

and let them ask questions and talk to them and be sized up.

I think it is a great exercise. And I've enjoyed watching it unfold for the first time in three elections where I'm not involved. But it's really been quite wonderful.

Q. Who's going to win? [Laughter]

The President. They'll decide that tonight.

Q. Did you talk to the Vice President? Did you talk to the Vice President?

The President. I haven't talked to him in the last 48 hours. But I talk to him, you know, frequently. I haven't talked to him in the last 48 hours, but I've talked to others associated

with the campaign. They're all up there working hard. That's all you can do up there. Nobody knows how the people of New Hampshire are going to vote. You've just got to go up there and work your heart out and hope it comes out.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:44 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams; and Ulster Unionist Party leader David Trimble. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Videotaped Address to the People of Puerto Rico on Efforts To Resolve the Impasse Over Armed Forces Training on Vieques Island February 1, 2000

My fellow citizens, last April there was a tragic accident at the Navy range on Vieques. I deeply regret the loss to the family of David Sanes and the suffering of others injured on that day.

That accident focused attention on the long-standing concerns of the island about training operations there. It led to a strong view in the Commonwealth that the Navy should end its training on Vieques. I understand why many people feel that way.

At the same time, as Commander in Chief, I must do all I can to ensure that our service men and women get the very best training possible. I know you understand that. Many Puerto Ricans have served with real distinction in our Armed Forces. You have never turned your back on your duty to share in the defense of our country.

For more than 50 years, Vieques has been a central part of our training for the Atlantic Fleet. The reason this is such a difficult issue is because right now there are no alternative sites that provide the same combined training opportunities.

For the past 9 months, we've been working closely with Governor Rosselló and Resident Commissioner Romero-Barceló to find a solution that meets our training needs and addresses fairly the concerns of the people of Vieques. Today I'm announcing a course of action that will give

the people of Vieques themselves the right to determine the future of the island, while at the same time assuring that our training needs are met.

Between later this year and early 2002, the people of Vieques will vote. In that vote, the people of Vieques will be asked to choose between two alternatives. If they choose the first alternative, the Navy will cease all training on Vieques and leave the island by May 1, 2003. If they choose the other alternative, training will continue on Vieques on terms that will be presented in detail at least 3 months before the vote.

I believe this is the best way to resolve the impasse over Vieques because it gives the people most affected by this decision, the people who actually live on the island, the right to determine for themselves which course of action we should take. In the meantime, until that vote is held, we're taking several other steps to ensure that our service men and women get the training they need, while addressing the needs of Vieques.

First, during the period leading up to the vote, I am ordering the training done on Vieques will be limited to nonexplosive ordnance, meaning there will be no live fire. I am also directing the Navy and Marine Corps to cut in half the amount of time they will spend training. In 1998 our troops trained for

182 days on Vieques; this year they will be authorized for 90 days.

Second, to address the problems caused by past training, we will implement measures to meet the health, safety, environmental, and economic concerns of the people of Vieques. Measures we will implement include positioning Navy ships to reduce noise; development of a new ferry pier and terminal; creating a new commercial fishing area; temporary compensation for fishermen; expanding and improving roads; a bioluminescent bay preservation program; a job training program for young people; providing land to extend the airport runway; and a public health service study.

Third, I will also ask Congress to begin transferring title to land on the western quarter of the island to Puerto Rico.

In the event that the residents of Vieques vote to continue training on the island, in recognition of the burden such training places on the community, we will increase the investment we make to meet infrastructure and development needs. In the event that they vote for an end to training, we will dispose of the land through the normal Federal process.

To make this solution work, I need your help. I understand the deeply held views people have on this issue. I understand that for many residents the accident exacerbated old wounds about the effect the training was having on your quality of life. They reflect a distrust that, unfortunately, has been building for decades.

As a Defense Department panel found, we have not always been good neighbors on Vieques. But I believe this plan will help resolve the impasse over Vieques in the fairest possible way, because it gives the people most affected by the decision the ability to choose for themselves what the future of their island will be.

I hope I can count on the cooperation of all the people of Puerto Rico to implement the measure I have outlined, to allow the training of our troops to continue in a responsible and much more limited manner during this period, while addressing the long-time concerns of the residents of La Isla Nena.

I want to thank Governor Rosselló for his unceasing effort to work out a resolution to this difficult impasse. Puerto Ricans and the people of Vieques have contributed greatly to our Nation's security. I am very grateful for that. And I hope all of us can work together with our Congress and with the government and Governor of Puerto Rico to implement this plan.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The address was videotaped at approximately 6:15 p.m. on January 31 in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. The transcript was embargoed for release until 5 p.m. on February 1. In his remarks, the President referred to Gov. Pedro Rosselló and Resident Commissioner Carlos A. Romero-Barceló of Puerto Rico. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this address.

Statement on the Crash of Alaska Airlines Flight 261 *February 1, 2000*

In times of tragedy, the American people pull together as one and offer their prayers and solace to those in need. Today our Nation prays for the men and women who were aboard Alaska Airlines flight 261 and for their families and friends.

Since last evening, the United States Coast Guard has been on the scene engaged in search and rescue operations. The National Transportation Safety Board's Go Team arrives this morning, and a joint command center is being established at the Port Hueneme Naval Center.

Underlying all these efforts is a strong and heroic determination to save lives and to find out exactly what went wrong, so that lives can be saved in the future. Throughout this difficult day and in the days and weeks to come, we will keep the passengers and crew of flight 261 in our thoughts, and let us hope that God's mercy will shine on them and their families.