

to ensure that maternal and child health programs are expanded to include child protection, family preservation, and support; we have released prevention grants for community-based family services in all 50 States; and we have worked with the Congress to pass the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, and the National Child Protection Act of 1993, all of which support child abuse prevention efforts in State and local jurisdictions.

Yet government programs alone cannot prevent child abuse. As a society that cares about the health and well-being of our children, we must forge caring, cooperative alliances that include government as a partner, but also involve schools, community organizations, businesses, religious groups, and especially parents and family members themselves—indeed, everyone who has a stake in the future of American families. During this special month, as we focus our Nation's attention on the disturbing problem of child abuse, let us remember that behind every heartbreaking statistic is a child whose health, happiness, and future depend on our ability to recognize the signs of abuse and our refusal to tolerate abuse in our homes and communities.

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim April 1999 as National Child Abuse Prevention Month. I call upon all Americans to observe this month by demonstrating our gratitude to those who work to keep our children safe, and by taking action in our own communities to make them healthier places in which children can grow and thrive.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this first day of April, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-third.

William J. Clinton

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NOTE: This proclamation will be published in the *Federal Register* on April 7.

Remarks on the National Economy and Kosovar Refugees and an Exchange With Reporters

April 2, 1999

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to make some fairly brief comments today about the situation in Kosovo and the humanitarian issue, and also about the good news today we received on the domestic economy. Let me make the economic remarks first, and then I will talk about Kosovo and refer to the folks from the administration who are here to my right.

As I think all of you know by now, it was reported today that last month the unemployment rate in the United States dropped to 4.2 percent, the lowest in this long expansion and the lowest monthly unemployment rate the United States has enjoyed since 1970. This is also an expansion that is widening the circle of opportunity. We had, among other things in this last monthly report, the lowest Hispanic unemployment rate ever recorded. Now we know also that real wages went up last year at the highest rate in two decades.

Now, these economic indicators are more than just economic indicators; they mean wider opportunity and a better chance for millions of Americans to have stronger families and give their children a better chance. It is a reminder of the gains we have made because we have done the right things economically for the long run.

And now we must act to extend that prosperity. That means, among other things, we have to be very, very smart about how we deal with the question of the surplus. In the coming months, I will continue to insist that a substantial portion of the surplus—the majority—as I have outlined since the State of the Union, be set aside in a way that will save Social Security and Medicare and will enable us to pay down the debt, to keep interest rates low, to keep investment high, to keep this economy going.

I hope that today this good news on unemployment will remind us of how we got here and not make us forget how we got here.

Now, let me say a few words about Kosovo, and in particular, the humanitarian situation. I am glad to be joined by the folks to my right—Hattie Babbitt, the Deputy USAID Administrator; Julia Taft, the Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration; General John McDuffie, the Chairman's Director for Logistics of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Eric Schwartz, who is our Director for Multilateral and Humanitarian Affairs at the NSC.

The humanitarian situation, as all of you know, remains grave in Kosovo. Since last year, nearly one in three people there have been pushed from their homes.

I met this morning with representatives of humanitarian organizations that are leading relief efforts in the area. They are doing courageous work under difficult circumstances. We want to support them in every way we can.

I can tell you that I was very impressed that they reported that the refugees coming out strongly support the action that NATO has taken and clearly understand that that action did not provoke the attempt to remove them from their homes, that that is part of an operation that has been going on since last year, that there were 40,000 troops and nearly 300 tanks—Serbian troops and tanks—massed in and around Kosovo at the time the peace talks in France broke up. And they are quite clear that what has happened to them was what was planned for quite a long while. And I appreciate the support—and the great difficulty of maintaining it—of these people who have suffered so much.

Now, what are we doing about this? This week I authorized an additional \$50 million in emergency aid to augment our contributions to the UNHCR and to the other relief organizations and to ensure that our military can do more to help them get aid to the people in need.

Today NATO agreed that its forces in Macedonia should support the relief effort there by providing transport, shelter, and logistical support.

While many people are arriving in neighboring countries, and Macedonia and Albania

are especially burdened, we are able to provide help there—although we need more countries to join us in providing help there. We must be increasingly concerned about the plight of displaced people who are actually trapped inside Kosovo and are under attack or certainly vulnerable to attack by Serbian forces.

That is why our airstrikes are now increasingly focused on military targets there. There's no doubt that what Mr. Milosevic wants to do is to keep the land of Kosovo and rid it of its people. We cannot let that happen with impunity.

I said yesterday in Virginia to our troops, and I want to say again, we must be determined; we must be persistent; we must be patient if we expect to see this mission through. And I am absolutely determined to do that.

We have to make sure that Mr. Milosevic pays a heavy price for this policy of repression. We have to seriously diminish his capacity to maintain that policy. Ultimately, we want to make it possible for the victims to return home, to live in security, and enjoy self-government.

Let me also reaffirm what I said yesterday about the three Army infantrymen who were seized on Wednesday as they were carrying out a completely peaceful mission in Macedonia. There was no basis for them to be taken; there is no basis for them to be held; there is absolutely no justification for putting them on trial or displaying them in public in violation of the Geneva Convention. As long as they are detained, they have the status of POW's and are entitled to all the protections that come with that status.

As I made clear yesterday, we will hold President Milosevic and his government responsible for their safety and well-being.

Ground Troops

Q. Mr. President, is Kosovo lost, sir?

Q. Mr. President, those same refugees you just cited a moment ago are, by and large, also saying that they believe that only NATO ground forces will be able to get them back into their country. Do you still feel the same way you do about ground forces?

The President. I still believe that we have a good possibility of achieving our mission

with the means that we have deployed. Remember, we have been at this for a week. I see all of you, and I don't blame you for doing this because everybody is trying to get their hands around a very complex problem, referring to Desert Storm or other historical analogies. Is this like the Persian Gulf; is this like Vietnam; what is it like? Is it like what happened in World War II?

Let me remind you, for these people who talk about ground forces, the ground forces that were deployed in the Middle East were deployed after the objective had been achieved by Saddam Hussein, after he had captured Kuwait. It took, as I remember, maybe more than 5 months to do the preparatory deployment before any action could be taken.

So this air campaign has been much more rapid in getting up and getting underway than any sort of ground operation could be. And it seems to me we have a real obligation to try to keep the NATO allies together and to vigorously pursue this. We are making the air campaign more intense; we are adding targets; we are keeping the NATO allies together. And I believe we have quite a good chance of achieving our objectives of the return of the Kosovars to live in security with the measure of self-government that they enjoyed under the old Yugoslav constitution before Mr. Milosevic took it away from them. And I believe that is what we should continue to do. That is what I intend to continue to do.

President's Policy

Q. Mr. President, with villages burning, sir, and refugees coming out at a rate of nearly 100,000 a day, is it not unfair to say that Kosovo is already lost? And if it is lost, sir, is it your policy to get it back?

The President. My policy is to stick with the NATO allies to provide for return of the Kosovars in conditions of security where they have the self—the autonomy that they had before Mr. Milosevic took it away. That is my policy.

Keep in mind, this campaign of his started last year. There were hundreds of thousands of refugees before the peace talks in France started. Before that happened, there were 40,000 troops and nearly 300 tanks in Kosovo

or on the borders. So there has been a lot of speculation—was this—I don't think anybody in our military was under any illusion that he did not have the capacity to do what has been done. And what we have tried to do is to gear up this air campaign as quickly as we could, and given the limitations of the weather, proceed.

We have strong allied unity. We have real firm determination today in Europe that these objectives will be achieved. And we intend to stay after them until they are.

I do not believe—I think that—I do not believe that anyone should expect, or should have expected—we recognized when we started that this campaign, this air campaign, would not be a week or two proposition.

Q. But, sir, even many of those who advised and represented the Kosovars at Rambouillet say that process is now dead, given what has happened on the ground. Will there have to be some new security and political arrangement beyond what was envisioned at those peace talks? And what will the U.S.—

The President. Well, I think there will have to be some sort of security arrangement in order for them to live safely. And then there will have to be some sort of agreement that entails the autonomy to which they are entitled. That is clearly right.

So the elements that were discussed at the peace talks in France are still elements that have to be resolved before the Kosovars can either stay home or go home, for those who have left, and do so peacefully, and do so with some measure of autonomy. And it seems to me that will require, clearly, for some period of time, some sort of international force that will be able to protect their security.

So the elements, the framework that we dealt with in France is still the framework people are going to have to deal with; whatever label you put on it, those are the—the objectives that we seek to achieve will require certain means to realize.

Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International].

Russian Involvement

Q. Mr. President, what about the deepening Russian involvement? Apparently, we

understand they are now going to offer aid; they're sending ships into the Mediterranean. Are they ready for a fight?

The President. I don't believe so. I believe that—as I said before and I'll say again, one of the unfortunate side effects of this whole crisis—and we saw it a little bit in Bosnia, but we were able to resolve it, thank goodness, in Bosnia in a way that brought us together with the Russians in the peace-keeping force there—is that this whole issue has put great strains on the domestic politics of Russia, in the Russian Duma, because of the religious and cultural identity and the ethnic identity of the Russians with the Serbs.

But I think that, based on my experience in dealing with this in the last few days, and my experience in dealing with the Russians over the last 6 years, and what appear to be the facts now, they are looking for ways to continue to oppose what NATO is doing, but to leave open the prospect that they could play a very constructive role in making a peace. I don't think anyone wants to see this conflict escalate, and I certainly don't believe the Russian Government does.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:23 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); the three U.S. Army infantrymen in custody in Serbia: Staff Sgt. Andrew A. Ramirez, Staff Sgt. Christopher J. Stone, and Specialist Steven M. Gonzales; and President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. The President also referred to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Statement on Signing the Small Business Year 2000 Readiness Act

April 2, 1999

Today I am pleased to sign into law S. 314, the "Small Business Year 2000 Readiness Act."

In 9 months we will enter the new millennium. We have made tremendous progress in our efforts to address the Year 2000 (Y2K) computer problem. In spite of this progress, however, too many businesses, especially

small- and medium-sized firms, will not be ready unless they act immediately.

This week, the Small Business Administration (SBA), the Department of Commerce, the Department of Agriculture, and other Federal departments and agencies of the President's Council on Year 2000 Conversion are sponsoring "Small Business Y2K Action Week." At hundreds of Y2K seminars and training events across the country, these agencies are educating small businesses on the steps necessary for achieving Y2K compliance.

The message we are delivering to small businesses at these events is that every small business must take responsibility for making sure it is ready for the Year 2000 by taking action now. Every business should assess its exposure to the Y2K problem, ask its vendors and suppliers to be ready as well, and develop contingency plans in case its own critical systems or the systems of its vendors fail as we move into the Year 2000.

The legislation I am signing today will help ensure that the Nation's small businesses have access to the capital they need to be "Y2K-OK" in the Year 2000. The Act will authorize the SBA to provide loan guarantees for two Y2K purposes. First, it will enable small businesses to purchase the systems, software, equipment, and services necessary to become Y2K compliant. Second, it will assist small businesses that suffer economic injury as a result of the Y2K problem during the Year 2000. Authority for this special program will terminate on December 31, 2000.

I want to especially recognize the job that Administrator Aida Alvarez and the Small Business Administration have done in ensuring that the Nation's small business community is ready to meet the Y2K challenge. Through its leadership of Small Business Y2K Action Week, and its other extensive outreach efforts, the SBA has done an excellent job of raising the awareness of small businesses concerning the Y2K challenge. I would also like to thank the Congress for acting swiftly this session to ensure that we have this additional tool for assisting small businesses in their efforts to address this problem.