

President Vladimir Putin of Russia; and American businessman Edmond Pope, detained and convicted of espionage in Russia. A tape was not avail-

able for verification of the content of this exchange.

Statement on Russian President Vladimir Putin's Decision To Pardon Edmond Pope *December 9, 2000*

I welcome President Putin's statement of his intent to pardon and release Edmond Pope. It will be a great relief to all Americans when

Mr. Pope is finally freed and reunited with his family. We want to see him home and safe as soon as possible.

Remarks at "Christmas in Washington" *December 10, 2000*

Thank you very much. First, I would like to thank my good friend Gerry Levin, George and Michael Stevens. Thank you, Sarah Michelle Gellar. I thank the Corrs for what they said about the work we've tried to do for peace in Ireland.

Thank you, Billy Gilman. I think you've got a future. [*Laughter*] Thank you, Brian McKnight, Jessica Simpson, Marc Anthony, and my old friend Chuck Berry.

Our family looks forward to this "Christmas in Washington" every year. But tonight, as many have noted, it's more special than ever to us, because it's our last one here. It also is the first Christmas of the new millennium.

Tonight I am grateful that we can celebrate in an America blessed with unprecedented peace and prosperity, a nation that, as we see when we look at all of these young people who sang for us tonight, is growing increasingly more diverse, and yet, at least if the young are our guide, increasingly more united as one community.

So this is a time for us to be grateful for our good fortune and to rededicate ourselves to the lessons of love and reconciliation taught by a child born in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. As people all around the world gather this season to decorate trees and to light menorahs, we should remember the true meaning of the holidays, the spirit of giving. A gift was given

to us, and we should in turn give—to bring a little light into every child's life, to give a little love and laughter and hope to those who don't have it.

That's really what Christmas is all about and what this celebration, and the work of the Children's National Medical Center, has been about. They've been at it for 130 years. In healing children, they remind us that every one of our children is a miracle.

As we rejoice in their lives, let's also take time tonight, when we look at the Navy Glee Club, to remember our men and women in uniform and all those around the world working for peace who will not be home this Christmas.

Finally, let me just thank all of you and the American people for giving Hillary, Chelsea, and me this incredible opportunity to share this joyous season and seven previous ones with you in the White House.

Thank you. God bless you. Merry Christmas.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:27 p.m. at the National Building Museum. In his remarks, he referred to Gerald M. Levin, chairman and chief executive officer, Time Warner, Inc.; George Stevens, Jr., executive producer, and Michael Stevens, producer, "Christmas in Washington;" actress Sarah Michelle Gellar, master of ceremonies; and musicians the Corrs, Billy Gilman, Brian

McKnight, Jessica Simpson, Marc Anthony, and Chuck Berry. "Christmas in Washington" was videotaped for broadcast at 8 p.m. on December 17.

Interview With Forrest Sawyer for the Discovery Channel December 6, 2000

Mr. Sawyer. Good evening, Mr. President.

The President. Good evening.

Mr. Sawyer. Thank you for talking to us.

The President. Glad to do it.

Mars Exploration

Mr. Sawyer. Let us talk about Mars. It is much in the news right now, some new discoveries on Mars that suggest there is at least a real possibility that this was once, some good long time ago, a land of lakes. That puts it on the radar screen.

The President. Yes. All along, our people have thought there was some chance, based on other research that had been done, that there might have been some kind of life on Mars, at least for the last couple of years we've had some evidence of it.

Now, these new pictures that we've seen indicate that there might have been water there, quite near the surface, and much more recently than had previously been thought. So I think it's important that we continue our exploration, that we continue to take photographs, and that we keep working until we can set a vehicle down and get some things off the surface of Mars and bring it back home so we can take a look at it.

We had a couple of difficult missions there, but we learned some things from them. NASA was very forthright, and they came up with a new plan, and I think we should keep going at it.

Mr. Sawyer. The question is how you should keep going at it. As you mentioned, there had been a couple of losses, and that's been a hard public relations blow to get by. This new information at least raises what's going on in Mars, to the public's attention, a little higher. Do you continue more aggressively than you had before?

The President. Well, I think the NASA people will be the best judge of that, but they are and they should be committed to Mars exploration. They should continue to do more, I think, with the photographs. We should get as

much information as we can from observation, in the greatest detail we can. And I think they should keep working on trying to get a vehicle to land on Mars that will be able to not only give us more immediate photographs but actually, physically get materials off the surface of Mars that we could then return to Earth. I think they should keep working on it.

Priorities for the Space Program

Mr. Sawyer. Look out a little further with me. You recall President Kennedy saying there should be a concerted effort to put a man on the Moon. Should there be a concerted effort to go that much greater distance and put humans—men and/or women—on Mars?

The President. I think it's just a question of when, not if. I think that now that we are committed to space exploration in a continuing way, now that we've got the space station up and the people there are working, and they're there 3 years ahead of the original schedule—I'm very proud of them—I think that what we should do from now on is to figure out how much money we can devote to this and what our most immediate priorities are.

The space station, I think, is going to prove to be an immense benefit to the American people and, indeed, to all the people of the world, because of the research that will go on there and what we'll find out. And so I think it's just a question of kind of sorting out the priorities, and the people who will come here after me in the White House and the space people and, of course, the interested Members of Congress will have to make those judgments.

Possibility of Life in Space

Mr. Sawyer. Do you think there is life out there?

The President. I don't know. But I think the—what we know from Mars is that the conditions of life may well have—for some sort of biological life—may well have obtained on Mars at some point in the past.