

May 20 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999

Kosovo. An international security force with NATO at its core must deploy to protect people of every ethnicity and faith in Kosovo. On this, our country is speaking with a single voice, as we see by the strong bipartisan support for the measure.

From the beginning, we have said that we believe that a peaceful resolution that meets these conditions would serve our interests, and we will continue to pursue one with our Allies and with Russia. We will also continue our military campaign until the conditions are met. I believe the campaign is working. Each day we hear reports of desertions in the Serbian Army, dissension in Belgrade, unrest in Serbian communities. President Milosevic should know that he cannot change the fundamental terms that we have outlined, because they are simply what is required for the Kosovars to go home and live in peace.

The question is not whether ethnic cleansing will be reversed but how much of the military will be destroyed because of his intransigence along the way; how much damage will be done to Serbia because of his delays? NATO is united in our determination to persist as long as it takes to achieve these goals.

Let me just make one other point about Kosovo. In the last few days, we have seen more disturbing evidence of the atrocities committed against innocent Kosovars, including some of the first photographic proof of massacres of unarmed people. In trying to divert attention from these crimes, Serbian forces are only committing more by placing civilians around military targets. It's like pushing someone in front of an oncoming train and then trying to blame the train for running them over. We will not allow this cruel tactic to deceive or divert us from our goal. We need to stay focused and patient in pursuit of our simple objective, to defend the right of a people to exist on their land without being subject to mass expulsion and mass murder. With continued support from Congress and the American people, that is exactly what we intend to do.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

Remarks to the Columbine High School Community in Littleton

May 20, 1999

The President. Thank you very much. Do that cheer for me one more time.

Audience members. We are Columbine! We are Columbine! We are Columbine!

The President. Thank you.

Dr. Hammond; Mr. DeAngelis; President DeStefano and the State legislators, county commissioners; Attorney General Salazar; especially Governor Owens, thank you for being here. To all the officials who are here; most especially to the students of Columbine and the students who are here from Chatfield and Dakota Ridge. And Heather Dinkel, thank you for standing up here in front of this big crowd and making a fine talk. Weren't you proud of her? She did a good job representing you today. [Applause]

I want to say a special word of thanks to the families who met with Hillary and me before we came over here, for telling us the stories

and showing us the booklets commemorating the lives of their very special children. I also want to thank the fine young people who still are hospitalized with whom I spoke by telephone yesterday—two of them, Patrick Ireland and Sean Graves, are here today. They left the hospital to be here.

I know there are some other people here who are also still injured who have come. I thank all of you for coming. This has been a long, hard month for all of you, and as Hillary said, it's been a hard month for America.

You heard her say that part of our job in these last 6 years, more than we ever could have imagined when we moved to Washington after the election in 1992, has been to be with grieving people, after the Oklahoma City building was blown up and the Embassies were blown up and our airmen were killed in the

bombing in Saudi Arabia and so many other occasions—and last year several times—after violence in schools. But something profound has happened to your country because of this. I want you all to understand that. I'm not even sure I can explain it to you.

One of the incidents of school killing last year occurred in my home State. It's a small State. I was Governor there 12 years. I knew the people involved; it was heartbreaking. One of the mothers of one of the children who was killed still works with us for safer schools and safer childhoods. And all America grieved. But I think they thought, "Oh, this is terrible; I wish somebody would do something about this."

But somehow, when this happened here—maybe because of the scope of it, and I think mostly because of you, how you reacted, all of you, the relief workers, the law enforcement people, the family members who were brave enough to speak—there was a different reaction. People thought, "This has happened in my neighborhood; what can I do?" I say that because you have a unique chance—a chance—to make sure that the children of Columbine are never forgotten.

But first, you have to deal with you and your lives. You're all left with searing memories and scars and unanswered questions. There has to be healing. There has to be answers. And for those things that will not heal or cannot be answered, you have to learn to go on with your lives.

I hope you have been comforted by the caring not only of your neighbors but of your country and people from all around the world. All America has looked and listened with shared grief and enormous affection and admiration for you. We have been learning, along with you, a lot about ourselves and our responsibilities as parents and citizens.

When America looks at Jefferson County, many of us see a community not very different from our own. We know if this can happen here, it can happen anywhere. And we see with admiration the fundamentally strong values and character of the people here, from the students to the school officials, to the community leaders, to the parents.

I think most Americans have looked at you and thought, among other things, that—God forbid—if something like this should ever happen to us, I hope we would behave as well. I hope we would also hold on to our faith as well.

I am impressed that you are moving forward. Most of the children have returned to school, even returned to sports and other activities. I am proud of all of you who are, in your own way, going back to living your lives, looking toward the future, to commencement or college or a summer job or just getting back to the ordinary business of life, which takes an extraordinary effort now. But I have to say, I think what's impressed me most is the way, in the midst of this, you have held on to your faith.

One of the greatest moments of grief in my life occurred 15 years ago, when Hillary and I had to go to the memorial service for a young man who was a senior at Yale University, a Rhodes Scholar, on the football team, the editor of the newspaper, the leader of his class academically. This young man happened to come from an African-American family in our hometown and a poor family at that. His father was a minister in a very small church. And we had the service in the high school auditorium.

His father was lame, and he walked with a pronounced limp. And he gave his son's eulogy, walking down in front of us with his limp, saying, "His mother and I do not understand this, but we believe in a God too kind ever to be cruel, too wise ever to do wrong, so we know we will come to understand it by and by."

In the Scriptures, Saint Paul says that all of us in this life see through a glass darkly. So we must walk by faith, not by sight. We cannot lean on our own wisdom. None of this can be fully, satisfactorily explained to any of you. But you cannot lose your faith.

The only other thing I really want to say to you is that throughout all your grief and mourning and even in your cheers and your renewal and your determination to get on with your life and get this school back together and show people what you are, there is something else you can do, and something I believe that you should do for yourselves and your friends, to make sure they will be remembered. Every special one of them.

Your tragedy, though it is unique in its magnitude, is, as you know so well, not an isolated event. Hillary mentioned there was another school shooting in Atlanta today. Thankfully, the injuries to the students don't seem to be life threatening. But there were several last year which did claim lives.

We know somehow that what happened to you has pierced the soul of America. And it

gives you a chance to be heard in a way no one else can be heard, by the President and by ordinary people in every community in this country. You can help us to build a better future for all our children: a future where hatred and distrust no longer distort the mind or harden the heart; a future where what we have in common is far more important than what divides us; a future where parents and children are more fully involved in each other's lives, in which they share hopes and dreams, love and respect, a strong sense of right and wrong; a future where students respect each other even if they all belong to different groups, or come from different faiths or races or backgrounds; a future where schools and houses of worship and communities are literally connected to all our children; a future where society guards our children better against violent influences and weapons that can break the dam of decency and humanity in the most vulnerable of children.

One thing I would like to share with you that I personally believe very much: These dark forces that take over people and make them murder are the extreme manifestation of fear and rage with which every human being has to do combat. The older you get, the more you'll know that a great deal of life is the struggle against every person's own smallness and fear and anger and a continuing effort not to blame other people for our own shortcomings or our fears.

We cannot do what we need to do in America unless every person is committed to doing something better and different in every walk of life, beginning with parents and students and going all the way to the White House. For the struggle to be human is something that must be a daily source of joy to you, so you can get rid of your fears and let go of your rage and minimize the chance that something like this will happen again.

Because of what you have endured, you can help us build that kind of future, as virtually no one else can. You can reach across all the political and religious and racial and cultural lines that divide us. You have already touched our hearts. You have provoked Hillary and me and the Vice President and Mrs. Gore to reach out across America to launch a national grassroots campaign against violence directed against young people. You can be a part of that.

You can give us a culture of values instead of a culture of violence. You can help us to keep guns out of the wrong hands. You can help us to make sure kids who are in trouble—and there will always be some—are identified early and reached and helped. You can help us do this.

Two days from now, you're going to have your commencement. It will be bittersweet. It will certainly be different for those of you who are graduating than you thought it was going to be when you were freshmen. But as I understand it, there will be some compensations. Even your archrivals at Chatfield will be cheering you on. When you hear those people cheer for you, I want you to hear the voice of America, because America will be cheering you on. And remember that a commencement is not an end. It is a beginning.

You've got to help us here. Take care of yourselves and your families first. Take care of the school next. But remember, you can help America heal, and in so doing you will speed the process of healing for yourselves.

This is a very great country. It is embodied in this very great community, in this very great school, with these wonderful teachers and children and parents. But the problem which came to the awful conclusion you faced here is a demon we have to do more to fight. And what I want to tell you is, we can—together.

I close here with this story. My wife and I and our daughter have been blessed to know many magnificent people because the American people gave us a chance to serve in the White House. But I think the person who's had the biggest influence on me is the man who is about to retire as the President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela.

He is 80 years old; he served 27 years in prison. For 14 years he never had a bed to sleep on. He spent most of his years breaking rocks every day. And he told me once about his experience. And I asked him: "How did you let go of your hatred? How did you learn to influence other people? How did you embrace all the differences in, literally, the centuries of oppression and discord in your country and let a lot of it go away? How did you get over that in prison? Didn't you really hate them?"

And he said, "I did hate them for quite a long while. After all, look what they took from me—27 years of my life. I was abused physically and emotionally. They separated me from my

wife, and it eventually destroyed my marriage. They took me away from my children, and I could not even see them grow up. And I was full of hatred and anger." And he said, "One day I was breaking rocks, and I realized they had taken so much. And they could take everything from me except my mind and my heart. Those things I would have to give away. I decided not to give them away."

I see here today that you have decided not to give your mind and your heart away. I ask you now to share it with all your fellow Americans. We love you, and we need you.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:37 p.m. in the gymnasium at Dakota Ridge High School. In his remarks, he referred to Jane Hammond, superintendent, Jefferson County Schools; Frank DeAngelis, principal, Columbine High School; Jon DeStefano, president, Jefferson County School Board; State Attorney General Ken Salazar and Gov. Bill F. Owens of Colorado; and Columbine High School students Heather Dinkel, student body president, and Patrick Ireland and Sean Graves, students wounded in the April 20 attack. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

Statement on the Shooting at Heritage High School in Conyers, Georgia

May 20, 1999

Today's shooting at Heritage High School in Georgia was deeply troubling to us all. In the wake of these terrible incidents, all Americans must come together and do everything we can

to protect children from violence. I applaud the Senate for today's historic vote to close the gun show loophole and keep guns out of the hands of criminals and children.

Statement on Senate Action on 1999 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Legislation

May 20, 1999

Today the Senate approved the emergency resources I requested to support our mission in Kosovo. Congressional support for this mission means our military forces can sustain the air campaign until we prevail. It sends a clear signal to the Milosevic regime that the Congress and the American people are committed to this mission. And the resources I requested for the Defense Department will keep our military readiness strong.

At the same time, the bill includes resources critical to helping the international community and the frontline countries of southeast Europe cope with the massive humanitarian crisis and other immediate spillover effects of the conflict and Milosevic's brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing.

This emergency funding package will also provide urgently needed resources to help Central Americans repair and rebuild after the devasta-

tion of Hurricane Mitch. With these funds, farmers can plant new crops in the final weeks of the growing season; roads, hospitals, and schools can be rebuilt; and Central Americans can look to the future with hope, knowing that America is standing with them. The legislation will support the improving prospects for peace in the Middle East by providing additional assistance to strengthen Jordan's economy and security. This emergency funding also provides resources for victims of natural disasters at home, and for our farmers in distress due to depressed crop prices.

While I am pleased that Congress has finally acted to fund our mission in the Balkans, to support the Middle East peace process, and to help American farmers and the victims of Hurricane Mitch, it is unfortunate that Members tacked unnecessary and ill-advised special projects onto essential emergency legislation.