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Oh, wait, wait, I'll answer the Coast Guard question. Go ahead. This is important—further—what's going on for America today, so I'll answer this. Go ahead.

Search for Wreckage of John F. Kennedy, Jr., Aircraft/Conversations With Kennedy Family

Q. Mr. President, I'm told that you were briefed earlier today by the U.S. Coast Guard about their search for the wreckage of the Kennedy plane. Can you tell us what the results of that are to date? And also, sir, since the search became a—quote, unquote—''recovery operation'' last night, have you had a chance to speak with any members of the Kennedy family, and if so, can you relate some or all of those conversations?

President Clinton. Well, let me say, first of all, I did speak with Admiral Larrabee this morning, and again I want to say I think the Coast Guard, the National Transportation Safety Board, the FAA, all the State and local entities who have worked for them have done quite a fine job here; and I'm grateful to them.

He was actually, Admiral Larrabee, somewhat optimistic that they would eventually be successful in this area they have identified, in finding further—at least further parts of the plane. And I believe it's appropriate that this search continue. So I think they've done a good job.

I have had, over the last 3 days, several conversations with Senator Kennedy, and I have talked with Caroline, and I have—but I think it would not be appropriate for me to talk about the merits of it.

Let me say that John Kennedy and his sister and later his wife, were uncommonly kind to my daughter and to my wife, and this has been a very difficult thing for us, personally, as well as because of my position. They are very strong people, and I think they are carrying on as well as any human beings could. But they need the support and prayers of our country.

Thank you.

Prime Minister Barak. Allow my please to add to it—to extend on behalf of myself and the Israeli people our prayers and thoughts to the Kennedy family that faced so many tragedies and now is facing another one, a tragedy that I believe touched hearts of billions all around the world.

Thank you.

President Clinton. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's 178th news conference began at 4 p.m. in Presidential Hall (formerly Room 450) in the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, the President referred to Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; Rear Adm. Richard M. Larrabee, USCG, 1st Coast Guard District, head of the search and recovery efforts off the coast of Martha's Vineyard, MA, to locate the missing aircraft that carried John F. Kennedy, Jr., his wife, Carolyn Bessette Kennedy, and her sister Lauren Bessette. The President also referred to Mr. Kennedy's sister, Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg. Prime Minister Barak referred to his wife, Nava; and Vice President Abd al-Halim Khaddam of Syria.

Joint Statement by President Clinton and Prime Minister Ehud Barak

July 19, 1999

During several days of close consultations, the President and the Prime Minister conducted a comprehensive review of the U.S.-Israel bilateral relations, the peace process, Israeli as well as regional security, economic and scientific development and cooperation. These fruitful discussions have produced important agreements and understandings in all of these areas.

Prime Minister Barak expressed his deep appreciation of President Clinton's special efforts to enhance the U.S.-Israeli relationship and advance the cause of peace in the Middle East.

President Clinton and Prime Minister Barak have reached a broad new understanding that significantly enhances the already unique bilateral relations between the United States and Israel, and raises their friendship and cooperation to an even higher level of strategic partnership. This new partnership is designed to underpin their joint effort to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict and achieve a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The President and the Prime Minister have agreed on the need to assign a top priority to the pursuit of peace in the Middle East. They have also reached a meeting of