

Statement on the Death of Dawn Steel

December 22, 1997

Hillary and I were saddened to learn of the death of Dawn Steel. She was a pioneer in the film industry, blazing a trail for a new generation of young women, and setting a standard of

achievement for all. Our lives have been enriched by her talent, and she will be missed. Our thoughts and prayers are with her husband, her daughter, and with all her family.

Remarks at a Hanukkah Celebration and an Exchange With Reporters

December 23, 1997

The President. Hello, everybody. Before we light the menorah, I'd like to make a brief statement. First of all, I'd like to welcome the Jewish Primary Day School students here and their principal, Susan Koss. I'd like to thank Mayrim Baram, who is not here, who lives in Israel, who did this magnificent, magnificent menorah for us. It's very, very beautiful. Dr. Amatzia Baram, his son, and Mrs. Baram are in the audience today, and through them, I'd like to thank his father for this really beautiful menorah. I will treasure it always. And it's been up in the White House during the holiday season, so many people have come in here and have seen it.

This evening I join the rest of the country in wishing you a happy Hanukkah. Tonight Jews across America and the world are celebrating the victory of the Maccabees over their oppressors and the Miracle of Lights that marked their triumph. This joyous holiday also reminds us of our precious right to religious freedom, a right we all hold dear as Americans, a right that is the very first one written into our Bill of Rights. Like the Maccabees, we must vigilantly oppose religious prejudice whenever we find it.

I know that your teachers and rabbis have instilled in you the values of compassion, justice, and tolerance. And if you have courage to follow those values, you can be the Maccabees of our time.

This year we will also celebrate the 50th anniversary of the creation of the modern State of Israel, the land where the miracle of Hanukkah occurred such a long time ago. But our prayers to God this holiday will be for peace in the land of Israel, for the tranquility of its people,

for a bright and hopeful future for all the children of the Middle East, children that are very much like you.

Now as Danny Lew lights the menorah, I wish you all once again a very happy Hanukkah. Danny.

[At this point, Danny Lew lit the menorah.]

Health Care Task Force Civil Case

Q. Mr. President, can we—if we have time for just one question. A Federal judge the other day had some very tough words for Ira Magaziner. But so far there's been no public comment from the White House. It seems like if that accusation was unfair, Mr. Magaziner is entitled to a public defense. And if it was fair, the public is entitled to an explanation of why somebody on the White House staff might mislead a judge.

The President. First of all, it's a fair question, but because of what we've been doing the last few days and because of what we've been—the holiday season, I honestly haven't read the judge's opinion, nor have I asked anyone on the staff for a response to it. So I'd like to ask you to just give me a pass until tomorrow or so. I'll be happy to answer it, but I don't want to give you the wrong answer.

I was a little skeptical when I read the news story, because I believe I know what the facts were, so I was quite skeptical when I read the news story. But I think it's a very fair question; we should answer the question. I just don't think I'm prepared to do it now. And I'll be ready tomorrow. I'll ask someone, and you can ask me tomorrow.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, what about the Middle East peace process? Is it going to take—Hanukkah celebrates—it's a celebration of miracles; what is it going to take to rekindle the Middle East peace process?

The President. Well, I'm actually quite hopeful. I think, first it takes a reaffirmation to the process of peace, which means that there should be a high level of security associated with the process itself. And I think there's general belief that the Palestinian Authority has redoubled its efforts on security. The Israeli Cabinet has seemed to adopt the position that said that they would be for another withdrawal consistent with the Oslo accords. There appears to be other discussion in Israel over the questions, the long-delayed questions about the airport and the port and the safe transit from the West Bank to Gaza.

So I'm actually quite hopeful that in the coming year we'll have progress not only between the Israelis and Palestinians but also between Israel and Syria. I think the openness is there, and I think that many people are sobered by the consequences of the absence of a viable peace process. So maybe it's just the holiday season, but I'm feeling pretty upbeat about it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:25 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Mayrim Baram, an Israeli who lost a son in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, his surviving son, Amatzia Baram, and his daughter-in-law, Bonnie Baram Belkin; Susan Koss, director, and Danny Lew, student, Jewish Primary Day School of the Adas Israel Synagogue; and U.S. District Judge Royce C. Lamberth.

Statement on the Death of Sebastian Arcos Bergnes
December 23, 1997

Hillary and I were saddened to learn of the death of Sebastian Arcos Bergnes, a courageous and tireless activist for human rights, democracy, and freedom in Cuba.

Mr. Arcos dedicated his life to peaceful change in his beloved homeland. He was a man of honor and dignity who commanded enormous respect around the world for the sacrifices he made and the good work he did for the people

of Cuba. As one of the founders of the human rights movement in Cuba, he blazed a trail which has inspired many others who cherish individual liberties. He was an example to us all and will be missed.

Our thoughts and prayers are with his son and daughter and the rest of the family who will carry on the effort to secure human rights in Cuba.

Statement on the Oklahoma City Bombing Trials
December 23, 1997

Two years ago, I told the families of the 168 innocent men, women, and children who perished in the Murrah Federal Building that they had lost too much, but they had not lost America, and that we would stand by them for as long as it took.

The dedicated team of prosecutors and investigators who brought these cases to a successful conclusion have helped to fulfill that promise. The Nation is deeply in their debt.

I know that no verdict in a court of law can ease the loss of a loved one. But the successful prosecution of Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols should offer a measure of comfort that all Americans stand with the families of Oklahoma City.