

peace process. He and Prime Minister Barak have set for themselves an ambitious timetable to reach a framework agreement as soon as they can, and then a final agreement by the middle of September. So we're working hard on it, and I think we'll get some things done today.

Elian Gonzalez

Q. Mr. President, a short time ago, Juan Miguel Gonzalez came out and called on the American people to help him urge you and your Attorney General to reunite him with his son. Do you have a message for Juan Miguel Gonzalez? And also, what steps is your administration prepared to take if the boy's Miami relatives won't turn him—

The President. First of all, I think he should be reunited with his son. That is the law. And the main argument of the family in Miami for not doing so has now been removed. I mean, their main argument was, if we let him go back to his father before the court rules, he might go back to Cuba. The court has now said he shouldn't go back to Cuba. The Justice Department agrees with that, and he has agreed to that.

So there is now no conceivable argument for his not being able to be reunited with his son. And that is what the lawful process has said. The immigration law is clear, and the determination of the INS and a Federal court are clear. So I think he should be united in as prompt and orderly way as possible.

Q. Well, what about the appeals court suggestion that a 6-year-old maybe has some rights to say where he wants to live and apply for asylum on his own behalf?

The President. Well, even if the appeals court were to say that, which would be a rather dramatic departure from the law, then there would have to be some setup at a trial level for determining that. And in the meanwhile, while all this legal process plays out, as a matter of law the INS determined, and a Federal court affirmed, that the father should have custody.

So, clearly, he should be reunited. And the argument that he might go back to Cuba before this thing can be finally resolved in the courts is no longer there. That's not an argument anymore.

Israeli Nuclear Arsenal and Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, did you write a letter for former Prime Minister Netanyahu, promising him that Israel would keep its nuclear or mass destruction weapons in case they reach an agreement with the Palestinians?

The President. I don't believe that issue ever came up in connection with an agreement with the Palestinians, with Mr. Netanyahu, or any other Israeli Prime Minister. To the best of my memory, it did not.

I think you all know what the issues are between the Israelis and the Palestinians. They are difficult, but I think they can be bridged. If the parties want to do this, we will do everything we can to help them and to minimize the difficulties and the risks involved. There are risks and difficulties involved for Chairman Arafat; there are risks and difficulties involved for Prime Minister Barak, for the Palestinian people, and for the Israeli people. I believe they are not nearly as great as the risks and difficulties of not making a peace agreement, so I hope they will do it. And if they want to do it, I'll do whatever I can to help them.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:54 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ehud Barak and former Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on the National Economy April 20, 2000

When I came into office, the budget deficit was a record \$290 billion, confidence in the economy was shaky, and unemployment was too high. Seven years of fiscal discipline have turned that situation around, creating an era of record budget surpluses.

Today we received more good news that our economic strategy is working and that the budget surplus is growing. The Treasury Department released Government financial information showing that the comparable budget balance for the first half of this fiscal year improved by more than \$30 billion from the first half of last year. This keeps us on

track to pay down a record \$300 billion of debt over 3 years.

In addition, today, for the third time this year, the Treasury Department is buying back some of our debt. If we maintain our fiscal discipline, we can make America debt-free by 2013 for the first time since Andrew Jackson was President. This will keep interest rates lower, helping to maintain strong investment and growth while saving money for American families.

Message to the Littleton, Colorado, Community

April 20, 2000

It is written in Scripture: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Hillary and I are with you in the spirit of comfort and prayer as you gather to remember those who lost their lives one year ago today.

You do not mourn alone. What happened in Littleton pierced the soul of America. Though a year has passed, time has not dimmed our memory or softened our grief at the loss of so many, whose lives were cut off in the promise of youth. It has not caused us to forget their gallant teacher—a man whose character and values brought so much strength to the school, sports teams, and community he served.

Last year, in the midst of the heartbreak and devastation of the Columbine tragedy, we saw the American spirit at its best—in the spontaneous outpouring of support for the Littleton community and in the determination to prevent such tragedies in the future. Our hearts have not yet fully healed, but today America stands together as one to keep faith with all those who lost their lives at Columbine—and all those whose lives were forever changed that day. We must continue to honor their memory and your courage by resolving to make America a safer place for all our children.

Hillary and I continue to keep all of you in our thoughts and prayers.

Bill Clinton

Videotape Remarks to a National Campaign Against Youth Violence Townhall Meeting

April 21, 2000

Good evening. I'm so pleased to join you as the National Campaign Against Youth Violence kicks off its City-By-City initiative.

Seven years ago I had the honor to speak at the Church of God in Christ in Memphis. That morning I spoke about the awful toll of youth violence and gun crime in our communities. On that day I said, unless we deal with the ravages of crime and violence, none of the other things we seek to do will ever take us where we need to go.

Together, we have come a long way in the last 7 years. With our strategy of putting more cops on the beat and getting more guns off the street, overall crime has fallen for the seventh year in a row. The juvenile violent crime arrest rate is the lowest in 10 years. And with 100,000 new community police officers and the Brady law, we've kept guns out of the hands of a half-million felons, fugitives, and stalkers.

But while we've made great progress, one act of violence is still one too many. Nearly a year has passed since the awful tragedy at Columbine, and gunfire continues to take the lives of nearly a dozen young people every single day.

If we're going to reach our goal of making America the safest big country on Earth, all of us have a responsibility to act. And Congress has to do its part, too, by sending me commonsense gun legislation that mandates child safety locks, closes the gun show loophole, bans the importation of large ammunition clips, and holds adults accountable when they allow young people to get their hands on deadly guns.

Our administration is trying to do its part by strengthening the enforcement of our gun laws, supporting more after-school programs, more mentoring, and more conflict resolution and peer mediation. Last year we helped to launch the National Campaign Against Youth Violence, and we established a new White House Youth Violence Council to coordinate the wide-ranging efforts of the Federal Government.