

## Statement on House Action on the Republican Budget Proposal *April 14, 1999*

The budget passed by House Republicans falls short of what the American people need for meeting the challenges of the 21st century. It fails to lock away the surplus to strengthen Social Security and Medicare, and it fails to meet many of America's other critical needs for the future. The fiscal discipline of the past 6 years has given us a historic opportunity to meet our

Nation's most serious long-term challenges. I will continue to work with the Congress to use the surplus to pay down our national debt, to strengthen Social Security and Medicare, to encourage our people to save for the future, and to meet our defense, education, and other long-term needs.

## Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the American Society of Newspaper Editors in San Francisco, California *April 15, 1999*

*The President.* Thank you very much, Mr. Seaton, distinguished officers, and members of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the crisis in Kosovo, why we're there, what our objectives are, how this fits in with our larger vision of the future.

Since I'm here I can't help noting that one of the truly striking aspects of this moment is the stark contrast it illuminates between a free society with a free press, and a closed society where the press is used to manipulate people by suppressing or distorting the truth.

In Belgrade today, independent journalists are being persecuted. This week, one brave editor was murdered in cold blood. Meanwhile, the Government-run press has constructed an alternative reality for the Serbian people in which the atrocities their soldiers are committing in Kosovo simply don't exist. Under those conditions, decent people can remain in denial, supporting policies that lead them to political and economic ruin.

Thank goodness our press and free press throughout the world have tried to get at and get out the truth, to ensure that words like refugees, displacement, ethnic cleansing don't become stale and lifeless but remain causes for action.

The tragedy in Kosovo is the result of a meticulously planned and long-premeditated attack on an entire people simply on the basis of their ethnicity and religion, an attack grounded in a

philosophy that teaches people to dearly love a piece of land while utterly dismissing the humanity of those who occupy it.

That is what Mr. Milosevic has been doing ever since Yugoslavia started breaking up in 1989. For a decade, he has been trying to build a Greater Serbia by using military force to rearrange the ethnic character of the nations which emerged from Yugoslavia. That is what he did for years in Croatia and, horribly, in Bosnia—what he is doing in Kosovo now.

Last year he drove hundreds of thousands of people from their homes into the frigid mountains and let them back only after NATO threatened to use force. He is now determined to crush all resistance to his rule even if it means turning Kosovo into a lifeless wasteland.

As these difficult days proceed, it is important to remember that we have no quarrel with the Serbian people. They were our allies in World War II; they have often been our allies. In a sense, they are victims of this tragedy, too. And we must understand the anguish of Serbian-Americans who, like Albanian-Americans, are worried about their loved ones back home. Americans should not blame Serbs or look down on Serbian-Americans because we disagree with the Milosevic government. We must not let his ethnic cleansing provoke us to ethnic bias.

We and our 18 NATO Allies are in Kosovo today because we want to stop the slaughter and the ethnic cleansing; because we want to build a stable, united, prosperous Europe that

includes the Balkans and its neighbors; and because we don't want the 21st century to be dominated by the dark marriage of modern weapons and ancient ethnic, racial, and religious hatred. We cannot simply watch as hundreds of thousands of people are brutalized, murdered, raped, forced from their homes, their family histories erased, all in the name of ethnic pride and purity.

NATO was pivotal to ending the killing and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. We can do so again, and this time we have responded more quickly.

Were we to stand aside, the atrocities in Kosovo would go on and on. Neighboring democracies, as you see, would be overwhelmed by permanent refugees and demoralized by the failure of democracy's alliance. The Kosovar Albanians would become a people without a homeland, a burden to host countries, a magnet for radical ideologies, a breeding ground for unending warfare in the Balkans. NATO would be discredited, yes, because it made promises not kept but, more important, because its values and vision of Europe would be profoundly damaged. Ultimately, the conflict in Kosovo would spread anyway, and we would have to act anyway.

Now, when we decided to launch the air campaign, after Mr. Milosevic rejected peace, we believed there was at least a possibility that our readiness to act would deter him from moving forward as it had in the past. But we also understood clearly that with 40,000 troops and over 250 tanks massed in and around Kosovo he might intensify his repression and go on with his planned attack, as I made clear in my address to the Nation the night the airstrikes began.

There was only one possibility that we and our NATO Allies were not willing to entertain, that the international community would look the other way in the face of this brutality.

Now the NATO air campaign has been underway for 3 weeks, often interrupted or limited by bad weather. This is, however, a good time to assess what has been accomplished and where we're going.

Mr. Milosevic's strategy has been to complete the ethnic cleansing, then break the unity of NATO by taking the bombs and offering phony concessions. But NATO is more united today than when the operation began. Whether they are Conservatives in Spain, Socialists in France, New Labor in Britain, or Greens in Germany,

the leaders of Europe and the people they represent are determined to maintain and intensify our attacks until Mr. Milosevic's forces leave Kosovo and the refugees return under the protection of an international force or until his military is weakened to the point when he can no longer keep his vise-like grip on Kosovo.

At the beginning of the operation, we focused, properly, on Serbia's highly developed air defenses, to reduce the risks to our pilots. There are still significant air defenses up, and therefore, there is still risk with every mission. But we have degraded the system to the point that now NATO can fly 24 hours a day, not simply at night. We've struck at Serbia's machinery of repression, at the infrastructure that supports it. We've destroyed all of Serbia's refineries, half of its capacity to produce ammunition. We've attacked its bridges and rail lines and communications networks to diminish its ability to supply, reinforce, and control its forces in Kosovo. Increasingly now, we are striking the forces themselves, hitting tanks, artillery, armored personnel carriers, radar missiles, and aircraft.

As the allies have said, all of us, repeatedly, Mr. Milosevic can stop NATO's bombing by meeting these conditions: One, Serbian security forces must leave Kosovo; two, the displaced Kosovars must be able to return; three, there must be an international security force to protect all Kosovars, including the Serb minority there, as they work towards self-government.

If he refuses, our military campaign will continue to destroy as much of his military capability as we can so that each day his capacity for repression will diminish.

Meanwhile, his actions, though absolutely devastating to the civilian population and horribly burdensome to the frontline states of Macedonia and Albania, have not destroyed the armed opposition among Kosovars. Indeed, their numbers and determination are growing. Ultimately, Mr. Milosevic will have to choose, either to cut his mounting losses or lose his ability to maintain his grip on Kosovo.

As for NATO, we are prepared to continue this effort as long as necessary to achieve our objectives. Our timetable will be determined by our goals, not the other way around.

In the meantime, we must do more to aid the refugees. They are pouring out of Kosovo. We must help to preserve their lives and health and their hope of return. This week, NATO approved Operation Allied Harbor, under which

8,000 troops will work with relief agencies in Albania to establish camps, provide logistical support, deliver aid, and ensure security. Thus far, we have contributed in the United States \$150 million to this effort.

Conditions at the borders are beginning to improve. Now we are most concerned about the fate of the refugees, hundreds of thousands of them, trapped inside Kosovo. They are unable to leave but afraid to go home. Mr. Milosevic apparently wants to use them as hostages and human shields, and he's preventing relief groups from getting to them. People of good will all around the world today are trying to find ways to overcome this cruel and cynical manipulation of innocent human beings.

Mr. Milosevic also continues to hold on to the three American servicemen his forces seized in Macedonia. He continues to flout his obligation to allow the Red Cross to visit them. I want to say again as clearly as I can: The United States will hold him personally responsible for their welfare.

Now, the stand we have taken, first in Bosnia, now in Kosovo, against organized ethnic hatred is a moral imperative. But it is also a strategic imperative. And I'd like to talk with you a little about that and ask all of you to ask yourselves how you view the history of the last 50 years and how you imagine the next 50 years unfolding.

The history of the United States, for a very long time, was dominated by a principle of nonintervention in the affairs of other countries, even when we strongly disagreed. Indeed, for most of our history, we have worn the principle of nonintervention as a badge of honor, beginning with George Washington's warning against entangling alliances.

The 20th century changed all that, with two World Wars, the cold war, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Panama, Lebanon, Grenada, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and others. Our steadily increasing involvement with the rest of the world, not for territorial gain but for peace and freedom and security, is a fact of recent history.

During the cold war, it can be argued that on occasion we made a wrong judgment because we tended to see the world solely through the lenses of communism or anti-communism. But no one suggests that we ever sought territorial advantage. No one doubts that when America

did get involved, we were doing what at least we thought was right for humanity.

Now, at the end of the 20th century, we face a great battle between the forces of integration and the forces of disintegration, the forces of globalism versus tribalism, of oppression against empowerment. And the phenomenal explosion of technology, including that of advanced weaponry, might be the servant of either side or both.

The central irony of our time, it seems to me, is this: Most of us have a vision of the 21st century world with the triumph of peace and prosperity and personal freedom; with respect for the integrity of ethnic, racial, and religious minorities within a framework of shared values, shared power, and shared plenty; making common cause against disease and environmental degradation, against terror, organized crime, and weapons of mass destruction.

This grand vision, ironically, is threatened by the oldest demon of human society, our vulnerability to hatred of the other, those who are not like us. In the face of that, we cannot be indifferent at home or abroad. That is why we are in Kosovo.

Kosovo is a very small place on a very large fault line, on the borderlands of Central and Eastern Europe, at the meeting place of the Islamic world and the Western and Orthodox branches of Christianity, where people have settled in a complex patchwork of ethnic and religious groups and where countless wars have been fought over faith, land, and power.

Kosovo is far from unique in its region. It is surrounded by nations with similar challenges of history and diversity. The only difference today is that they—think of them, Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Bosnia—are now at least struggling to realize the vision of multi-ethnic democracy that Mr. Milosevic is struggling to kill.

Much of the former Soviet Union faces a similar challenge, including Ukraine and Moldova, southern Russia, the Caucasus nations of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, the new nations of central Asia. These nations spent most of the last half century under Communist rule. In the years when Western Europe was overcoming its old animosities by integrating its economies and embracing democracy, in the years when Americans began confronting our own legacy of racial hatred through open debate and political activism, these nations saw their

problems frozen in time, kept in place by a rigid system that allowed no talk of change.

They projected to the world a picture of stability, but it was a false picture, a stability imposed by rulers whose answer to ethnic tensions was not to resolve them but to suppress and deny them. When the weight of Communist repression was lifted, these tensions naturally rose to the surface, to be resolved by statesmen or exploited by demagogues.

The potential for ethnic conflict became, perhaps, the greatest threat to what is among our most critical interests: the transition of the former Communist countries toward stability, prosperity, and freedom. We are in Kosovo because we care about saving lives and we care about the character of the multiethnic post-cold-war world.

We don't want young democracies that have made the right choices to be overwhelmed by the flight of refugees and the victories of ethnic hatred. We don't want to see Europe re-fight with tanks and artillery the same battles they fought centuries ago with axes and arrows. And because stability in Europe is important to our own security, we want to build a Europe that is peaceful, undivided, and free, a Europe where young Americans do not have to fight and die again to deal with the consequences of other people's madness and greed.

Who is going to define the future of this part of the world? Who will provide the model for how the people who have emerged from communism resolve their own legitimate problems? Will it be Mr. Milosevic, with his propaganda machine and his paramilitary thugs, who tell people to leave their country, their history, and their land behind, or die? Or will it be a nation like Romania, which is building democracy and respecting the rights of its ethnic minorities, or Hungary, which has accepted that ethnic Hungarians can live beyond its borders with security and freedom, or Macedonia, which is struggling to maintain a tolerant, multiethnic society under the unimaginable pressures of the human and economic costs imposed by Mr. Milosevic's policies?

Now, after our recent experience in Bosnia and Kosovo, it's easy to forget that despite all the violence and turmoil they have experienced, the people of this region have, in fact, found ways to live together through the years. If the nations of the Balkans had truly experienced a thousand years of unceasing ethnic cleansing,

their ethnic makeup wouldn't be anything like what it is. They would be utterly homogeneous, not so diverse. Today, most of those countries are democracies. Most are trying to resolve their problems by force of argument, not force of arms.

We cannot allow the Milosevic vision, rooted as it is in hatred and violence and cynicism, to prevail. But if we truly want a more tolerant, inclusive future for the Balkans and all of south-east Europe, we will have to both oppose his efforts and offer a better vision of the future, one that we are willing to help build.

Now, what does all this mean for the future of Kosovo and the region as a whole, starting from where we are right now? What many Kosovars want is independence. That is certainly understandable. After what they've been through, it's only natural that they should equate sovereignty with survival. But I continue to think it is not the best answer. Kosovo lacks the resources and infrastructure to be viable on its own. Moreover, Yugoslavia's long-suffering neighbors fear that an independent Kosovo would be unstable and that the instability itself would be contagious.

Finally, we must remember the principle we and our allies have been fighting for in the Balkans is the principle of multiethnic, tolerant, inclusive democracy. We have been fighting against the idea that statehood must be based entirely on ethnicity.

Some people think the best way to solve Kosovo's problems, and Serbia's and Bosnia's, is to withdraw their borders and re arrange their people to reflect their ethnic distinctions. Well, first of all, a lot of people who say that haven't looked very closely at the maps. It is a problem of staggering complexity. Once it starts, it would never end. For every grievance resolved, a new one would be created. For every community moved to a new place, another community would, by definition, be displaced.

If we were to choose this course, we would see the continuous fissioning of smaller and smaller ethnically based, inviable states, creating pressures for more war, more ethnic cleansing, more of the politics of repression and revenge. I believe the last thing we need in the Balkans is greater Balkanization.

The real question today is not whether Kosovo will be part of Serbia. The real question is whether Kosovo and Serbia and the other states in the region will be part of the new

Europe. The best solution for Kosovo, for Serbia, for Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, and all the countries of southeast Europe is not the endless re-jiggering of the borders but greater integration into a Europe in which sovereignty matters but in which borders are becoming more and more open and less important in a negative sense. It is to affirm the principle that Mr. Milosevic has done so very much to undermine, that successful modern states make a virtue, not a blood feud, out of ethnic and religious diversity.

That is the solution that Western Europe accepted—not too long ago, really, when you think of it—after Europe had been consumed by two of the bloodiest wars in all of human history, after the Holocaust almost erased an entire people from the face of the Earth.

It is hard to visualize today, hard to remember, when you drive across Belgium and Holland, across the border between France and Germany, that twice in this century millions of people spilled blood fighting over every inch of that land. It is hard to imagine the immediate postwar Europe Winston Churchill described as a rubble heap, a charnel house, a breeding ground of pestilence and hate. But because of the changes which have occurred, it is not unimaginable today that the nations of southeastern Europe will choose integration and peace, just as their Western neighbors have.

To achieve that future, we must follow the example of the World War II generation by standing up to aggression and hate and then by following through with a postconflict strategy for reconstruction and renewal. If we don't want people to remain mired in the miseries of yesterday, we must give them a better tomorrow to dream of and work for.

Even as we fight this conflict, we must look beyond it to what the Balkans, southeastern Europe, indeed, the whole continent of Europe should look like in 10 or 20 years. We should try to do for southeastern Europe what we helped to do for Western Europe after World War II, and for Central Europe after the cold war, to help its people build a region of multi-ethnic democracies, a community that upholds common standards of human rights, a community in which borders are open to people in trade, where nations cooperate to make war unthinkable.

That is why my request to Congress for supplemental funding for our military and humani-

tarian operation in Kosovo will also support emergency assistance to Yugoslavia's neighbors, which do not want their dreams of democracy and integration undermined by a flood of refugees and the fear of violence. That is why we've been working to help the countries of the region consolidate democratic reform and build professional armed forces under civilian control.

We need to intensify these efforts and to work with the European Union and the international financial institutions to mobilize more support for these countries. And we need to condition this help, just as we did with Western Europe 50 years ago, on closer cooperation among the beneficiaries and a new understanding of their sovereignty.

This will take constant, steady American engagement, together with our European allies, old and new. It will demand keeping institutions, including NATO and the European Union, open to new nations who make the right choices. It will take money in the form of investment and aid. It will require a willingness to provide material and moral support to people and leaders across the region who are standing up for multi-ethnic democracy.

Realistically, it will require a democratic transition in Serbia, for the region's democracies will never be safe with a belligerent tyranny in their midst. It will demand from us a recognition that there is no easy way out of the region's troubles, but there is a solution that advances our interests and keeps faith with our values if we are ready to make a long-term commitment.

Of course, all of this will take time and effort. In the meantime, the people of Kosovo should have protection, security, and self-government. That can only be assured by an international security force with NATO at the core.

As in Bosnia, this force should also include members of NATO's Partnership For Peace that represent the whole range of ethnic groups in Europe. This is precisely the kind of mission we envisioned for the Partnership For Peace when it was created 5 years ago, and the kind of mission I very much hope Russia could join as well, just as it did so constructively in Bosnia.

In the long run, our goal for Kosovo should not be independence but interdependence. Our watchword for the region should be integration, not disintegration. The ultimate answer for Kosovo, for Serbia, for Bosnia, Croatia, all the Balkans is not to withdraw behind barriers of

mistrust and insecurity but to join a Europe where borders unite rather than divide, to build a richly textured fabric of civilization that lifts all God's children and resists those who would tear it apart by appealing to the dark recesses of the soul that lead only to dead ends.

The Balkan war that began in Kosovo 10 years ago must end in Kosovo. It should be the last conflict of the 20th century. It should not be the defining conflict of the 21st century.

The United States has the opportunity and the responsibility to make that decision come out right for our children and our grandchildren. We can help to lead to a new day for the people of this long-suffering region, a more peaceful time for Europe, and a better future for the United States.

Thank you very much.

*Edward Seaton.* The President has kindly agreed to take questions. You must be an ASNE member to ask a question. I would invite you to go to the floor mikes, as I see you're doing. Please identify yourself and your newspaper. We'll start over here with Rich Oppel.

*April 14 Attack on Kosovar Albanians*

Q. Mr. President, Rich Oppel, Austin American-Statesman. Would you help us sort out what happened yesterday on the road from Prizren to Kukes? According to press accounts—you had your choices, I guess—NATO aircraft either bombed a convoy that includes refugees or the Serbs attacked the Albanians in response to our bombing.

Did we screw up? Can the prosecution of this war be sustained—can it sustain the support of Americans if the newspapers of this country are publishing front-page stories showing dead civilians? And what word went out from you and Sandy Berger today to the Pentagon and to the NATO High Command about yesterday's events?

*The President.* Well, first of all, what we believe happened is that the pilot thought it was a military convoy and that there were apparently civilians in the convoy who were killed. That is regrettable. It is also inevitable in a conflict of this kind, with planes traveling at high speeds, doing their best to fulfill their mission.

And if the requirement is that nothing like this can ever happen, then we're saying it's okay with us if Mr. Milosevic displaces over a million Kosovars, kills and rapes thousands upon thousands of them. And keep in mind, in Bosnia

there were more than 2 million refugees and a quarter of a million people killed.

You cannot have this kind of conflict without some errors like this occurring. This is not a business of perfection. I ask you to think about the hundreds and hundreds of sorties which have been flown in the last 3 weeks and the small number of civilian casualties. It should be obvious to everybody in the world that we are bending over backwards to hit military targets, to hit security targets, even to hit a lot of targets late at night where the losses in human life will be minimized. These efforts have been made, and they have been remarkably successful.

So, certain regrettable things will happen. We will do our best. The military will evaluate this incident, as it does every other one; so will the NATO command. But I have to tell you, if anyone thinks that this is a reason for changing our mission, then the United States will never be able to bring military power to bear again, because there is no such thing as flying airplanes this fast, dropping weapons this powerful, dealing with an enemy this pervasive who is willing to use people as human shields, and never have this sort of tragic thing happen. It cannot be done.

I believe when the scales are weighed, it will be obvious that this is a result of Mr. Milosevic's policies. If he doesn't want this to happen, he ought to get out of Kosovo, let the Kosovars come home, and let people come in there who can protect them. That is the answer to this.

*Effectiveness of NATO Strategy*

Q. Mr. President, thank you very much for coming to speak to us. I'm Dave Seaton of the Winfield Daily Courier in Kansas. If the people, the hundreds of thousands of people hiding in the hills in Kosovo, the Albanian Kosovars, perish from natural causes or as a result of this slaughter of paramilitary forces, won't NATO's hoped-for victory from bombing be hollow? And won't we have failed to prevent the kind of repeat of the Holocaust that you've said is what we don't want to enter the 21st century with?

*The President.* Well, first of all, I believe that our strategy will prevail. We do have, as I said, a very difficult problem here, to figure out what to do about the refugees within Kosovo. We are working at it. The international relief agencies are working at it. A lot of countries that have some relationship with Serbia are working

at it. And we are doing our best to try to figure out how to resolve it.

I think the answer is, what is the alternative? So far, we still don't have as many refugees and nowhere near as many people dead as we did in Bosnia. And I think it's because we have moved more quickly. I think we have a chance to put this back together without having as much wreckage as we had there. And we are working as hard as we can to do it. It is a difficult situation, but we are working as hard as we can. And we are doing it while keeping this NATO Alliance together.

And keep in mind, that is also very important, I think, that this is not an action by the United States alone. This is not one we engineered or dominated. This is a decision we made as partners with the 18 other NATO Allies, and we are doing our best to deal with it. And I assure you that we're trying to deal with all the contingencies. I do not think it is—including trying to figure out what's the worst thing that can happen and how to avoid it. But we're doing our best to deal with that.

It's not possible to fly helpless cargo planes over and do airdrops to people, for example, if we know there is a better than 50 percent chance they won't get the supplies in the first place and a much better than 50 percent chance that the planes would be shot out of the air, even though they are not warplanes at all. So we're struggling to come to grips with this. But I think we moved very quickly, and we've made a lot of progress in a short time in dealing with the massive refugee problem on the borders in the other countries, and I hope in the next few days we'll have some progress to report on this.

#### *President's Response to Criticism*

Q. Mr. President, Ken Bunting with the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. I haven't listened to any talk radio today, but, I apologize, I do often. And I'm often reminded of your wife's comment about the rightwing conspiracy, the critics who want to get at you for anything and undermine your Presidency and discredit you, personally. But there is a common drumbeat on the airwaves now, and it is that you personally lack the moral authority to be Commander in Chief.

And certainly, I guess there is a powerful inclination to ignore those criticisms. But if you had to address it to an Air Force pilot, who had listened to the same radio shows and per-

haps been persuaded to that point of view, how would you address that?

*The President.* Well, I don't have to address it to the Air Force pilot. I am his Commander in Chief, and they swore an oath to the Constitution, and they have performed admirably. And they don't deserve to hear that.

I just have seen a lot of our Air Force pilots. I just went down to Barksdale Air Force Base in Shreveport, Louisiana. I spent endless amounts—I spent hours talking to the families, the friends, the people that were there, encouraging people to say what they think. One person said something critical. Several hundred said, "We believe in what we're doing. It is the right thing to do. Thank you for doing it. We are proud to do it. This is what we signed on for."

This is a democracy, and people can say whatever they want to say. But I have found that the American people, vast majorities of them, at least, appreciate it when I don't spend my time responding to them, and instead I spend my time working for the American people and trying to do what I think is right. I let other people be their judge about whether they think I should or shouldn't do something. But I have no response, except to get up every day and try to do my job.

And I think that this country is in a better place than it was 6 years and 3 months ago because we have followed that policy, instead of being totally consumed with spending all of our time answering our critics. I'd rather work on what I can control, and the opinion of some of the talk show people is something that's way beyond my control and happily so. [Laughter]

*Mr. Seaton.* We have time for only one more question, and if I could, I'd like to break the line over here.

Q. I really have an important question, if I may.

*Mr. Seaton.* Okay, but if Len Downey would get his question right afterward.

#### *Serb Weapons of Mass Destruction*

Q. Chris Waddle, executive editor of the Aniston Star. Mr. President, we're a center for chemical warfare training and storage in Anniston, Alabama, and Pentagon officials confirm to us the chemical weapons capability of the former Yugoslav forces. How does that availability of weapons of mass destruction among the Serbs impact American and NATO operations in the Kosovo conflict? And what is your

administration's policy of response or retribution in the however unlikely event of enemy use of such weapons of mass destruction against insurgents or refugees or even the NATO Alliance?

*The President.* My response would be swift and overwhelming. And we have, obviously, intelligence about the capabilities of the Serbs in a number of areas militarily, just as we do with other countries. But I think they are quite well aware of the dangers of overly escalating this. And I think that's all I should say about it right now.

*Mr. Seaton.* Mr. President, I'm told we have to—you can take one from Len.

*Q.* I'm the only woman in line, so I'd like—*[laughter]*—

*The President.* I'll take a couple more.

You know what's going on, don't you? The people that help me don't trust you not to write a story that's about something other than Kosovo, and they think the longer I stay up here, the greater my chances of screwing up. *[Laughter]* That's really what's going on here. And it's wonderful when you're not running for anything, you can say just exactly what's on your mind. *[Laughter]*

But—have at it, go ahead. *[Laughter]*

#### *Human Rights in Afghanistan*

*Q.* Okay, great. Thank you. I'm Narda Zacchino with the Los Angeles Times. Knowing your interest in human rights and having had you refer to all God's children, I'd like you to focus some attention for just a moment on some of God's children in Afghanistan. And what I'm speaking about is, this is a country that's under the harsh rule of the Taliban, some of whose leaders we helped finance and arm in their fight against the Soviet Union.

In Afghanistan today, there are 11½ million women and children, women and girls, who are virtually under house arrest. Male doctors are not permitted to treat women and girls, and female doctors are not allowed to practice. Women are kept in their homes and may only leave if they're in the company of a brother, a father, or a husband. Windows of homes where women live are painted black so that no man may, per chance, see them without their burkha. When they go outside, they're totally shrouded. A 70-year-old woman was beaten severely because her ankles showed to a man. A teenage girl was almost stoned to death be-

cause her ankles showed when she was riding her bicycle. Women in this country are not permitted to do anything except stay in their homes, unless they leave in the company of a man.

It's a terribly repressive regime. And a number of people think that we have some obligation to these 11½ million women and girls, because of our relationship—former relationship to these people who are in power. What do you think?

*The President.* Well, I absolutely do, and I think we would even if we hadn't supported the Taliban on "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" principle years ago. I think, independent of that, we do. I think that what has happened to the women and children of Afghanistan is atrocious.

The First Lady and I had an event at the White House to highlight that on Human Rights Day, including having two Afghan women there who talked to the press about what was going on. I met with a group of leaders from the Feminist Majority the other day and talked about how we could do more to bring more to the United States, what other things we could do to put pressure on Taliban and on other states, other countries, to try to help us to change conditions.

And I think it is very, very important to do. I think it is one of the worst examples of systematic human rights abuses in the world today, and a terrible perversion of Islam.

*Mr. Seaton.* We asked Len Downey to raise a question that was of concern to ASNE, so I invite him to do so if he could.

#### *Availability of Information*

*Q.* Len Downey of the Washington Post. Mr. President, a growing number of newspaper editors and broadcast news executives are very concerned about the relatively little reliable information and specific information that has been released so far by the Defense Department about the bombings and the other military activities so far during Operation Allied Force—much less information, for instance, than was provided daily during the Persian Gulf war or Operation Desert Fox. In view of the need, Mr. President, that you discussed today to have the American people support this military action, will you instruct the Defense Department to provide us and the American people with more specific information about the bombing?



*The President.* Well, Mr. Downey, you know, late last week the Defense Department had a big, long briefing. And there are basically two issues here, and we're trying to resolve them. I actually had a rather extended conversation yesterday with two of the other leaders of the NATO alliance about this because I think it's important, not just in the United States but throughout Europe, to get more information out more quickly.

There have been two problems from the point of view of the Pentagon: One is trying to work through the NATO command structure and let them do the daily briefings and try to determine by consensus, if you will, what should be gotten out and how; and then to have the Pentagon play a supporting role in that.

The other problem is a practical one, which is sometimes it takes—in the Gulf, when we fought in Iraq in Desert Storm and later when we had our actions there, neither the weather nor the terrain presented the barriers to actually assessing quickly what the impact of the action was that is presented in the Balkans. So sometimes there is just an inevitable delay, which is one of the reasons that—last week I talked to Secretary Cohen and General Shelton about having the Pentagon do a big briefing to be much more detailed about what, in fact, had happened and what conclusions we drew from it.

So all I can tell you is, I'm aware that this is a difficulty. I agree that we should try to do more, more simultaneous with the actions. And I am working on it and trying to get NATO to do more as well. Unless there is some specific security-related reason that some issue shouldn't be talked about, I think the more information we can get out there the more quickly, the better off we are.

*Q.* Thank you.

*The President.* But I know that whenever there's a conflict between any Government and the press, there's always the assumption that there is some deliberate scheme at work here. And I don't think that's the case here. I think really, we're trying to work through—NATO has never done this kind of operation before, in this way, and there are a lot of things that have to be worked through. But I am working on it, and I hope that most of you will be generally satisfied within the next few days.

Do you want to take a couple more?

*Mr. Seaton.* We could; it's up to you.

*The President.* He's been standing there a long time. [Laughter]

#### *President's Legacy*

*Q.* I have. And I'm the only resident from Vancouver, Washington, standing here, so—[laughter]—Tom Koenninger, the Columbian, Vancouver, Washington. Mr. President, my question has two parts. The first is, as you near the end of your second term in office and deal with such issues as the Balkans, what legacy do you believe you are leaving to the American public? Secondly, would you be specific, sir, in telling us ways in which America is better off for your Presidency?

*The President.* Well, I think, first of all—let me answer the first question first. I think others will determine the legacy of this administration, and most of it will have to be done when all the records are there and time passes and people without an axe to grind one way or the other have a chance to have their say.

I can only tell you what I have tried to do. I have tried to lead America into a new century and into a whole new era in the way we work and live and relate to each other and the rest of the world. And I have tried to help build a world that was more peaceful, more prosperous, and more secure.

I think that among the things that people will say this administration did and made progress on was, we gave the United States a modern economic policy and got out of 12 years of horrible deficit spending during which we quadrupled the debt. I think that the work we did to support the solution of social problems, in reducing the welfare rolls by half and reducing the crime rate and putting 100,000 police on the street, would be important. I think the work we did in education will be important.

I think the systematic effort we made to promote reconciliation among people of different racial groups will be important. I think the work we have done in the Middle East to Northern Ireland in promoting peace will be important. I think the work we've done in Latin America through the Summit of the Americas and the work we've done with our allies in Central America will be important. I think there are a lot of things that will altogether add up to preparing America for the 21st century, building a stronger American community, and repairing the social fabric.

And let me just say one thing. When I got off the airplane today there were a bunch of young people who are AmeriCorps volunteers. That's a program we started back in the second year of my Presidency. And one young woman said to me, "I'm 30 years old. You're the first President I ever voted for. I've kept up. You did what you said you'd do, and it's worked." And her saying that to me meant more than just about anything any American could say.

When I was in New Hampshire for the seventh anniversary of the New Hampshire primary, there were schoolchildren along the highway waiting in the cold rain. And person after person said to me, "You had to come to these little town meetings in 1991, and we listened to you, and you've done what you said."

So what I think will also happen is people will see Americans can solve their problems. Government has a role to play, and it can produce. So I think there's a sense of possibility, a sense of optimism, a sense of eagerness about the future that the present difficulties in Kosovo cannot begin to overshadow. And I think the country is clearly better off than it was 6 years ago.

Q. Thank you.

*Success of Post-Cold-War Policies*

Q. Mr. President, my name is Dave Zeeck. I'm the editor at the newspaper in Tacoma, Washington, the News Tribune. And part of a little known function of this convention is to help train young journalists. There are some journalists here who produce the AS&E report. I'd like to ask them to stand because they gave me this question. If you all would stand, please.

Their question was—and you made an indirect reference to this in your speech—you didn't mention the Marshall plan by name, but that seemed to be what you were talking about as a way to resolve this later. And their question was, could a greater effort have been made after the fall of the Berlin Wall to do more along the lines of a Marshall plan, particularly in the Balkans, and might that have prevented something like we're facing today?

*The President.* Perhaps. I wasn't President then, and I don't know. I don't say that in a blameworthy sense; I just wasn't. And I don't think it's fair for me to make judgments where I don't have all the facts, and I can't say. I don't mind saying that I missed the boat somewhere if I know it, or if I know enough about

somebody else to say that, but I don't know the answer to that.

Let me say it in another way. I am convinced that after communism fell, that the work that—we had a chance after the Berlin Wall fell, after the end of communism, to build a Europe that was united, democratic, and at peace for the first time in history. You go back; since the rise of nation-states on the continent of Europe, that had never been true before. There had always been some conflict; there had always been some division; there had always been some absence of democracy—never before possible.

At that moment there were three great challenges, I would argue, to that vision. One is, what happens to Russia? Does Russia become a democracy? Does it become stable? Can it be prosperous enough in the painful transition? The other was, what happens to all the states around that were Communist, non-Russian states, basically the Balkans and Central Europe and southeastern Europe—second question. Third question is, would there be a conflict between Islam and the Orthodox branch of Christianity, manifest most obviously in the tension between Greece and Turkey but also up in the Balkans? If those three things could be resolved in a satisfactory way, then we could build a Europe that was united, democratic, and at peace.

Now, what happened? The Germans took on East Germany, in an act of patriotism and generosity and costliness of staggering proportions. They're still paying the economic price today, but it was a brave and good and generous thing to do.

The major countries in Europe supported the European Union. NATO took in Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic. There was a massive effort made to try to deal with Russia. The United States put a lot of money into the denuclearization program and other things.

After all is said and done, where are we? And we dealt with the Balkans in a more halting way. I think everyone would have to admit that. And we've continued without great success to resolve the difficulties between Greece and Turkey, but they haven't gotten worse, either. And we may have some Americans of both heritages here today that could have some ideas about that.

So where are we today? Today, we're concerned that Russia has maintained its democracy, but its economy has been so burdened,

it's caused all kinds of other problems, and that takes a lot of time for us. We're working on that. We're trying to maintain our strategic partnership with them even as we disagree about the conflict in the Balkans.

Central Europe is in very good shape, Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic. Romania, Bulgaria, a lot of other countries—Slovenia—are doing better than most people would have imagined they would do. But the Balkans are in trouble, and the trouble in the Balkans has exacerbated the tensions with Russia, at least in the short run.

And all I can tell you is, I don't know whether we could have done more before. I always prefer to look to tomorrow. I'm not blaming anybody for what happened before. I can't do that. I don't know enough to know. Everybody had their hands full, and there were so many changes going on at once, I'm not sure anyone could have figured out more to do.

But I can tell you that if you want to think about what you want your children to live like, you imagine what do you want to happen in Asia; how are we going to work out our relationships with China and deal with the remaining security threat in North Korea and try to help Japan and the other countries come back? How are we going to have the strongest possible alliance in Latin America? What kind of new partnership can we have with Africa? But it all could come a cropper unless we have a united, democratic, and free Europe. And the three things are what I said: our relationship with Russia; what happens in the Balkans and southeastern Europe; and will Islam and Christianity be able

to coexist in a positive way in the underbelly of Europe.

And so I would say, maybe more could have been done; I don't know. I just know now, right now, all those people are fighting over smaller and smaller pieces of land. It's like life is a zero-sum game. You kick me out of my village; I'll kick you out of your village.

The Bible says, wisely, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." We need to have an alternative vision. They need to be brought into the vision of a prosperous Europe. They need to have more to gain by working together than they do by having constant fights with one another. They need to have—and we need to reach out and lift up, there.

So, however this conflict ends, or whenever it ends—I think I know how it's going to end—but whenever it ends, we have some building to do. They have to have something to live for. You just can't tell people what they can't do; they've got to have something to be for, something to dream of, a future to build. And we ought to be a part of it.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:05 p.m. in the Grand Ballroom at the Fairmont Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Edward Seaton, president, American Society of Newspaper Editors; assassinated Serbian publisher Slavko Curuvija; President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); and Staff Sgt. Andrew A. Ramirez, USA, Staff Sgt. Christopher J. Stone, USA, and Specialist Steven M. Gonzales, USA, infantrymen in custody in Serbia.

## Memorandum on Carbon Dioxide Emissions Reporting *April 15, 1999*

*Memorandum for the Secretary of Energy,  
Administrator of the Environmental Protection  
Agency*

*Subject:* Report on Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>)  
Emissions

My Administration's proposal to promote retail competition in the electric power industry, if enacted, will help to deliver economic savings, cleaner air, and a significant down payment on

greenhouse gas emissions reductions. The proposal exemplifies my Administration's commitment to pursue both economic growth and environmental progress simultaneously.

As action to advance retail competition proceeds at both the State and Federal levels, the Administration and the Congress share an interest in tracking environmental indicators in this vital sector. We must have accurate and frequently updated data.