

autonomous Kosovo within Serbia would be like. And that's the good news.

There are still some important disagreements. The Serbs have still not agreed to a NATO-led multinational force to try to maintain the peace over a 3-year period. The Kosovars still want some sort of assurance of a referendum at the end of the 3-year period, and neither side will agree to the other's position on that. And so we're working through that today, hoping for a resolution.

I talked to Secretary Albright last night. Whatever happens today and however they agree to proceed, I think it's very important that the Serbs exercise restraint on the ground and that the Kosovars respond in kind. They've made a lot of progress, and they don't need to let this thing get away from them. And we'll keep watching it, and I expect there will be more news on it as the day breaks.

Q. Will you extend the deadline again, sir; is that it?

The President. No, I don't know. That's up to the parties. I hope that they'll be able to resolve what they're going to do today. I think there will be some sort of resolution about where to go from here today, and we'll just have to see.

Q. But no bombings?

The President. Well, whether NATO bombs or not, the Secretary General has the authority in his pocket now. That depends upon the actions of the Serbs. And what we need is continued restraint. But as I said, they made a lot of progress; they had these two big differences, each side having one condition the other won't agree to. So we'll just have to see where we go today.

Q. Mr. President, Senator Lott expressed concern about a costly, open-ended, no-defined-

peacekeeping mission. What kind of reassurances can you give him on that point?

The President. Well, I think that what we learned in Bosnia was that we shouldn't set a date certain and later find out we can't meet it and have people feel that they've been misled. I don't want to do that. So I think the important thing to do is to have an exit strategy based on benchmarks, on developments. And then if the Congress agrees with the benchmarks, that those are reasonable standards, then I think we can have an open relationship that has some credibility in the agreements between the Congress and the executive branch.

In terms of paying for it, I think in this fiscal year, whatever we have to do, we would need emergency funding because we're in a fiscal year where the Defense budget is already set. In the years ahead, I would expect that we would have to work that into the budget, and I think that's what the Congress leaders—Congress, as far as I know in both parties—have expected us to do, because they don't want the Pentagon to have to absorb these costs away from readiness and taking care of our people in the military.

Cooperation With Republicans

Q. Mr. President, these Republican leaders all voted to oust you from office. How can you work with them?

The President. We all took an oath, and I think we intend to follow it. We owe it to the American people, and I'm looking forward to it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:15 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to NATO Secretary General Javier Solana. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on the Kosovo Peace Talks *February 23, 1999*

The peace talks in Rambouillet, France, are a significant step forward in the search for a fair and lasting peace in Kosovo. In the last three weeks, the negotiations have produced more progress than we have seen in the decade

since Kosovo's autonomy was stripped away by the Government in Belgrade.

By agreeing in principle to a strong plan that would provide substantial self-government for the people of Kosovo, the negotiators on the

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 cochairs 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,