

election, none of them, Republicans or Democrats, will be defeated.

Thank you.

NOTE: The exchange began at 6:03 p.m. at the U.S. Ambassador's residence. In his remarks, the President referred to Representative John D. Dingell. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi of Japan in Cologne, Germany

June 18, 1999

Prime Minister Obuchi. I look forward very much to meeting you again next summer, in July, when we host the Kyushu-Okinawa summit. I hope to see you there.

President Clinton. And I'm very pleased that it's going to be in Okinawa. That's great.

Gun Control Legislation

Q. Mr. President, as you know, Dingell won and McCarthy lost, and the NRA is crowing that they beat you. What's your reaction?

President Clinton. They did. But they didn't beat me; they beat the American people. When the NRA got the House leadership to put the vote off a month, past the Memorial Day recess, so that the memories of Littleton would fade and they could wear the Members out—from these districts where they were vulnerable—they were given a terrific advantage. And they did what they always do with backroom politics; they made the most of it.

But I noticed even last night they kept putting the vote off. When did they vote, 1:30 a.m.? After, so it wouldn't be on the evening news, in the hope that no one would find out that they are still running the Congress, this Congress, for their own convenience, instead of for the interest of the people.

They did win, and it's a great tribute to their money and their power. But it's not a tribute to the children or the future of America. So one more time the Congress of the United States, with the majority in the lead, says, "We don't care what's necessary to protect our children. We can't possibly bear to make anyone in the NRA mad." And the American people are going to have to send them a signal some way or another. Because the NRA can always produce several hundred telephone calls for every one an ordinary citizen would make. The

people who feel strongly about this are not organized. They don't have a lot of money, and they don't normally threaten people in public life the way the NRA threatens them.

So now they say, "Okay, if you go to a gun show and you'd rather not have your background checked, just walk outside and swap guns and money, and everything is fine." I think when the American people figure out what they did in the dead of night, they will be bitterly disappointed; they'll be shaking their head; and they'll wonder what in the world is going on in Washington. What is going on is business as usual. And it was a great victory for the NRA, but it was a great defeat for the safety of our children.

There's a reason they did this at 1:30 a.m. They will never be able to explain why it's okay not to have a background check if these guys go outside, or why it's okay to have a background check that the FBI has already told them will let over 20 percent more criminals get handguns. They'll never be able to defend it, so they did it at 1:30 a.m.

NATO-Russia Negotiations on Kosovo

Q. Mr. President, what do you hear from Helsinki this morning?

President Clinton. That they're still working, that they've got almost all the issues resolved, that there are still some matters still to be resolved. When I was briefed this morning it didn't seem to me that it would take too much longer, given the nature of the issues.

Q. Mr. President—[inaudible]—you and President Yeltsin to solve the issue?

President Clinton. Well, I think the important thing right now, insofar as possible, is to focus on making decisions that will work. I don't think that—it may be necessary for this to be resolved

not only at our level but the involvement of Prime Minister Blair, President Chirac, Chancellor Schroeder, and others. But I don't think so, I think the Defense Ministers are working. Secretary Cohen is consulting, basically, all the time with our Defense Ministers and NATO.

The thing that I think we need to focus on is what is necessary to make this work. You know, you folks have done—the news media has done a stunning job in the last day or two in reporting what our people are finding, now that they're finally in Kosovo, about the dimensions of the wholesale slaughter that went on there. We must not make any decisions which will, in any way, shape, or form, undermine the ability of the Kosovars or the willingness of the Kosovars to come home.

So we can work through all this. We want to protect the Serb minority; they deserve that. We want this to be a balanced force. But we have got to achieve our objectives. And certainly the horrible, horrible stories that have been coming out in vivid detail in the last 2 days should reinforce that in the minds of all of us, including, I would hope, the Russians. So I expect we'll get this worked out today.

Economic Recovery in Japan

Q. Mr. President, do you think the Japanese economy has turned the corner with the strong—[inaudible]—

President Clinton. [Inaudible]—they had good news. I certainly hope so. I want to talk to the Prime Minister about it. His opinion would be better than mine, but I was thrilled by their economic performance in the last quarter. And

I think it's a tribute to the steadfast economic reform program of the Prime Minister. I hope that they will be able to keep doing that. I think it's good for the world for Japan to have this kind of growth. And the United States should welcome it, too, because as one part of it, as you probably know, is that there has been a substantial drop in the trade deficit we had with steel, imported Japanese steel which, as you know, has been a huge bone of contention in America.

So I hope we can keep making progress on that, and I hope they can keep growing, because I think it's good for the world, as well as for the Japanese people.

Q. So do you think Mr. Obuchi's economic policies are paying off now, with the 7.9 percent economic growth—

President Clinton. It's very good news. I know that he wants to see it continue, and so do I. But I think—you know, this is good news. The people of Japan have endured a lot of disappointing quarters. They must be very happy about this, and the people in the United States, we're all pulling and hoping that this is a trend and that we'll see more of it.

NOTE: The exchange began at 10:21 a.m. at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. In his remarks, the President referred to President Boris Yeltsin of Russia; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; President Jacques Chirac of France; and Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom and an Exchange With Reporters in Cologne, Germany June 18, 1999

Situation in Kosovo

President Clinton. I would just like to make a brief comment. The Prime Minister and I are looking forward to having a discussion about the next steps on Kosovo. But I think it's important to point out, and I think we should all just take a moment to reflect on the fact that this is the eighth day of the agreement; 35,000 Serb troops have left Kosovo; 19,000 KFOR

troops are in there. They're going about their work, and they're busy establishing security.

The refugees are beginning to come home, some of them even before we think it's safe. But the three things that we've fought for 79 days to achieve, the Serb forces out, the international force with NATO at its core, and the refugees coming home, are being achieved. And