

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT
ELMENDORF AIR FORCE BASE

12:15 P.M. (AST)

General Hill, Secretary Kissinger, Lieutenant Governor Mayor Sullivan, Mayor Roderick, General Gamble, General Marks:

I guess I am what you Alaskans call a "chee cha coe", a newcomer. Well, I am no newcomer to the knowledge that this great land within another great land, the United States, is a great and wonderful partner of all of the rest of us in this great land.

There is something very special, I have observed -- very special -- about the pioneer spirit that is not only alive but is growing in Alaska. Alaska gives all of us an inspiring farewell boost as Secretary Kissinger and I proceed to enhance the quest for peace and improve international relations.

I would like to commend Alaska for its determination to be a leading State in providing the United States with self-sufficiency in energy. I commend you that Alaska is proceeding with careful and efficient planning to produce more oil in harmony with appropriate environmental concerns. This is important for you and for the rest of us.

Personally, I am very proud to stop and visit with you for a few minutes today. It has been my good fortune to be in Alaska on several occasions in the past in traveling through a good part of this great State.

Then, as now, it brought back the memories in the Congress of the United States where on more than one occasion I was called upon to vote on whether Alaska should be given statehood. You would not be familiar with the record, but I am. I was proud then, and I am proud now, to have always voted for Alaska statehood.

I deeply regret the very severe storm and flood damage that ravaged Nome and the Seward Peninsula area in recent days. It is a sad and tragic story.

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At the Governor's request, a major disaster declaration was issued by me in Washington so that the area could and will receive immediate assistance. That is the least we can do, and with that assistance goes our prayers for the very best under those difficult circumstances.

Quick action in this emergency must be taken to aid those affected and afflicted -- the Eskimos and others -- and we wish them the best in their hour of need.

The State of Alaska is geographically separated from our other States. It took us seven hours and 20 minutes, I think, to fly from Washington, D.C. But let me say with emphasis, Alaska is very close to our hearts, to all of those in the lower 48.

The hearty people of Alaska, together with the alert Armed Forces stationed in this very strategic area, are a source of great pride to all of us -- all of us Americans.

Let me reassure you today that this Administration is energetically seeking world peace but remains aware that the best insurance for peace is the maintenance of a first class military force ready for action for the defense of America and freedom everywhere.

We have strong, ably led, well-equipped, dedicated, superb individuals in the Armed Forces of the United States, and I, as Commander-in-Chief, am very, very proud of the job that has been done and will be done in the defense of our country and freedom throughout the world.

Let me assure you that there will be no lessening in this Administration of my support for a strong Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and the Coast Guard. All of us have an interest in the defense of Alaska. Your defense is our defense.

Just a few weeks ago the Secretary of Defense visited Alaska and I am deeply interested in his recommendations. And upon my return from this mission abroad, I will discuss with the Secretary his recommendations for the strengthening of our defense forces in all of the United States, including Alaska.

Let me reassure Alaska on another subject -- it relates to the depletion of our fishery resources by other nations. You can be sure that this matter is high on the agenda on the list of priorities for diplomacy as far as I am concerned.

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As I said at the beginning, I am departing today as a "chee cha coe", a newcomer, but I hope to return next week on my way home as a sourdough.

I thank all of you for taking the time from a beautiful Sunday and coming to give me and my party a send-off welcome. I am deeply appreciative and very, very grateful. I can assure you that I and the others will do our best on an important and constructive mission.

I thank you all for the send-off. May God bless our efforts as we go forth from here.

Thank you very much.

END

(12:31 P.M. AST)