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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT
AND
CARL PLATOU

THE EAST GARDEN

11:27 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: It is a great privilege and pleasure for me to welcome the Royal Highnesses to the White House and to the East Garden, and we are deeply grateful as a Nation for their thoughtfulness and generous gift on behalf of our Bicentennial.

I think it is very typical of the feelings that the Norwegian people have. It is my understanding that this idea for this gift for this purpose came from a health center that is in Norway, and to give it to a health center for the purpose of helping the handicapped is a wonderful expression of not only generosity, but thoughtfulness from those who are healthy to those who are less fortunate.

So, we are extremely grateful, Your Royal Highness, for this kindness on behalf of the American people at the time of the celebration of our 200th anniversary.

It has been a pleasure to chat with you and to know that we have some mutual interests. They do it much better than I. They are much younger--when we are talking about skiing--but Hubert is a good skier. (Laughter)

I do want you to know that the American people, 215 million strong, Your Royal Highness, are deeply grateful for this gift and will you express to His Majesty, King Olav, and to the Prime Minister and to the people of Norway our gratitude and appreciation for what will be a most worthwhile and very, very effective gift for those who are handicapped in America.

Thank you very, very much.

MORE

MR. PLATOU: Mr. President, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

The Crown Prince and I consider it a great honor and indeed a privilege to be here in the White House to represent our country at this historic time when even a Viking is circling Mars in preparation for a touchdown. (Laughter)

Now, my countrymen have for centuries had an urge to explore, and in the era of the Vikings 1,000 years ago their adventurous spirit led them to this country, where they discovered what they named Vinland. Some centuries later, though, your great Republic was founded by other explorers and settlers from the Old World.

A great part of the Norwegian people emigrated to this country and helped to build her greatness on the principles which were made the political cornerstones of our Government 200 years ago -- freedom and human dignity.

Throughout the years since then, the contacts between our two countries have been numerous and the benefit has been mutual. We fought together in World War II and the help which the American people gave my country after victory was achieved remains a vital element in our relationship.

I personally had the privilege as a young boy to stay in your country during the war years and went to school here in Washington, D.C. For the last quarter of a century, we have been allies in NATO.

As you celebrate your Bicentennial, it is, therefore, only natural that we should offer a token of our esteem. To this end, the Norwegian Government and Parliament have decided to make a contribution of \$200,000 to the establishment of a health sports center in the State of Minnesota called the Vinland National Center.

In Norway we have gained valuable experience in developing sports and other recreational facilities aimed at bringing increased enjoyment of life, strengthened health and improved possibilities for physical training and medical rehabilitation for handicapped people to further integration into our society.

Some of the encouraging results achieved at the Norwegian Health Sports Center at Beitlestern were demonstrated to the American public through the arrangement in the winters of 1975 and 1976 of cross-country skiing races for blind and other handicapped people in the State of Colorado and the State of Minnesota, respectively.

MORE

It gives me great pleasure to present an address, Mr. President, describing our Bicentennial gift signed by the Prime Minister of Norway on behalf of the Norwegian people.

THE PRESIDENT: Your Royal Highness, I say again, the American people are deeply grateful and this is a fine contribution for our Bicentennial. But, may I say the Norwegian people over the years have made a great contribution to not only Minnesota but to the 50 States of our country.

It is my understanding that some 800,000 Norwegians over a period of time came to the United States and their contribution as American citizens have been invaluable as we have made headway and progress in this country.

So, I thank you not only for their contribution, but for this thoughtful gift, and the American people are deeply appreciative.

END (AT 11:35 A.M. EDT)