosphere a little bit, give us something to laugh about—which they did—and then talk for a good period of time, probably more than a half hour, about the issues that are before us. I want us to focus on the work to be done. There's plenty of time later to worry about that. All of us that are drawing a check ought to be doing the people's business now.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:25 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; and Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland.

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

July 15, 1999

President Clinton. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I am delighted to welcome Prime Minister Barak to Washington. As all of you know, he is the most decorated soldier in Israel's history. And as a soldier, as Army Chief of Staff, Interior Minister, and Foreign Minister, he has made immeasurable contributions to his nation's security and its emergence as a modern, thriving democratic society, time and again taking on tough tasks and getting them done right.

Now, as Prime Minister he has put Middle East peace at the top of his agenda, telling his fellow citizens that Israel's triumph, and I quote, "will not be complete until true peace, trust, and cooperation reign between Israel and its neighbors."

Mr. Prime Minister, if your mentor, Yitzhak Rabin, were here today, I believe he would be very gratified, seeing the leadership of his cherished nation in your most capable hands.

For more than half a century, the United States has stood proudly with Israel and for the security of its people and its nation. Now, Mr. Prime Minister, as Israel again walks bravely down the path of peace, America will walk with you, ready to help in any way we can.

As we have seen before here at this house, as Israelis, Palestinians, Egyptians, and Jordanians have come together, what at first seems unlikely, even impossible, can actually become reality when the will for peace is strong. America will help as you move forward, as you put implementation of the Wye

River agreement back on course, as you work for a final status agreement, as you seek to widen the circle of peace to include Syria and Lebanon and to revitalize talks among Israel and the Arab world to solve regional problems and build a prosperous common future. I look forward to our meeting and to strengthening the bonds between Israel and the United States.

First, Mr. Prime Minister, again, welcome. The podium is yours.

Prime Minister Barak. Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, I came here as a messenger of the people of Israel who have called for change and renewal, and I am determined to bring about change and renewal. I and the people of Israel attach great importance to the relations with the United States, its friendship and support and its invaluable contribution to the peace process. The United States has always been true and tried friend of Israel, and President Clinton personally has played an important role in changing the Middle East landscape.

I came to Washington following a series of talks with a number of Middle East leaders. I assured them that we would work as partners with mutual trust in order to overcome all the challenges and complications that are still awaiting us down the street.

We agreed that we need to abide by the previous agreements signed by all parties, including the Wye accords. It is our intention to inject new momentum into the peace process and to put it back on all tracks. For this, we need American leadership and support all along the way.

Mr. President, we are on the threshold of the 21st century and the third millennium. Mothers, fathers, and children all across the Middle East yearn for the dawn of a new era. They expect us to provide them with a better and safer future. We cannot let their hopes down. Together, as partners in the search for peace, we can help transform the Middle East from an area of confrontation and enmity to a region of peace, security, and prosperity.

I look forward to all my meetings here, and I hope that this visit will usher in a new era in the peace process and further deepen American-Israeli relations.

Thank you very much.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister——

Q. Mr. President——

President Clinton. Let me tell you—here's what we'll do. We'll take a couple of questions from the Americans and a couple of questions from the Israelis, but we'll start with a question from the American press.

Sam [Sam Donaldson, ABC News].

U.S. Role in Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, when you say as you did the other day, words to the effect that the United States perhaps should step back somewhat and let the parties do more of the work, what do you mean by that?

And, Mr. President, how would that change U.S. involvement in the process?

Prime Minister Barak. I think that the United States can contribute to the process more as facilitator than as a kind of policeman, judge, and arbitrator at the same time. This was the tradition when Yitzhak Rabin was leading the peace process, and I deeply believe that this is the right way to have the best kind of inference and the best kind of contribution that the United States can bring into the peace process.

It is clear to all of us that without United States participation, contribution, and without the leadership that had been shown in the past by the President—and I hope will be shown in the future by the American administration—we won't be able to reach a peace. And I'm confident that we'll find these resources and move forward towards peace that all our peoples are awaiting.

President Clinton. I agree with what the Prime Minister said. I thought that the peace process worked best when we were essentially facilitating direct contacts between the parties and helping to make sure that there was a clear understanding, helping to make sure that we were there to do whatever we could do to, now and in the future, to make sure that it would work.

We took a more active role, in effect, as a mediator when the bonds of trust and the lines of communication had become so frayed that we were in danger of losing the peace process. And I did not want that to happen, and I didn't think either side wanted that to happen. So we did what was necessary to keep it going. But, obviously, if there is

a genuine priority put on this—there's a sense of trust and mutual communication on both sides—the people in the region have to live with the consequences of the agreements they make; it is far better for them to take as large a role as possible in making those agreements. And so, to that extent, I agree with the Prime Minister.

Do you want to call on an Israeli journalist? Is there anyone——

Visit of Prime Minister Barak

Q. Mr. President, when you say that you are waiting for Mr. Barak as a kid that's waiting for a new toy, you don't think that by this remark you're making some kind of patronizing on Mr. Barak, that you want to play with him? What kind of game do you want to play with Mr. Barak?

President Clinton. No, I don't think it's patronizing at all; it's just the reverse. What I'm saying is that the United States is a sponsor of the peace process. We have done what we could consistently for more than 20 years now through all kinds of administrations to try to advance the peace process. I have probably spent more time on it than anyone has, and certainly I've spent a lot of time on it.

But my view is that we should not be in a patronizing role, we should be in a supportive role. We should do what is necessary to keep the peace process going. But you heard what the Prime Minister said. He said that the United States' role was essential, it was best if it worked as a facilitator. He has already gone to see all the leaders of the region with whom he must work, or many of the leaders of the region with whom he must work, which I thought was the right thing to do in the right order. So I was supporting the position that he took.

Prime Minister Barak. Wolf Blitzer [Cable News Network], you are half American, half Israeli, so you get priority. [*Laughter*]

Q. Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister. I think what the previous reporter, Shimon Shiffer, was asking the President—I don't think the President necessarily understood the question. Your comment at the Democratic fundraiser in Florida the other day, when you said you were as excited as a young kid with a new toy about the meetings that you're going to have with the new Prime Minister, which today have caused some consternation, headlines in Israel—that you were referring to the Prime Minister as a new toy.

President Clinton. No, no—I see, yes——

Prime Minister Barak. May I tell you Wolf, that I feel like someone who got the mission of diffusing a time bomb, and I believe that we are all under urgent need to deal very seriously not with a tricky interpretation of an innocent favorable statement but by looking into the real problems and focus on solving them.

President Clinton. Yes, let me say, though—I didn't understand, you're right. Thank you, Wolf. That is—in English, what that means is that you are very excited. It has no reference to the Prime Minister. For example—[*laughter*]—I would never do that. For example, if I—no, no, if I were taking a trip to Hawaii, I might say, I'm as excited as a kid with a new toy—doesn't mean I think Hawaii's a toy, if you see what I mean. It means that—it's a slogan, you know. In American English, it means I am very excited about the prospect of the rejuvenation of the peace process. And that's all it means. I would never say such a patronizing thing, ever.

So I thank you; thank you, Wolf. This is a historic moment. Blitzer helps me make peace with the press and the people of Israel. That's wonderful. [*Laughter*] Yes, now you get a real question.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, the Prime Minister has suggested that he's going to have to use up a lot of his domestic political capital in Israel in order to fully implement the Wye agreement. Would it be wise to go right away to the final status issues and let them save some of that political capital for the tough decisions Israel is going to have to make down the road? Would you be willing to go along with deferring some of the agreements that were achieved at Wye?

President Clinton. First of all, I'm not quite sure that's what he said, but I think that those kinds of questions ought—may be

properly to be asked of us after we have a chance to have our meeting. But the problem is, we have—maybe we ought to let him answer it—but there is another party there, and they have their expectations. So maybe I should let the Prime Minister answer that.

Prime Minister Barak. We abide by an international agreement, Wye agreement included. It had been signed by an Israeli freely elected government, by the Americans, and by Chairman Arafat. We are committed to live up to it. But there is a need to combine the implementation of Wye with the moving forward of the permanent status agreement. It could be this way—first Wye, then final status. It could be this way, but only through an agreement with Arafat after mutual, open, frank, and direct discussion.

If we together agree, whether with the Americans and Arafat, that something could be made in order to bring those two elements together, I hope and believe that even the international press would not resist it very forcefully.

President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria

Q. Prime Minister Barak, you have met with President Mubarak; you have met with President Arafat; you have met with King Abdullah. What are the possibilities of a meeting between you and President Hafiz al-Asad?

Prime Minister Barak. We still wait to see. When the time comes, I hope we'll be able to meet. It takes two to tango. I'm ready; the arena is ready; maybe the dancing instructor is ready. We have to find opportunity and begin.

President Clinton. Now, let me say that is not a patronizing remark toward President Asad as the Prime Minister's dancing partner. [*Laughter*]

Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International], go ahead.

Israeli Settlements

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, when do you plan to disband the heavily armed settlements in Palestine?

Prime Minister Barak. I'm not sure whether I understood the question, so could you please repeat it?

Q. There are more and more settlements being built around Jerusalem and so forth. Are you going to disband them?

Prime Minister Barak. No. I'm not going to build new ones. I'm not going to dismantle any one of them. Israeli citizens live in them. They came to these places, almost all of them, through an approval of the Israeli Government. We are responsible for them. But the overall picture will be settled once we end the permanent status negotiation and whatever will be agreed, we will do. I believe in a strong block of settlements that will include most of the settlers in Judeo-Samaria and the Gaza Strip.

Thank you.

President Clinton. Thank you.

Arab-Americans

Q. Mr. President, many Arab-American organizations in this country are very skeptical about Arabs getting a fair chance in Israel, while Arab-Americans from Arab descent and from this country going to Israel having very harsh treatment. There are four people sitting in jail without due process. They are badly treated at the airport. Can you comment on that?

Prime Minister Barak. I will answer. I'm ready to look into this problem. We have no intentions to humiliate or to intimidate any Arab citizens, be it Israelis, Americans, or of other countries. And I cannot respond directly to the story you are telling since I don't know the details.

President Clinton. Thank you very much.

Palestinian Right of Return/Location of U.S. Embassy in Israel

Q. Mr. President, do you personally believe in the Palestinian right of return, even though your comments perhaps at the press conference with Mr. Mubarak might not reflect a change in U.S. policy?

And to Prime Minister Barak, one issue here in the States has been the question of moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. Do you think that that has to happen? I'm sorry—from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Thank you. Do you believe that that needs to happen now?

Prime Minister Barak. Be careful about the directions. [*Laughter*]

Q. Do you believe that that needs to happen now, or can that wait for progress in the peace process?

President Clinton. Do you want me to go first?

First of all, as you correctly stated, nothing that I have said should be interpreted as a change in United States policy. I do think there will be a general atmosphere when the peace is finally made which will be positive. That's all I said.

On that question, the question you asked me that is explicitly an issue stated for final status negotiations by the parties; that's part of the final status talks. The United States, as a sponsor of the peace process, has asked the parties to do nothing to prejudge final status issues. We certainly should be doing nothing to prejudge the final status issues. That is why I have had a consistent position on that, on the Embassy, on every issue. Whatever else we do, the United States has no business trying to prejudge these final status issues. That's what the parties have to work out in the final status talks.

Q. But Mrs. Clinton has certainly prejudged them.

Prime Minister Barak. As the Prime Minister of Israel, I would like to see all the Embassies from all around the world coming to Jerusalem, and we will do whatever we can to provide the preconditions for it. I feel that the essence of the peace effort that we are trying to drive forward right now is to bring within the shortest possible time a new landscape, political landscape in the Middle East that will make the whole question irrelevant; you will see all the Embassies together, side by side, in Jerusalem.

Thank you very much.

Israeli Astronauts

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, is there going to be Israeli astronauts on the space station? Are you going to discuss this issue, and do you desire such?

Prime Minister Barak. I like Israelis, especially Israeli astronauts. There is an officer, highly competent officer in our air force, and I would be more than glad to see him walking in space when we enter the new millennium, maybe in 2001 or 2002.

Thank you.

President Clinton. Thank you. We have to go to work.

First Lady's Views on Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, what about Mrs. Clinton? She's prejudged the issues. What about Mrs. Clinton's prejudgment, Mr. President? Tell us about Mrs. Clinton's prejudgment, sir.

President Clinton. That's why Senator Moynihan's law is good; every individual Member of Congress can express a personal opinion, but because of the waiver, the United States does not have to prejudge the final status issue. That's good. That's the way the law is set up, and it's good.

Q. Also, she's not President, is she?

President Clinton. That's right.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:29 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. Prime Minister Barak referred to Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. A portion of the remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Statement on the Northern Ireland Peace Process

July 15, 1999

I share the regret that the people of Ireland and Northern Ireland feel at the setback in the peace process. They have voted overwhelmingly for peace. They want a permanent end to violence and to the potential for violence. The cry for a peaceful, inclusive, democratic society in Northern Ireland has never been stronger.

Real progress has been made on all sides toward fulfilling the solemn commitments spelled out in the Good Friday agreement. It is incumbent on all parties to carry out their obligations under that accord. I am convinced that it is possible to achieve full implementation of this historic agreement in all its aspects by next spring, as contemplated by its terms.

The British and Irish Governments intend to conduct over the next few weeks an interim review of the implementation of the agreement aimed at overcoming the hurdles in the peace process. For the future of all