

Albanian side have shown courage and leadership. The agreement by the Serb side to substantial autonomy for Kosovo also represents an important, but incomplete, recognition that only by allowing the people in Kosovo control over their day-to-day lives can there be a lasting peace.

The Kosovar negotiators have asked for time to consult with their constituents before formally signing the peace plan. I believe that the Kosovar Albanian people will strongly support what their negotiators have done, because the agreement represents the opportunity for a better life after years of repression and fear. The Serbs should be prepared to return to the negotiations on March 15 with a commitment to

sign the full agreement—including the indispensable provisions on the withdrawal of most Serb security forces from Kosovo and the deployment of a NATO-led peace implementation force.

In the meantime, it is imperative that all sides avoid provocations that would imperil this progress. NATO Secretary General Javier Solana retains the authority given to him by the NATO Council to act if necessary.

I want to thank Secretary Albright and all her negotiators for their tireless efforts that led to hopeful developments, and commend British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine, the cochairmen of Rambouillet, for their leadership.

Remarks on the “Insure Kids Now” Initiative

February 23, 1999

The President. Thank you very much. Let me begin by saying how very much I appreciate all of you here who are a part of this historic day. I thank my longtime friend Governor Carper for his generous remarks and his great stories. He almost broke my concentration, though. I’ll spend the rest of the day trying to remember what my first answer was to whether there was a noise when a tree falls in the forest. [Laughter]

I thank you, Governor Leavitt, for your outstanding leadership and your concern for our children. I’d like to, again, acknowledge the presence of Governor Angus King of Maine and Mary Herman; Governor and Mrs. Knowles of Alaska; Governor Vilsack of Iowa; Mrs. Rosselló from Puerto Rico; Mrs. Underwood from West Virginia. And I thank all the members of the Governors’ conference who are here.

There’s one private citizen here I would like to acknowledge, and that is Bud Chiles, the son of the late Governor Lawton Chiles of Florida, who has been very active in this endeavor, as well. I thank him.

We have a distinguished bipartisan delegation from the United States Congress here: Senator Hatch, here supporting his Governor from Utah; Senator Specter from Pennsylvania; Congresswoman Diana DeGette from Colorado; Congresswoman Anna Eshoo from northern Cali-

fornia; Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee from Texas; Congressman Bart Stupak from the upper peninsula of Michigan. He is the only person in the room who thinks it is warm outside today. [Laughter]

I’d also like to thank the Smith family for coming, and I hope the boys weren’t too embarrassed to stand up. They look very healthy to me, and that’s reassuring. [Laughter] And I’d like to thank these beautiful children for being here—over here, and their families. When you think about what this is all about, just kind of look over there.

I want to thank the National Governors’ Association. I want to thank Secretary Shalala, who is indefatigable. If I ask her to do something, sooner or later I will come to regret it—[laughter]—because she will do it, and I will wind up doing whatever it is I’m supposed to do to make sure it gets done. She is not only the longest serving person in her position ever, she is also the most energetic, and that is no disrespect to her predecessors. I have never known anybody with as much energy as she has, with the possible exception of her mother, who I understand is still winning tennis tournaments in her eighties. [Laughter]

I’d also like to thank the First Lady, without whom I probably would not know very much about these issues. When I met her in 1971,

she was already obsessed with them. She took an extra year when we were in law school to work at the Yale Child Studies Center and the Yale University Hospital so that she could put her legal learning to work to help the health of our children.

When you talked about our home State having 38,000 people signed up, we have less than one percent of the population. That means if everybody was doing that well, we'd already have 4 million kids signed up for this program, and that is in no small measure due to a group called the Arkansas Advocates for Families and Children, which Hillary founded over 20 years ago now. So I thank her for all that she has done.

When the Congress passed the bipartisan balanced budget in 1997, it was a truly historic act, and most of the publicity that surrounded that endeavor came from the sheer relief the country felt that finally we had done something about the deficit. But it's important to point out that there were a lot of very important provisions within that very large law, but none more important than the \$24 billion allocated to provide health insurance. We estimated at that time—to up to 5 million kids, which we estimated at that time were about half of the uninsured children in our country.

It is inconceivable that a country with as much economic prosperity as we now enjoy, and the best health care system in the world, would leave 10 million—now nearly 11 million—children without health insurance. We know many of them are eligible for Medicaid, but their parents don't know it. We know there are a lot of hard-working families now whose incomes are too high to qualify for Medicaid, but they apply, or qualify, for the Children's Health Insurance Programs now that the States are operating around the country. But they don't know it.

Now, we knew when we signed this law into effect—I'll never forget Donna Shalala telling us that, you know, we can pass this law, but we've already got—at that time—over 3 million kids eligible for Medicaid who don't sign up and don't know it. So we knew then that, to make the tree heard in the forest, to extend the Governor's metaphor, to make the health insurance program more than an empty promise, we'd have to somehow get the word out to parents.

Last week—you've heard all these stories—last week I had an incredible experience at a

health care forum in New Hampshire. I met a woman named Christine Monteiro, who has run a small business with her husband, a solar energy business, for 11 years. And like all small businesses, she had her ups and her downs. But the hardest times came when her kids needed health care and they couldn't afford the health insurance.

She found out about it the way we don't want people to have to find out about it, even though better that she found out than not. She had to take repeated visits to the doctor, with her child. And finally, a health care worker at the medical clinic told her that she might be eligible for New Hampshire's CHIP program. She applied immediately and found that her daughter's visits were all covered, and she saved up to \$1,000 a month for a very serious illness for her child.

Christine and her family were lucky. Not everybody, even who would come into a medical facility, might know. This should not be a matter of luck. We're here because all of us, in our various roles in life, recognize that we have an obligation to use every possible tool, every possible response, to reach more of the hard-working families like those you've heard about and seen today.

Government has a role to play. Secretary Shalala talked about it. Our national campaign is called "Insure Kids Now." We've already heard about the remarkable National Governors' Association effort, working with our administration and Bell Atlantic. The national toll-free number—I'm going to say it again—I like to say toll-free numbers, you know. There's some chance it'll get on television if I say it—[laughter]—one of the few things I can think of to say that is subject to absolutely no controversy. [Laughter] I could stand up here for 10 minutes and just repeat the toll-free number. I'll say it again: 1-877-KIDS-NOW. Not hard to remember and important not to forget.

As you've heard, because of the work of the NGA, you can get State-specific information. Because when the Congress set this program up in the Balanced Budget Act, and we strongly supported this, we realized we couldn't possibly design a program in Washington that would cover all the different circumstances that existed from State to State. So all these programs were set up and then approved State by State. So this is very, very important that we get this information out to people in the form in which

it is most usable. And again, I want to thank Governors Carper and Leavitt for their leadership in this critical past year, and all the other Governors for their support.

Secretary Shalala told you about some of the things we're doing at the Federal level to reach more uninsured children. But let's be frank: To reach them all—to reach them all—everyone who can touch the life of a child or the child's parents needs to be involved in this effort.

Today we're here to announce an unprecedented commitment, from media to business, from the health care industry to grassroots organizations, all over our Nation, to inform families of these new health insurance options. We begin with an all-out media campaign to reach as many families as possible. NBC is unveiling a new primetime PSA to raise awareness about Children's Health Insurance Programs. Epatha Merkeson, one of the stars of NBC's "Law and Order," who appears in the PSA, is here with us today. Thank you very much for being here.

ABC and Viacom/Paramount will soon begin airing a PSA the First Lady made to inform families about the "Insure Kids Now" toll-free number. They have representatives here. I thank them. The National Association of Broadcasters will make the First Lady's PSA available to all of its member stations. Black Entertainment Television and Turner Broadcasting will also run the ad.

Before I go forward, I'd like to just unveil the two PSA's here for the first time. Let's take a look at them.

[At this point, the public service announcements for the "Insure Kids Now" initiative were shown.]

The President. I'd also like to thank the representatives from Univision here. They will run a PSA in Spanish, made by HHS.

And we're not stopping there: Major corporations, from Kmart and Ralph's Grocery to

McDonald's to General Motors; from the American Medical Response to Blue Cross/Blue Shield Association to Pfizer, all of whom are represented here, will help make sure that the "Insure Kids Now" toll-free number appears on grocery bags and restaurant placemats, on school buses and in doctors' offices, even on the toothbrushes that dental hygienists give their patients. And with the help of organizations like America's Promise, the United Way, and a host of community-based groups, families will hear about health insurance from the people they trust the most, from teachers and principals, doctors and nurses, rabbis and ministers.

Ultimately, of course, parents must take responsibility for their children's health. Our message must be: What you don't know about your children's health insurance options can hurt them. It's up to you to find out if your child is eligible for this health insurance. So call the toll-free number: 1-887-KIDS-NOW.

Working together, we can reach those kids. Look at those kids there. There's over 10 million of them. They deserve to be as healthy as we feel today. And we can do it for them.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 3 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Thomas R. Carper of Delaware, chairman, and Gov. Michael O. Leavitt, vice chairman, National Governors' Association; Gov. Angus S. King, Jr., of Maine and his wife, Mary J. Herman; Gov. Tony Knowles of Alaska and his wife, Susan; Gov. Tom Vilsack of Iowa; Irma Margarita (Maga) Rosselló, wife of Gov. Pedro Rosselló of Puerto Rico; Hovah Underwood, wife of Gov. Cecil H. Underwood of West Virginia; and actress S. Epatha Merkeson. The transcript made available by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

Radio Remarks on the "Insure Kids Now" Initiative February 23, 1999

As every parent knows, nothing is more important than keeping our children healthy. So I have very good news for working parents. Even if you can't afford private health insurance,

it's now possible to get help with doctor bills, medicines, and hospital care for your children. If your children are uninsured, please call 1-877-KIDS-NOW—1-877-KIDS-NOW. With a