

The President. Well, I don't know what he's prepared to do. I appreciate the fact that he let our American soldiers come home. That was the right decision. They weren't even involved in the operation.

It seems to me that if he asked the question, what is best for the Serbian people over the long run? What is most likely to preserve the territorial integrity of Serbia over the long run? What is most likely to give us a result where Serbia can join with its neighbors in a common endeavor to promote prosperity and peace and, therefore, the natural strengths that Belgrade and Serbia have because of the size of their country and the abilities of their people? What is most likely to promote that? Then the answer will clearly be: letting the Kosovars come home, having an international force to protect them and the Serb minority in Kosovo, and then getting on about the business of building a better future for all the people of southeastern Europe.

So, I think if the right questions are asked, then this is not a defeat for Serbia we're seeking. What we're seeking is the simple right of the Kosovar Albanians to live in peace on their own land, without fear of cleansing because of their religious or their ethnic background, and a simple statement that in Europe there will be no more ethnic cleansing. We will not usher in the 21st century with the worst nightmares of the 20th.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:09 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Special Envoy and former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin of Russia; Secretary General Javier Solana of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Gen. Wesley K. Clark, USA, Supreme Allied Commander Europe; Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany; and President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). The President also referred to the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

Statement on Tornado Damage in Oklahoma and Kansas

May 4, 1999

My heart goes out to the people of Oklahoma and Kansas who suffered through a night of terror and devastation. Some of the

most powerful tornadoes ever recorded tore through these States last night, killing dozens of people, leveling whole neighborhoods, and leaving more than a thousand families homeless.

In the coming hours, I will declare several counties in both States Federal disaster areas, speeding the way for Federal aid. James Lee Witt, the director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, is now on his way to the region to assess the damage and to assure the people of Oklahoma and Kansas that the Federal Government will provide whatever support is necessary to help them begin putting their communities back together.

Right now, our top priority is to make sure people are safe, that everyone is accounted for, and that initial cleanup can begin. Local and State officials, fire and police, emergency services, and National Guard personnel worked through the night and are doing an outstanding job of helping people through these most difficult hours. The thoughts and prayers of all Americans are with the victims of this tragedy.

Statement on Signing Legislation To Award the Congressional Gold Medal to Rosa Parks

May 4, 1999

I am proud to sign S. 531, a bill which authorizes me to bestow the Congressional Gold Medal to Rosa Parks.

Forty-three years ago, in Alabama, Rosa Parks boarded a public bus, took a seat, and began a remarkable journey. Her action that December day was, in itself, a simple one; but it required uncommon courage. It was a ringing rebuke to those who denied the dignity and restricted the rights of African-Americans. And it was an inspiration to all Americans struggling together to shed the prejudices of the past and to build a better future. Rosa Parks' short bus trip, and all the distance she has traveled in the years since, have brought the American people ever closer to the promised land that we know it can truly be.

NOTE: S. 531, approved May 4, was assigned Public Law No. 106-26.

**Message on the Observance of
Cinco de Mayo, 1999**

May 4, 1999

Warm greetings to everyone celebrating Cinco de Mayo.

It was 137 years ago today that General Ignacio Zaragoza Seguin led an outnumbered and ill-equipped Mexican militia into battle. With brave hearts, they successfully defended their young nation and set a powerful example of hope and determination for freedom-loving citizens around the world.

Well over a century has passed since this battle, but we can still learn much from the Mexican patriots who fought at Puebla. Their story reminds us to cherish our own independence and to honor those who struggled and sacrificed to attain it. It encourages us to stand up against injustice and to uphold our ideals. Finally, it shows us that brave men and women can overcome great odds when they are united in principle and purpose.

As we mark this special holiday, we also celebrate the enduring friendship between the United States and Mexico and the rich cultural heritage that Mexican Americans have brought to our society. As we stand at the threshold of the 21st century, let us vow to work together to forge a future of peace and prosperity for our hemisphere and the world.

Hillary joins me in extending best wishes to all for a memorable celebration.

Bill Clinton

**Exchange With Reporters Prior to a
Meeting With Released U.S. Army
Infantrymen at Ramstein Air Base,
Germany**

May 5, 1999

Captured Serbian Soldiers

Q. Mr. President, would you favor releasing the Yugoslav soldiers, now that the U.S. soldiers have been released?

The President. I think Secretary Cohen answered this earlier today, but several days ago I raised this issue with our national security people, asking them if they would look at it and make recommendations, and I expect to get it in a couple days, and right now

I'm just glad they're home, or they're halfway home, anyway—a couple days they'll be home.

What I think all Americans want for these fine soldiers is what we also want for the over one million people of Kosovo. We want them to go home, too.

And their families—I want to tell you I had occasion to talk with their families on a couple of occasions, and they were concerned, loving, and they were vigorous advocates for their loved ones. And I was very proud of the way they conducted themselves during this incredibly difficult time for them as well. And I want to thank them for the loyalty they had for their children, husbands, nephews, brothers and for the love they have for their country. I was also very moved by them.

**Release of Captured U.S. Army
Infantrymen**

Q. Why do you think Milosevic let them go, sir?

The President. I think he had a number of motives. The important thing is that he did let them go. They were in a peacekeeping mission in Macedonia; they had nothing whatever to do with this. They never should have been taken in the first place. I appreciate what they were doing in Macedonia and their service to our country, and I'm glad they're free.

NOTE: The exchange began at 5:53 p.m. In his remarks, the President referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

**Proclamation 7194—Mother's Day
1999**

May 5, 1999

*By the President of the United States
of America*

A Proclamation

There is nothing more precious than the bond between a mother and her child. With unconditional love and infinite patience, our mothers nurture us throughout our lives,