

May 1 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999

will ensure that our children inherit a living, breathing Earth, our most important obligation of all.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 5:49 p.m. on April 30 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on May 1. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 30 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Remarks at the White House Correspondents' Association Dinner May 1, 1999

Thank you very much, Stewart, Susan, Brian. You all were pretty tough on the Times for boycotting this dinner tonight. I understand they wanted to protest the increasingly circus-like atmosphere. Why are they doing it? I'm the guy who shows up every year and gets shot out of the cannon. [Laughter]

You really made me feel like I'm on the downhill slide—Brian spent all this time dumping on the Vice President. [Laughter] You know, you were really rough on him. That riff was pretty funny. I mean, you gave him credit for everything. I think since you pointed out that he went to the Kentucky Derby today, I should say, he claims no credit for siring the winner. [Laughter]

I know that this dinner has gotten out of hand in recent years, but I see a lot of familiar faces out here. And I want you to know that I really appreciate all these Hollywood celebrities inviting the work-a-day Washington press to join them tonight. [Laughter]

Now, you know I, on occasion, have my differences with the New York Times. But they've taken a principled stand. [Laughter] And I support them. In fact, I feel so strongly about it that I challenge the Washington Times and the Weekly Standard to follow their example next year—[laughter]—and the year after that, and so on. [Laughter]

I know there was some talk about my not coming this year, and I admit, the thought did cross my mind. [Laughter] But then I heard if I didn't attend, Aretha might not attend, and that would break Brian's heart, because we couldn't bear the thought of having Scott Pelley sing "R-E-S-P-E-C-T." [Laughter]

I hope you'll all enjoy Aretha, but you know—and I love her, and I will certainly enjoy it. And I want to see you later—I like to come

here because there are those other parties later on. Now, last year Sid Blumenthal swore he could get me into the Vanity Fair party. [Laughter] What a difference a year makes. [Laughter] This year I have to take him. [Laughter]

I love seeing all the White House correspondents in this room tonight. For me, it's a rare treat to see you outside the White House gates—and notwithstanding what Susan said, get used to it. [Laughter] You know that the National Park Service is planning this long-range plan to relocate the White House Briefing Room to a larger facility, outside the West Wing—which I think is too bad. I mean, Helen was just starting to get comfortable. [Laughter] And she's still mad about the last time the White House Briefing Room was moved—that's when the Capital moved to Washington from Philadelphia. [Laughter]

But look, this is going to be hard on us, too. It's going to be really hard on the White House if they move the Briefing Room because then the leakers will have to start dialing 10-10-321. [Laughter]

Speaking of big moves, I saw yet another journalist commenting today that if Hillary runs for the Senate, she'll have to deal with the New York press, and that will be hard, because they're even meaner than you are. I want you to know something: We are not scared of them; we're scared of the co-op boards. [Laughter] Have you ever seen one of those applications? I've been filling one out—look, here's my answer to some of the questions. You tell me what kind of chance we've got.

Question 2, anticipated employment? Unknown. [Laughter] Question 3, anticipated earnings? Unknown. [Laughter] Question 5, current residence? Public housing. [Laughter] It gets better. References? Nelson Mandela, the Dalai

Lama, Steven Spielberg. [Laughter] Outstanding debts? Williams & Connolly—[laughter]—and the House Democrats. [Laughter]

I know these are really busy times for all of you in the press corps. I appreciate your hard work. But what I really appreciate is all the commentary. I hope the NATO commanders videotaped this morning's briefing by retired General Howard Fineman. [Laughter] I wonder how in the world the Allies ever managed to pull off D-day without "Talk Back Live." [Laughter]

Press coverage has really changed a lot over the years. You know, during the Hundred Years War, the European press corps didn't even start second-guessing until 1370. [Laughter]

Now, just imagine if today's press corps covered yesterday's wars. Here are a few headlines. Paul Revere's warning: "Too Little Too Late." [Laughter] Lincoln speaks at Gettysburg: "Fails To Articulate Exit Strategy." Teddy Roosevelt leads charge up San Juan Hill: "GOP Divided." [Laughter] McArthur to Philippines: "I Shall Return—Refuses To Set Specific Timetable." [Laughter]

This is the last White House correspondents' dinner of the millennium. Frankly, I'm surprised you see any news value in all this millennium stuff. I mean, after all, we've known about it for 1,000 years now. [Laughter] I think history will record that the world spent the last days of this millennium compiling lists. You may have seen a list compiled by the Newseum of the top 100 news stories of the century, everything from putting a man on the Moon to the polio vaccine, ranked in order of importance.

I don't mind telling you, I made the Newseum list—something about the events of last year, number 53—53! I mean, what does a guy have to do to make the top 50 around here? [Laughter] I came in six places after the invention of plastic, for crying out loud. [Laughter] And I don't recall a year of 24-hour-a-day saturation coverage on the miracle of plastic. [Laughter] And I guess the strongest economy in a century was number 101.

Ladies and gentlemen, I think it's really good for us to step away from the work we do for an evening and laugh a little. I thought Brian was really funny, and I like laughing at somebody else for a change. [Laughter] But I hope you'll forgive me if I sort of stop it now and say a few serious words, for these are not usual times. While we've got a lot to be grateful for,

in rising prosperity, and falling unemployment, poverty, welfare, and crime, you all know we have real challenges.

All Americans are still hurting for the families of Littleton and seeking ways that each of us can help to give our children less violent, more wholesome childhoods. And our thoughts are in Kosovo, where America and our allies are engaged in a difficult struggle for freedom and human rights and against the destruction of other human beings because of their ethnic and racial heritage.

The roots of violence at home and ethnic cleansing and racial hatred abroad are of great complexity and difficulty. But we know that our country is strong enough and good enough to meet these challenges.

There was a reference to this before, but I want to say a special word about the three servicemen and their families. Our prayers have been with them for the past month, and there are indications that they may soon be released to Reverend Jackson and his interfaith group. We certainly hope that this will occur.

But let us remember tonight also what is at stake for more than a million other people who have been involved in Kosovo—a very great deal. What is at stake there, what was at stake in Bosnia, and what will doubtless be at stake elsewhere in the world in the years ahead is whether Mr. Milosevic's vision of ethnic cleansing, with its uprooting, its raping, its killing, its destroying every record and remnant of culture and history—or our democratic vision of ethnic tolerance and political pluralism, of affirming our common humanity—whether his vision or ours will define the beginning of the 21st century. On this there can be no compromise. And therefore, our determination must be unwavering.

I thank you, the White House correspondents, for making the donation to help the refugees of Kosovo. That is a welcome and valued contribution. So are the reports you and your colleagues file every day, often at great personal risk for those in the region.

As our prayers are with our military personnel and our allies tonight, they're with the Kosovars—indeed, with all innocent people who are caught up in this grievous affair. I again ask Mr. Milosevic to let the Kosovars come home, with the Serb forces out, and an international force in to protect all the people, including the Serb minority who live in Kosovo.

May 1 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999

And I ask the American people to remember what it is we are fighting for: a world in which the dignity of humanity counts for more than the differences of humanity. For human differences, when celebrated but contained, can make life a lot more interesting, but when unleashed as weapons of war, soon make it unbearable.

The 20th century has seen altogether too much of this. If we and our allies, indeed, if you and I as citizens, and each in our official capacities, all do our job, the world of our children will be better. It will be not only more prosperous but more peaceful, not only more diverse but more unified, not only more human but more humane. Let that be our prayer to-night and our determination.

Thank you very much, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 10:20 p.m. in the International Ballroom at the Washington Hilton. In his remarks, he referred to White House Correspondents' Association outgoing president Stewart Powell, Hearst Newspapers, and incoming president Susan Page, USA Today; dinner emcee Brian Williams, NBC News; Scott Pelley, CBS News; entertainer Aretha Franklin; Helen Thomas, United Press International; President Nelson Mandela of South Africa; movie director and producer Steven Spielberg; Staff Sgt. Andrew A. Ramirez, USA, Staff Sgt. Christopher J. Stone, USA, and Specialist Steven M. Gonzales, USA, infantrymen in custody in Serbia; civil rights leader Jesse Jackson; and President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

Statement on the Release of American Infantrymen Held Prisoner by Serbian Authorities

May 2, 1999

I am pleased that our three American servicemen who have been held as prisoners by Serbian authorities have today been released and that they are now safely out of Serbia. I am grateful to Reverend Jackson and his delegation for helping to secure their freedom. All of America is anticipating their safe return.

As we welcome our soldiers home, our thoughts also turn to the over one million Kosovars who are unable to go home because

of the policies of the regime in Belgrade. Today we reaffirm our resolve to persevere until they, too, can return with security and self-government.

NOTE: In this statement, the President referred to civil rights leader Jesse Jackson, whose personal appeal won the release of Staff Sgt. Andrew A. Ramirez, USA, Staff Sgt. Christopher J. Stone, USA, and Specialist Steven M. Gonzales, USA.

Remarks at the Welcoming Ceremony for Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi of Japan

May 3, 1999

Prime Minister Obuchi, Mrs. Obuchi, members of the Japanese delegation, my fellow Americans. Mr. Prime Minister, we welcome you to America and to the White House, and to greet you in the spring when the cherry blossoms every year remind us of the generosity and friendship of the Japanese people.

The cherry blossoms—or in Japanese, *sakura*—have made it through changing times, environmental challenges, and even most recently, the attention of our local population of beavers. [*Laughter*] They have endured, as our friendship has endured and will continue to endure forever.