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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Fallston, Maryland)

For Immediate Release

December 4, 1985

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
IN DISCUSSION WITH FALLSTON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Fallston High School Band Room
Fallston, Maryland

10:50 A.M. EST

Q Mr. President --

THE PRESIDENT: Hello there.

Q The class of students here at Fallston High School have several questions prepared for you today.

THE PRESIDENT: All right.

Q Would you speak this morning on the Geneva summit? We'd like to --

THE PRESIDENT: How come I'm nervous? (Laughter.)

We'll all be seated.

It's good to see you and I'll try my best with the questions that you have and -- have you decided who is first?

Q -- are very strong components of your respective political systems. It is apparent that the two of you formed a friendship, but there was also a sense of mistrust between you. Do you really believe we can achieve world peace with the Soviets?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I have to believe that we can, and I'm optimistic and hopeful of it. In spite of the differences between our systems, I think one thing on our side is the Soviet people have -- are virtually obsessed with the desire for peace because of the suffering they underwent in World War II. The Soviets lost 20 million people in that war. And that was not just military -- that was the civilians that died as the attacks went into their cities like at Stalingrad and all. So there is a great desire for peace there.

At the same time there is a mistrust and we have to at least recognize that. I got the impression that they really -- many of them do believe that we have hostile intentions toward them. And I tried to disabuse them of that thought by pointing out that when World War II ended ours was the only country that our industry hadn't been bombed to rubble in the war, our military was virtually intact. We had 12.5 million people -- men and women in uniform -- and we were the only ones with the nuclear weapon. We were the only ones who had the bomb. At that point we could have literally dictated to the world if we had chosen to do so. And we didn't. We set out to help the other nations in the war, including our enemies. And I pointed this out to him -- that we had some evidence on our side that we didn't have hostile intentions. And I can only hope that it registered.

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THE PRESIDENT: This is one of the things that I think could come out of these meetings that we're having, because now that they, too, have been victims of terrorism, I think that they've got a very definite reason for wanting to. We do cooperate with all the other nations in the world -- or most of them. We've managed to establish a contact, exchange information, and so forth, on terrorism. And I hope the same thing can happen with them.

You, and then I'll go that way.

Q Mr. President, I've been wondering what text you're putting in place to stop a \$2 billion failure like the Sargeant York program from happening again.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, you -- it isn't a case of putting things in place. You don't want those things to happen, and yet, you must realize that in that field, as in so many others, you are going to research and your research indicates the potential of some weapons system, and you go forward and now and then you're going to find that defensive abilities have been developing all the time, too. And suddenly, you find that something that looked good when you first planned it and ordered it has now been overtaken by a superior defense. And I don't know any answer to that. Just try our best and see that those kind of things don't occur.

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And -- I think that, but also, our agreement -- you know, for -- ever since 1946, our country has been proposing controls of weapons, and more recent years, the controls of nuclear weapons. And we've had negotiators -- Vienna, in Stockholm, and in Geneva -- on this subject. For the first time, really, now, the Soviets have actually suggested a figure to which, if we can work out the conditions, they would be willing to reduce their numbers.

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And so, I think this was an accomplishment also.

Q Mr. President, I was wondering why was Fallston High School chosen out of thousands of schools across the country to be honored by your visit?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, you're a pretty outstanding high school. And you're also here, within range of the Capitol. I'd like to do this in more areas of the United States. But we just thought that this was a pretty good place to start telling your generation about our dreams of people exchanges and with the hope that we have that it will be your generation that will start these exchanges where we can get better acquainted.

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But we -- there is trade, particularly in our agricultural field. And we want to keep those doors as open as we can.

Q Thank you.

Q Mr. President, on the issue of arms reduction, do you believe that there will ever be any significant agreement settled between the U.S. and the Soviet Union because of the unwillingness on either side to deplete nuclear weapons out of each other's major stockpiles?

THE PRESIDENT: I think -- no, I think, as I said before, that we made a pretty good start here on this matter of the nuclear weapons. I think that both sides recognize that as long as we keep building these mountains of armaments higher in an effort to stay even with each other -- and here I have to say on our behalf, we are the ones who are trying to catch up. They are the ones who went out ahead and have placed their military emphasis on offensive weapons, where we have thought of them as a deterrent to war and why we're seeking a defensive shield right now that would render nuclear missiles, if not obsolete, at least more harmless as a threat.

But I believe that, for the first time, they recognize, with some of their problems, that the arms race has helped create those problems for them. They have dwelt so much on military buildup that they've had to deny their people many of the things that you and I think are just everyday in our ability to go down to the store and buy them. Well, they don't have such privileges.

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Q How do you and Mr. Gorbachev propose to organize a risk-reduction center to prevent accidental nuclear war?

THE PRESIDENT: Now wait a minute. I had a little problem there.

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THE PRESIDENT: How do we propose to -- You've got to forgive me. I've got a little problem.

Q To organize a risk-reduction center.

THE PRESIDENT: The risk -- oh. Well, this is a thing that we are trying to put together here and have proposed and they seem very willing to go along with this. And this is to have, again, meeting places where our own military can meet with each other so that there wouldn't be danger of one or the other of us thinking that a hostile action had been taken. This is more information on maneuvers, war games -- practice war games and so forth, and we would have these centers where we could immediately communicate with each other at a military level and know what's going on.

So we are going to go forward with those and it's kind of a new experiment so I can't tell you exactly how they'll work out.

Q As you've said, the Soviet people believe that Americans are looking for war. What can we as Americans do to help change the --

THE PRESIDENT: I think it comes from our understanding of the basic Marxian principle, because Karl Marx had always said that socialism could never succeed until the whole world was a one-world communist state. And so this has caused us to view with alarm, as I say, their outright offensive -- buildup of offensive weapons. Now I think this would be one of the things and the type of deeds that we would talk about if they do not still follow that Marxian principle. If they are not aimed at expansionism and conquering or taking over the whole world then they can help prove that by joining in arms reductions to show that they have no hostile intent. But this is one of the reasons for the basic suspicion between us.

Q I have a question in starting a different issue. Due to the success of the crew of the Atlantis experiments in the area of space construction, what are your plans concerning a sky lab or space station?

THE PRESIDENT: We believe that the newest frontier in the world is space, and we believe that the shuttle experiments so far have shown us so many literally miracles that can be performed in the weightlessness of outer space that instead of these just shuttle flights going up with experiments, that we should see if we cannot put together out there a place where then the shuttles could carry workers and workers in space could develop -- let's take in the fields of medicines alone, we have an incurable ailment of diabetes. We have found in the experiments in the shuttle out there that a cell

which, in order to have a cure for diabetes, must be able to be divided and split. We can't do it here on earth as we could do it up there in the weightlessness of space. So there are other medicines and things of that kind that from the experiments already conducted -- we believe we need a place now not just to experiment, but to actually manufacture.

And so this kind of a space station -- I don't particularly like that name -- space station. You know, I know some people are toying with things like calling it a "universal space camp." "Station," again, has a kind of a hard, possibly military sound to it and that isn't what it's for.

Q First I'd like to thank you for mentioning the cheerleaders' competition at Rising Sun today. I'm a cheerleader. (Laughter.) My question to you, Mr. President, is simply, how do you feel now that the effects of any decision you make concerning the Strategic Defense Initiative or more generally the nuclear arms race literally affects the lives of billions of people all around the world?

THE PRESIDENT: It is something anyone in this position has to live with. It isn't easy, and I have come to understand very much why Abraham Lincoln once said that if he -- well, he said that he had been driven to his knees many times because there was no place else to go. And he said if he didn't believe that he could call on someone who was stronger and wiser than all others, he couldn't meet the responsibilities of his position for a single day. And all you can do is to try to the best of your ability and with all the input and knowledge you get, then hope that the decisions you make are based on what is morally right. And that's all you can do.

As I say, I've come to understand very much what Mr. Lincoln meant. He's supposed to be around the White House, you know, now and then. (Laughter.)

Q I would like to know, what will the United States' position be when the SALT II agreement expires late in December?

THE PRESIDENT: We haven't made a decision on that yet. We have compiled a report right

now that shows the Soviet Union has committed 23 violations of the SALT II Agreement, and we have to decide whether we can have complete agreement on both sides that we're going to abide by it, even though it has never been ratified. Or we're going to have to conduct ourselves on the basis of what they are doing also. There's no way that we could be so one-sided as to be destroying missiles and things of that kind, stay within a limit that they are violating.

This is one of the things -- when I talk about an arms buildup and where the race started -- when SALT I was agreed upon -- from the time of SALT I, the Soviet Union has added 6,000 warheads -- nuclear warheads. And since SALT II, 3,850 of those have been added. And this is what I mean about agreements that were aimed at trying to limit the increase instead of flatly saying, "Let's get rid of some of these things." So, we have a decision yet to make on that. And it's going to -- in part -- depend on our negotiations with them about the present violations of that agreement.

Q Mr. President, I was wondering do you feel that a nation other than the United States or the Soviet Union could possibly start a nuclear war?

THE PRESIDENT: That another nation other than the Soviet Union or the United States could start a nuclear war? Well, we know that there are a few other nations -- some allies of ours that have some nuclear weapons. We suspect that here and there there have been efforts -- whether they've succeeded yet in creating a missile or not, we don't know, but other countries -- and some of them the countries that are in the Third World and where there is a lot of hostility and instability -- wars can start by accident. If you take World War I, it's been called by everyone who ever knew in history the war that no one wanted. But it started when a terrorist, a radical, threw a bomb at a leader of a European country -- assassinated the leader of the European country. And out of that came World War I, which finally included even the United States.

Wars can start accidentally. Wars can spread across borders -- regional wars, such as the one in Nicaragua. And this is why this was one of our subjects also for negotiation. We want to help in any way we can to persuade the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops, that they've had there fighting for six years and bring them home. And then let the people of Afghanistan, within their country, settle peacefully what kind of a government they want. The present government of Afghanistan was installed there by the Soviet Union, so that's why they're in defending that government.

Q Mr. President, I've heard the first impressions are very important --

THE PRESIDENT: A little louder, there, for Old Dad.

Q I feel that first impressions are very important. What were your first impressions of General Secretary Gorbachev?

THE PRESIDENT: My first impressions of him? A very intelligent man. And, while at the same time I recognize that he, heart and soul, believed in his -- in the system that he's grown up in -- he's young enough that this is all he's ever known. He grew up from even earlier than you in this system. He has faith in it and believes in it. But, at the same time, having dealt with other leaders -- the Soviet Union who can kind of pound the table and get quite excited about things -- no. Our discussions, I must say, would be like we're having. He listened well, and I listened to him. And it was -- we were affable in this. And it was a case of disagreeing on particular issues, but no hostility, no enmity.

And I had to believe that he believed some of the propaganda that's been going on for 70 years about us, that he -- his -- he's never been to the United States -- and that his impression of us -- He was ready to believe, for example, that our Strategic

Defense Initiative that we're trying to find a defense against nuclear weapons, that, really, out of that research we might develop something that would be a weapon in space for attacking them. And I countered that by telling him that if our research yielded a defensive weapon, we would sit down with them and with our allies -- with all the world -- and share it, and say, "Look, why don't we all have this, and then none of us have to have nuclear missiles." And I hope that that had some impact on him.

But, no, I think that -- I have no illusions about him suddenly turning soft about their system or not. He totally believes in -- that that's the system that the people should have. And I said to him, "Look, you have your system. We don't like it. And you don't like ours. But we can each have our own systems and still get along together."

END

11:15 A.M. EST

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THE PRESIDENT: We believe that the newest frontier in the world is space, and we believe that the shuttle experiments so far have shown us so many literally miracles that can be performed in the weightlessness of outer space that instead of these just shuttle flights going up with experiments, that we should see if we cannot put together out there a place where then the shuttles could carry workers and workers in space could develop -- let's take in the fields of medicines alone, we have an incurable ailment of diabetes. We have found in the experiments in the shuttle out there that a cell

which, in order to have a cure for diabetes, must be able to be divided and split. We can't do it here on earth as we could do it up there in the weightlessness of space. So there are other medicines and things of that kind that from the experiments already conducted -- we believe we need a place now not just to experiment, but to actually manufacture.

And so this kind of a space station -- I don't particularly like that name -- space station. You know, I know some people are toying with things like calling it a "universal space camp." "Station," again, has a kind of a hard, possibly military sound to it and that isn't what it's for.

Q First I'd like to thank you for mentioning the cheerleaders' competition at Rising Sun today. I'm a cheerleader. (Laughter.) My question to you, Mr. President, is simply, how do you feel now that the effects of any decision you make concerning the Strategic Defense Initiative or more generally the nuclear arms race literally affects the lives of billions of people all around the world?

THE PRESIDENT: It is something anyone in this position has to live with. It isn't easy, and I have come to understand very much why Abraham Lincoln once said that if he -- well, he said that he had been driven to his knees many times because there was no place else to go. And he said if he didn't believe that he could call on someone who was stronger and wiser than all others, he couldn't meet the responsibilities of his position for a single day. And all you can do is to try to the best of your ability and with all the input and knowledge you get, then hope that the decisions you make are based on what is morally right. And that's all you can do.

As I say, I've come to understand very much what Mr. Lincoln meant. He's supposed to be around the White House, you know, now and then. (Laughter.)

Q I would like to know, what will the United States' position be when the SALT II agreement expires late in December?

THE PRESIDENT: We haven't made a decision on that yet. We have compiled a report right

now that shows the Soviet Union has committed 23 violations of the SALT II Agreement, and we have to decide whether we can have complete agreement on both sides that we're going to abide by it, even though it has never been ratified. Or we're going to have to conduct ourselves on the basis of what they are doing also. There's no way that we could be so one-sided as to be destroying missiles and things of that kind, stay within a limit that they are violating.

This is one of the things -- when I talk about an arms buildup and where the race started -- when SALT I was agreed upon -- from the time of SALT I, the Soviet Union has added 6,000 warheads -- nuclear warheads. And since SALT II, 3,850 of those have been added. And this is what I mean about agreements that were aimed at trying to limit the increase instead of flatly saying, "Let's get rid of some of these things." So, we have a decision yet to make on that. And it's going to -- in part -- depend on our negotiations with them about the present violations of that agreement.

Q Mr. President, I was wondering do you feel that a nation other than the United States or the Soviet Union could possibly start a nuclear war?

THE PRESIDENT: That another nation other than the Soviet Union or the United States could start a nuclear war? Well, we know that there are a few other nations -- some allies of ours that have some nuclear weapons. We suspect that here and there there have been efforts -- whether they've succeeded yet in creating a missile or not, we don't know, but other countries -- and some of them the countries that are in the Third World and where there is a lot of hostility and instability -- wars can start by accident. If you take World War I, it's been called by everyone who ever knew in history the war that no one wanted. But it started when a terrorist, a radical, threw a bomb at a leader of a European country -- assassinated the leader of the European country. And out of that came World War I, which finally included even the United States.

Wars can start accidentally. Wars can spread across borders -- regional wars, such as the one in Nicaragua. And this is why this was one of our subjects also for negotiation. We want to help in any way we can to persuade the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops, that they've had there fighting for six years and bring them home. And then let the people of Afghanistan, within their country, settle peacefully what kind of a government they want. The present government of Afghanistan was installed there by the Soviet Union, so that's why they're in defending that government.

Q Mr. President, I've heard the first impressions are very important --

THE PRESIDENT: A little louder, there, for Old Dad.

Q I feel that first impressions are very important. What were your first impressions of General Secretary Gorbachev?

THE PRESIDENT: My first impressions of him? A very intelligent man. And, while at the same time I recognize that he, heart and soul, believed in his -- in the system that he's grown up in -- he's young enough that this is all he's ever known. He grew up from even earlier than you in this system. He has faith in it and believes in it. But, at the same time, having dealt with other leaders -- the Soviet Union who can kind of pound the table and get quite excited about things -- no. Our discussions, I must say, would be like we're having. He listened well, and I listened to him. And it was -- we were affable in this. And it was a case of disagreeing on particular issues, but no hostility, no enmity.

And I had to believe that he believed some of the propaganda that's been going on for 70 years about us, that he -- his -- he's never been to the United States -- and that his impression of us -- He was ready to believe, for example, that our Strategic

Defense Initiative that we're trying to find a defense against nuclear weapons, that, really, out of that research we might develop something that would be a weapon in space for attacking them. And I countered that by telling him that if our research yielded a defensive weapon, we would sit down with them and with our allies -- with all the world -- and share it, and say, "Look, why don't we all have this, and then none of us have to have nuclear missiles." And I hope that that had some impact on him.

But, no, I think that -- I have no illusions about him suddenly turning soft about their system or not. He totally believes in -- that that's the system that the people should have. And I said to him, "Look, you have your system. We don't like it. And you don't like ours. But we can each have our own systems and still get along together."

END

11:15 A.M. EST