

The President's News Conference With President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt *July 1, 1999*

President Clinton. Good afternoon. I'm delighted to welcome President Mubarak back to the White House. He is our longtime partner in building a safer and more peaceful world.

Once again, we now have a real chance to move the peace process forward in the Middle East. Egypt has been central to that process and to all the progress which has been made since the Camp David accords over 20 years ago. Egypt will continue to play a leading role to address the important tasks ahead, building on Oslo, Wye River implementation, reaching a permanent status agreement between Palestinians and Israelis, widening the circle of peace to include agreements with Syria and Lebanon, revitalizing talks between Israel and the Arab world on a host of other important issues from the environment to water resources to refugees to economic development. There are, to be sure, major challenges ahead, but the will of the people for peace is strong.

President Mubarak and I also discussed our common determination to fight terrorism in all its forms.

With regard to the peace process, let me just say one other thing. The best way for the Israelis to have lasting security is a negotiated peace based on mutual respect. That is also the best way for Palestinians to shape their own future on their own land. A negotiated peace is the best way for all the people of the region to realize their aspirations.

Let me just say also that over the last two decades, under President Mubarak's leadership, Egypt has done much to fulfill the aspirations of its people. Economic growth has been strong and sustained; inflation has been held in check; the GDP per person has increased by a factor of five. Egypt is building a modern infrastructure in roads, powerplants, communication systems. Civil society has grown, with work ahead to strengthen it, so that all Egyptians participate in building a better future.

Among the reasons for all this progress, two stand out, both advanced by President

Mubarak's wise leadership. First, Israel's—excuse me—Egypt's deepening peace with Israel that has freed resources and energies of the people. A broader regional peace will be good for prosperity, for progress, and for freedom.

Second, Egypt's economic reform, with expansion of the private sector and free markets. The work of President Mubarak and Vice President Gore on our U.S.–Egypt partnership for growth and development, which they will advance later today, has been crucial. The President is committed to continuing the reforms, and America will continue to help.

Today we discussed a number of other issues. I'd like to mention just one: Kosovo. I am profoundly grateful to Egypt for supporting the stand taken by NATO. Already, more than half the refugees have returned to Kosovo. There is still much work to do, and I thank Egypt for its commitment to provide Egyptian police officers for the civilian police implementation force there.

But we have made a powerful statement together. The future belongs to those who reconcile human differences, not those who exploit them. The future belongs to those who respect human rights, not those who destroy people because of their religion, their race, or their ethnic background.

I hope we can carry some of the momentum from what we have achieved in Kosovo to the Middle East, as we seek there to promote tolerance and a durable peace. As we do, the leadership of President Mubarak, as always, will be critical.

Mr. President, welcome. The floor is yours.

President Mubarak. Thank you. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I was very pleased to see my friend President Clinton and exchange views with him on matters of common concern. As usual, our talks this morning reflected the similarity and the convergence of our views. We value our solid friendship with this great Nation and consider it one of the pillars of our policy.

For decades, we have been working together in order to bring about peace and reconciliation in the Middle East. President Clinton has been playing an active and very effective role. Under his leadership, the American contribution to the cause of peace has reached a new high. His continued involvement is appreciated by those of us who are committed to peace in the region.

In the months ahead, we'll be looking forward to reviving the peace process, which has been stalled for sometime. Unfortunately, valuable time has been wasted. Today there's an opportunity which should not be missed. We shall work closely with the U.S. and coordinate our joint efforts in order to have the parties break the stalemate and restore movement towards peace.

Recent events indicate that most of the region's inhabitants are yearning for peace. We shall be working with President Asad, Prime Minister Barak, and Chairman Arafat, respectively, with a view to creating the necessary atmosphere for resuming the peace process without delay. I'll be meeting with each of them in the near future for this purpose.

Agreements which have been signed on the Palestinian track must be implemented fully and in good faith. Provocative actions, especially settlement activities, should be stopped altogether. This will pave the way for starting final status negotiations. In parallel, negotiations should be resumed on the Syrian track. There are signs that the ground is favorable for that. It would be a mistake to assume that movement should be confined to one track at a time. Progress on each track facilitates movement on the other. The goal is to achieve just, comprehensive, and stable peace in the whole area.

In that context, we were alarmed by the recent Israeli bombing of civilian targets in Lebanon. Such actions only poison the atmosphere in the region. They create an erosion of the people's confidence in the process at the time when we are working hard to encourage the parties to take confidence-building measures. We call upon Israel to apply maximum self-restraint in the crucial months ahead.

As tangible progress is achieved towards peace, we can work for enhancing cooperation and interaction in the region. Egypt was a country that initiated the peace process, and we remain most willing and determined to do all we can to help bridge the gaps and restore confidence between the parties.

We also discussed some other regional and international problems, notably African issues, as well as matters related to cooperation between countries of north and south.

I commended President Clinton on the success of the American role in bringing about peace and security in Kosovo. We hope that the events that took place in that part of the world will convince all those concerned of the necessity to abide by the rule of law and respect the human rights of all peoples. We are aware of the fact that much has to be done to help the refugees and to prevent any recurrence of ethnic, religious, or cultural violent conflicts. On our part, we will contribute to international forces as being assigned the task of maintaining security and order in Kosovo.

As we are about to enter a new era, with the dawning of the new millennium, we must spare no effort in our quest for peace and security. For all nations, global problems that threaten the future of mankind ought to be addressed with vigor and determination. In all these endeavors, we shall cooperate with our partners and friends, among whom the U.S. figures very prominently.

Our bilateral cooperation is expanding every year, and it will continue to grow. This is a goal both of us are committed to. The Clinton administration has done much in this respect, and the President's personal involvement in this process was and continues to be most appreciated by the Egyptian people.

Before I conclude, I would like to send a message of friendship and affection to all Americans. Thank you very much.

President Clinton. Thank you, Mr. President. Now, as is our practice, we will alternate between American and Egyptian journalists.

Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International], you go first.

Q. I'd like to ask both Presidents questions. President Clinton, do you have any new ideas for breaking the stalemate in the Middle East? And with the advent of our own Independence Day, when do you think Lebanon will be free and independent and rid of a longtime occupation?

President Mubarak, do you think the new Israeli Government will make a gesture toward halting the settlements?

President Clinton. Well, let me answer the questions you asked me first. I do think that

the time is right, but I think that before I advance publicly any ideas, I should have a chance to meet with the Prime Minister-elect, Mr. Barak, when he—according to the reports in the press this morning, he has constituted a government on quite a broad base. We should give him more freedom of movement to move aggressively ahead.

Our role, traditionally, has been to try to create the conditions and provide the support necessary for the parties to make peace, and I expect that he will have ideas of his own about that. And so I think that the appropriate thing for me at the moment is to look forward to our meeting, which I hope will occur in the near future, and then after that, after I talk with him, to make whatever statements are called for at that time.

On the question of Lebanon, I think our position on that has always been clear. We believe that a comprehensive peace in the Middle East should include not only an agreement with the Palestinians and an agreement with the Syrians but also an agreement which includes Lebanon and promotes its independence and integrity.

President Mubarak. The question about the settlements you mean? I think the time now is, at least, to improve the atmosphere in the area, to stop building the settlements now until the negotiations start. Then the Palestinians and the Israelis could sit and find out what could be done. This is, I mean, a step for improving the atmosphere between the two groups.

President Clinton. Would you like to call on one of your journalists?

President Mubarak. Yes.

Q. Thank you. The question is for President Clinton. I would like to follow up on Helen's question on the settlements. President Clinton, in 1991, when you first were running for the Presidency, you made a pledge never to criticize Israel publicly. However, your administration expressed its dissatisfaction with Israel's settlements activities by describing them as an obstacle to peace.

However, 23 new settlements have been built since the signing of the Wye River accord. Would you be willing, your administration, would be willing to tell Israel to stop building the settlements, the new Israeli government, to stop building the settlements and undo the wrong that has been done? Thank you.

President Clinton. Well, I think our position on the settlements has been clear. We don't

believe that unilateral actions by any parties, including other interested parties like the United States, which compromise the capacity of the parties to the Oslo accord to reach agreement on final status issues, should be taken. And that includes provocative settlement actions. We have made that clear and unambiguous.

But I do not believe—the Israeli people just had a huge election, a big election, and they voted in very large percentages in ways that almost every commentator has concluded sent the signal that they were ready to pursue the peace process to its conclusion. They now have a Prime Minister-elect who has just completed his government. He is coming to see me in the next few days. I think the less I say, until I see him and until we see if we can embrace a common posture toward making a peace, the better. But my views on the settlement question are well-known and have not changed.

Yes, Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press].

2000 Election and Campaign Finance Reform

Q. Mr. President, Governor Bush has raised a record-breaking \$36 million, more than 10 times his closest rival for the Republican nomination. Do you think he's wrapped up the nomination, or is wrapping it up? And if he decides not to accept Federal campaign money and the spending limits that go with it, as appears increasingly likely, do you think that would be a blow to campaign finance reform?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, I don't want to get into being a political handicapper, so I can't say—how do I know what the Republicans are going to do in their nominating process? I don't have a clue.

But I would make two observations. First of all, the leadership of the Republican Party, in general, are unanimously hostile to campaign finance reform. They don't believe in it. And so, if he did that, he would have that in common with the other leaders, who won't permit us to bring the McCain-Feingold bill to a vote or to try to pursue what I believe are needed changes in the campaign finance laws. So that is one thing that—that's just where they are, and they're very forthright about it. And the American people are going to have to make up their minds whether this is an important issue to them or not.

But I would make one point, generally. I think the most valuable commodity in an election, in a democracy, in which you will cover

the candidates extensively—even more valuable than money—is ideas. And I think the most important thing, therefore, that I have seen in this election so far is that Vice President Gore is, nearly as I can determine, the only candidate of either party who has yet actually told the American people what he would do if he got elected.

And I think that if you look at the 1998 elections, for example, it's a good example that, in a democracy which has a vigorous media publicizing what people are doing and saying, money may be important, but ideas are even more important.

World Summit on Terrorism/Middle East Peace Process

Q. My first question is for President Mubarak. You've been suggesting for some time the preparation of a world summit on terrorism. Did you discuss your ideas on this issue with President Clinton? And, Mr. President, do you have a specific plan for dealing with this international threat?

And for you, President Clinton, to carry on with the peace process, how do you plan to work really on the peace process as you approach the next, best and maybe the happiest, 18 months in the Clinton administration? [Laughter]

President Clinton. Well, being at peace would be a good start. [Laughter]

President Mubarak. I've already discussed this issue about international terrorism with the President, as well as I have discussed it with other heads of states, but mainly here with President Clinton I did this issue. I'm saying that in the coming century, the most dangerous element is not the war program of this or that; it's terrorism spreading all over the world.

Sometimes when the terrorism starts, when I start speaking about terrorism sometime, I was told, "Oh, because of some kind of incident, you're speaking about terrorism." Now terrorism is spreading everywhere in the world. It's a very dangerous phenomenon. And a summit, and if it's well prepared before it—I think the whole world will suffer from terrorism. War is much more easier than terrorism. Terrorism, you never know when the attack is going to take place. But war is planned, and you know its limits.

That's why I discussed with the President, and I hope we could reach a summit, and before

the summit there should be very thought-out preparation with a technical group to see what kind of agreement could be reached in the whole world under the U.N.

President Clinton. We discussed this issue quite extensively, and this has been a subject of great concern to me. It's one thing we've shared over the last 6 years. A few years ago, I gave a speech at the United Nations, at the opening session, about terrorism and asked that we focus on it.

We have asked the Congress to provide substantial resources to look into what else we can do to fight terrorism, to deal with the threats of biological and chemical weapons and the prospect that they might get into the hands of terrorists. We have to consider the prospect in the future that, as the President said, the most serious security threats to nations will not be from other nations but from terrorist groups that cross national borders and that may well form presently unprecedented allegiances with other illegal groups, organized crime groups, drug traffickers, weapons profiteers.

And so I think that all the nations of the world that are interested in stability and peace for their people are going to have to have a much higher level of cooperation on these issues. So I'm for doing anything that can be done to increase that.

Now, you asked me about the Middle East peace process. Let me just say again, our role has never been to dictate to either party the terms of the peace. Even though we have many Arab-Americans and many Jewish Americans in this country, we do not live in the Middle East. The people of the Middle East live there, and they have to work out the terms of their own reconciliation.

What we have always tried to do is to keep the parties working together and then to do whatever was necessary to provide the support that the friends of peace need, and if the process seemed in danger of failing, as it did before the Wye River 9½ days and sleepless nights, to do what could be done to keep it alive. But I think that the people of Israel have sent us a loud message that they want the process to be kept alive and they want it to be seen through.

So we're in a period of transition now. Let's let the Prime Minister, the new Prime Minister-elect get his government in place, take office, come to see me, talk to President Mubarak,

and talk to all the other parties and see where we go from there. But those of us who are friends of the peace process in the Middle East should focus on successful resolution of it. And sometimes, the less we say in public, the more likely we are to have a positive impact on the outcome of the negotiations.

Q. On Northern Ireland—

President Clinton. Larry [Larry McQuillan, Reuters]? Yes, I'll take an Irish question. Go ahead.

President's Relationship With the Vice President/Medicare

Q. President Clinton, as you're aware, there have been reports of tension between you and Vice President Gore, and I wondered if you could comment on your relationship. And are you resigned, as the campaign goes on, that inevitably, you're going to be at odds on certain issues and disagree with the Vice President, and for that matter, assuming your wife decides to run for the Senate, perhaps on Medicare and New York issues?

President Clinton. Well, that's a substantive question. I'll be glad to answer that if you want. But let me say, I have been, frankly, bewildered by those reports. Only one person ever asked me about it directly, one of your number, and that was Wolf Blitzer, in an interview I did before I left my European trip at the G-8, and I gave him a very good answer, which was that I thought that the Vice President had done a good job in his announcement. I thought the most important thing he had done is—I'll say again—is to tell the American people what he would do if he got the job and to pose the choice that I think is before them, which is do you want to go beyond—build on and go beyond the successful direction of the last 6½ years, or would you like to turn around and go back and take a different course?

And so I think he's doing fine. I honestly do not know what the source of the stories are, but they are not in my heart or my mind. I want him to get out there, and if he disagrees with the decisions that I make as President during the next year and a half, then of course, he will have to say so. And I will take no offense at that. And if my wife decides to run for Senator from New York, then some of the disagreements that we've had in the past over decisions I've made as President she may be constrained to state publicly because they will be relevant

to the future. And that's the way a democracy works.

You know, members of a political party, whether Democrats or Republicans, belong to the political party because they share a general set of values and a general approach and because they agree on almost all things, not because they agree on all things. It would be a dreary world, indeed, if we all agreed on everything, and I didn't ask Al Gore to become Vice President so that he would agree with me about everything. Nobody with a fine mind and a lot of experience and looking at the world we live in would agree with anyone else with the same qualities on every issue. It just wouldn't happen.

Now, on the merits—let me say, on this Medicare issue, there have been many people—not just in New York with the teaching hospitals, but there are rural hospitals; there are home therapy providers; there are others—who have felt that the budget savings, the cuts in the '97 Balanced Budget Act, were too severe and made it difficult for them to maintain quality of care. One such group are the teaching hospitals. There are a lot of them in New York who take care of a lot of poor people, but there are a lot of them in Massachusetts, a lot of them in California, and there is at least one in every State in the country.

When we put out our Medicare plan, we, therefore, did not continue all of the cost savings in the '97 Balanced Budget Act beyond the period when they run out. We actually left some of them off to try to alleviate that pressure. The second thing we did was to create a fund, a quality fund, of about \$7.5 billion, which the Congress can use to debate and allocate to alleviate present problems.

So I would encourage the Senators from New York, or anyone else who's concerned about this, to bring those concerns, bring the facts to the table, get it out in the open, then embrace the idea of Medicare reform, pass that fund, and then allocate it as it should be allocated. Because I do think that's a legitimate issue.

Iraq/Kosovo/Middle East Peace Process

Q. For President Mubarak, have you discussed the issue of Iraq and how close or distant American and Egyptian positions are? For President Clinton, Mr. President, I'd like to congratulate you on your success and resolve on Kosovo. And from your statement, you referred as one

of the criteria for success, the return of refugees; will you work—the return of refugees, Kosovars, to their homes. Will you use the same criteria in the Middle East, that the Palestinian refugees and displaced will come back to their homes? Thank you.

President Clinton. That's really good. [Laughter] That's really good. [Laughter]

President Mubarak. Well—

President Clinton. You called on him. [Laughter]

President Mubarak. I didn't know what was the question. [Laughter]

Really, for the first part of the question, about Iraq, really, our position didn't change at all. We are looking forward, how to help the people of Iraq under any circumstances. I have discussed this with the President, and I think that the resolution in the U.N., and I think maybe some improvement in it in the near future, may lead to helping the people of Iraq for medicine, food, and other things. And I hope that something can conclude in that direction—discussed this with the President.

President Clinton. Let me say, our position on Iraq is that we favor the proposal before the United Nations, advanced by the British and the Dutch. It would provide for more money to Iraq to help the people there, with their human needs. But it would maintain a vigorous arms control regime, because we do not believe that Saddam Hussein should be permitted to develop again weapons of mass destruction.

And I would remind everyone that he has actually used weapons of mass destruction. He has used chemical weapons on the Iranians. He has used them on his own people, on the Kurds that live in Iraq.

So I think that we have a balanced position. But I have never wanted the Iraqi people to suffer because of their leader. And I think we supported a relaxation of the way the funds flow there so that more can go to benefit the people. But I do not believe we should give up on an attempt, an insistence, indeed, that the United Nations, in return for this, maintain an arms control regime.

Now, on the refugee question, let me say one brief question about Kosovo because I do appreciate the interest in Kosovo in Egypt and in other countries of the region. About half the refugees have gone home. They're dying to go home. And one of the reasons that NATO was determined to act is we knew, if we acted quick-

ly enough, that the refugees could go home and most of them would wish to go home.

Even in Bosnia, where the war went on from—the conflict—from 1991 until 1995, there were many people who had established other lives in other places and did not want to go home. There are still a lot of refugees who have not gone home in Bosnia.

So I'm delighted that the Kosovars are pouring in. The truth is that we've actually tried to slow it down a little bit, because we're worried about the landmines and other explosives which might be there, and we want it to be safe for them, and because we're trying to get organized to help everybody rebuild their homes and the basic infrastructure of life so that once they do go home, they can actually live and do well.

Now, that brings you back to the refugee question you asked in the Middle East. I think that the important thing is if we have the right kind of a peace agreement. That's why I say—no one can accuse me of dodging Middle East questions. I've been up to my ears and eyeballs in this peace process since the day I took office. But if you just look at it as a practical matter—the agreement that is made in the end—whether refugees go home depends in part on how long they've been away and whether they wish to go home. It will also depend on what the nature of the settlement is, how much land will the Palestinians have, where will it be, how does it correspond to where people lived before.

And I would like it if the Palestinian people felt free and more free to live wherever they like, wherever they want to live. I would also like it very much if we could help those countries which have borne a heavy burden, particularly Jordan where a majority of the population is now Palestinian, to build a better life for the people who are there, because they have a lot of very serious economic challenges. They have a fine new King who is an able person, and we're trying to help, and we want others to help. But I think it will depend upon the refugees themselves, and it will depend upon the shape of the final agreement.

Ask the Irish question if you want.

Northern Ireland Peace Process

Q. Thank you, sir. Several questions on Northern Ireland. What is the latest—[laughter]—sorry.

President Clinton. They're learning from you now. [Laughter]

Q. What is the latest update you can give us about your activities? Do you plan to make an emergency trip over there? Do you blame either side for the impasse? And what constructive suggestions can you convey to us at this juncture?

President Clinton. Well, I have been—for the last couple of days, particularly, we've been in virtually constant contact with the parties there. And I spent a lot of time on it yesterday and late, late last night and this morning early. They are in negotiations as we speak. The mood seems to be reasonably positive, and they are exploring some new ideas. I offered my suggestions for a possible resolution of the sticking points, with the benefit of all the folks on our national security team who have been working on that.

And I'll say this, it is a very difficult problem for the parties, but it will be very hard for the world to understand if this breaks off, since everyone has agreed to the fundamental elements of the Good Friday agreement. Both sides agree that they have to comply with every bit of it. There was an election where the Irish people voted for it. Then there was an election where the Irish people voted for leaders under it.

So if you have a situation where you've had two elections ratifying a peace agreement and you have all the leaders saying that we all have to comply with every element of it and it falls apart over sequencing, I think that it would be—to call it a tragedy would be a gross understatement. But it is a very difficult thing—it would take 30 minutes to go through the whole litany of why. But they are working now. They are exploring some new ideas, and they do seem determined to work it through to a positive conclusion.

Would you like to take one more?

Middle East Peace Process/Iraq

Q. Thank you. President Clinton, you talked about the 9½ days at the Wye Plantation. We know you tried; God knows you tried, but you failed, sir. [Laughter] What makes you think that—

President Clinton. I got an agreement. It wasn't my job to implement it. It has not been fully implemented. The agreement, itself, was a success.

Q. That's correct, sir, but your officials—[laughter]—

President Clinton. That's all right. They tell me I've failed every day. It's quite all right. [Laughter] You just save them the trouble today. Go ahead.

Q. Your officials used to speak about CBM, confidence-building measures. The Palestinians did their part, even Netanyahu thanked Arafat at one stage. But let's say you failed in convincing the Israelis to reciprocate and do the same. What makes you feel that this time around you would be more successful, sir?

My question to President Mubarak: Sir, how does Egypt view any external interference in Iraqi internal affairs from whatever source it comes? Thank you.

President Mubarak. I've failed also this time. [Laughter]

President Clinton. Yes, they zinged you this time.

Let me say, I think, with regard to Wye, obviously, I think its conditions should be honored, because it's like any agreement between two parties; unless both parties agree that the agreement should be modified, then it should be honored.

I believe that historians, when they look back on this period, will conclude that the principal difficulty that Mr. Netanyahu had was the nature of his coalition, and because it was small enough—his majority was so small and it included people who were so hostile to the peace process, that no matter what he tried to do, they could always threaten to bring him down.

Now, the reason I think it will be different now is, number one, Prime Minister-elect Barak was a much more open and heartfelt supporter of the Oslo process. He has—you remember, I think his first public event after his election was to visit the gravesite of our friend Prime Minister Rabin. But number two, he got a big vote from the people of Israel with peace being the major issue. And number three, he has constituted a government—apparently, from the morning press—with quite a large voting majority in the Knesset, obviously geared toward the peace process, because the parties have deep differences, in his coalition, over domestic policies unrelated to the peace process.

So for those reasons, I think the chances of success are now greater. And therefore, I think that all of us should try to restrain our comments about specifics until we talk to the Prime

Minister-elect and we can form a common strategy.

President Mubarak. Concerning the interference in the internal affairs of Iraq, you know our principle from the beginning; we never interfere in the internal affairs of Iraq. If there is any change in the Government of Iraq, it should come from internally, not from outside. This is our principle which has been adopted all our life with any country in the world.

Press Secretary Joe Lockhart. Thank you.

President Clinton. One more, go ahead.

Q. On Russia?

President Clinton. One more.

Q. What if I say I'm going to leave? [*Laughter*]

President Clinton. I'll give you a question. [*Laughter*]

Bill Bradley

Q. Mr. President, when you were asked about George W. Bush and the Republicans a few moments ago, you deferred, pleading ignorance. Perhaps I could ask you about the Democrats. When you said that Al Gore is the only one in the race on either side of the party who has been talking about ideas, clearly that represents a dig not merely at the Republican candidates but also former Senator Bill Bradley as well. So let me ask you about his candidacy, sir, if I may.

Number one, do you believe that he's as qualified as is the Vice President to be President of the United States? And number two, how do you explain, in your own mind, when you heard the figures yesterday showing that the Vice President raised less money than he'd hope for and Bill Bradley appears to have raised more?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, I'm not going to talk about their fundraising because I don't think I should be a political handicapper. But anyone who understands Senator Bradley's career and life story would not be particularly surprised by this. I certainly wasn't. And I don't think it's accurate to say the Vice President has raised less money than he hoped for.

On the other question, it wasn't a dig at Senator Bradley. He has said, himself, that he has not laid out his case for being President and said that he wants to wait until the fall to do it. That's what he said. I'm not digging him. I have nothing bad to say about him. That's a fact.

But I, personally, have always believed that you should begin by saying why you want the job, because you're asking people to hire you to do things. And I think the Vice President deserves a lot of credit for doing that. That's my view. But you can't read that as a dig at Senator Bradley because he, himself, said, "In the fall, I will tell you what it is I intend to do." That's his position.

Q. And do you think he's as qualified as the Vice President, sir?

President Clinton. I think the question—the American people will have to decide who's qualified and who's not. There is nobody in the race who is running or who could run who has had as much experience in as many different ways. He's had both legislative experience and executive experience. Besides that, he's been a journalist, the Vice President. You've got to think that counts for something. [*Laughter*] So he's been a journalist; he's been in the executive branch; he's been in the legislative branch. He has vast experience in foreign policy, in arms control issues, and vast experience in domestic policy. And maybe even more important than experience, the ideas that he's advanced have made America a better place. So if results counts and experience counts, then he has quite a good resume.

And I don't have to make comparative judgments about the other candidates to say that. No one has anything like that level of experience, with that level of positive impact on the people of our country. Those are just, I think, indisputable facts.

Q. How about one more?

President Clinton. You want to ask one more Egyptian? Equal time.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. I have a question for President Mubarak and one for President Clinton. Sir, at this moment, Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak is forming his government in Israel. What should be, with so little time before the next American elections, which are just around the corner, what would be——

President Clinton. Seventeen months? [*Laughter*]

Q. What would be perhaps the one thing or one message you would direct towards Mr. Barak as a step that should be taken as soon as possible to revive the peace process?

And President Clinton, your comment on President Mubarak's statement?

President Mubarak. Is the question directed to me?

Q. Yes, first, Your Excellency.

President Mubarak. I think I have already mentioned that, in the comments I started with, there should be some steps to make that feel much far better and to start the peace process. Eighteen months is quite a lot; we could achieve in one year so many things. The peace process was already started years and years ago. The Palestinians have signed some agreements. If Mr. Barak—and I'm sure that he's going to do it—starts implementing the Wye agreement, for example makes some steps for the settlements, I think the process will move. And we hope that we could finish or reach a final status in one year. One year and a half is quite a lot of time for negotiations.

President Clinton. I agree with that. It doesn't have anything to do with the time left I have on my term. My advice would be—let me go back to 1993 when I became President. Our biggest problem was the domestic economy was not doing well, and we had a \$290 billion deficit, and there was no easy way to close it. And we presented an economic plan to the Congress that passed by only one vote in both Houses. It was very controversial; it was very difficult, I think in that sense—politically, internally—was perhaps more controversial than making—than in Israel going forward with the peace process maybe now, given the vote in the last election.

I think it's better, if you know you've got to do something without which you cannot succeed in serving your people in the long run, it's better to do it sooner rather than later, generally. That is generally true. And if it is going to be difficult and there are tough consequences, it's better to take them early rather than later. That is just a general rule. Because otherwise, if you don't do it, you may never get around to doing it, but it won't get any better. It will just get worse and worse and worse.

So it's better to just take a deep breath and go on and do what you think has to be done. That's what I believe.

Press Secretary Lockhart. Thank you.

President Clinton. First—next question, I'll give you—next time we come, I'll give you the first one, after we do the roll. I've got to go. Thank you.

President Mubarak. Thank you very much.

President Clinton. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's 177th news conference began at 1:47 p.m. in Presidential Hall (formerly Room 450) in the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, the President referred to Gov. George W. Bush of Texas; CNN senior White House correspondent Wolf Blitzer; President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; King Abdullah II of Jordan; outgoing Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak of Israel; and former Senator Bill Bradley. President Mubarak referred to President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority.

Remarks on the Charters of Freedom Project July 1, 1999

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. As you might imagine, this is a very special day for Hillary and for me, in a signal honor for us to have the chance to serve at this moment. I want to thank John Carlin for his faithful stewardship of these great documents; thank my friend Mike Armstrong for his generosity and for calling on others in the business community to help in this endeavor; thank Secretary Riley and NASA and the Department of Com-

merce for working with the National Archives in designing and developing the new encasement that will house our charters. I thank the Center for Civic Education for their efforts to teach our children the importance of history.

I'd like to thank these young people who are here who read—first they helped us recite the Pledge of Allegiance, and then they read from our founding documents. And I thought that young man did a remarkable job introducing