

Week Ending Friday, June 18, 1999

**Remarks at Whiteman Air Force Base in Knob Noster, Missouri**

*June 11, 1999*

Thank you very, very much. General Lyles, thank you for your introduction and your service. I'd like to thank General Barnidge for making me feel right at home. You can tell he's pretty proud of you, and he makes a good speech, doesn't he? I didn't know whether he was a politician or a general the first time I met him. *[Laughter]* I've got the coin, General. *[Laughter]* I think I know the rules. You got yours? *[Laughter]*

Actually, ladies and gentlemen, when I discovered these coins, I decided one way I could always remember the men and women of our military is to keep every coin I receive visible. And for as long as I have been President, I have done that. And if you saw the speech I gave last night on Kosovo, when the camera zooms in I have three racks of these coins behind me. I now have nearly 300 of these, from every unit, every enlisted person, every officer, every commander that has given me one of these, I still have the coins. And everyone who comes into the Oval Office sees them all, to remember you and what you do for our country. And this will be on that desk tonight when I get home, and I thank you for it very much.

I want to thank my good friend Congressman Ike Skelton for representing you so well and representing all of America's military families and military interests so well. I'd like to thank my National Security Adviser, Sandy Berger, who did a lot of working in planning and executing our efforts in Kosovo and others who have come here with me today.

There are a large number of Congressmen here, and I want to acknowledge all of them, because I think it's important that you know you have broad support. We have four Members from Missouri here, in addition to Congressman Skelton: Congresswoman Pat Danner, Congresswoman Karen McCarthy, and

Congressman Kenny Hulshof from Missouri. They are all here. I'd like to ask them to stand and be recognized. *[Applause]*

We have Congressman Norm Dicks from Washington and Congressman Steny Hoyer from Maryland, as you heard, two big supporters of the B-2 program. We have Congressman Leonard Boswell from Iowa and Congressman Dennis Moore from Kansas, two of your neighbors here. And we have two Congressmen who came all the way from New York State, Congressman Eliot Engel and Congressman Peter King. I'd like to ask the rest of the members of the congressional delegation to stand. I thank them for being here. *[Applause]*

We all came down from Washington today on behalf of your fellow Americans to salute the men and women of Whiteman Air Force Base, to thank you for a job well done, to honor you for the way you honor America.

Over the past few months, our Nation has faced an extraordinary challenge, a decade of brutal policies in the former Yugoslavia, and in particular, in Kosovo, exploded into a humanitarian catastrophe when Serbian troops evicted over one million people from homes they had lived in with their families for generations. It was the culmination of a long campaign by the Serbian President, Mr. Milosevic, to exploit ethnic and religious differences to strengthen his power over the people of the former Yugoslavia.

Now, in nearly every country, at some point or another there are demagogues who have tried to exploit people's ethnic, racial, and religious differences. The difference here is that he wasn't just calling people names. This exploitation involved mass murder, mass rape, mass burning, mass destruction of religious and cultural institutions and personal property records, an attempt to erase the very presence of a people from their land, and to get rid of them dead or alive. We have come to call it ethnic cleansing. The International War Crimes Tribunal

prosecutor indicted Mr. Milosevic and the leaders who worked with him for war crimes and crimes against humanity. It is that which the B-2's from Whiteman flew to reverse.

I asked you, our Armed Forces, and our NATO Allies, to act when all of our diplomatic efforts failed after Mr. Milosevic had already put 40,000 troops and 300 tanks in and around Kosovo. I asked you to act early because the world community took 4 long years to mobilize itself to stop the aggression in Bosnia, and by the time it happened, there were a quarter of a million people dead and 2½ million refugees.

And the great dream that we all had, after World War II and after the cold war, that finally Europe would be free and undivided and at peace, and Americans would never have to go there in large numbers to fight and die again, was threatened by the oldest demon of human society, our fear and hatred of people who are different from us. That is what he exploited, in a systematic way, to threaten the future stability and peace of Europe and the security of the United States and to do unspeakable humanitarian horrors to innocent civilians.

So when diplomacy failed, we and our NATO Allies acted. We attacked the Serb forces with air power for 79 days with three goals: first, to return the refugees with security and self-government; second, to get the Serb forces out of Kosovo; and finally, to have an international security force, with NATO at its core, to deploy to protect all the people of that troubled land, the ethnic Albanians and the ethnic Serbs.

Today, the three objectives have been achieved. The Serbian forces are withdrawing, an international force with NATO at its core is preparing to enter, and very soon the refugees will go home. Mr. Milosevic accepted these conditions for one reason: You made him do it. Thanks to you and the others who flew and supported our air mission and those of our NATO Allies, he ran out of room, and he ran out of time. And thanks to you, the century is ending, not with helplessness indignation over such unspeakable cruelty but with its opposite, a ringing affirmation by free people of human dignity.

It was not an easy campaign. Kosovo is a long way from Whiteman, even in a B-2. We

had to coordinate all the details with 18 NATO Allies. The Serbs had sophisticated air defenses. They placed innocent civilians around military targets. The weather was often downright atrocious, especially when we began the operation.

Yet, day after day, with remarkable precision, our forces pounded every element of Mr. Milosevic's military machine, from tanks to fuel supply, to anti-aircraft weapons, to the military and political support. Most Americans will never know how hard this was or how hard our forces worked, the pilots, the crews, the people who make it happen on the ground. But I want you to know that we are very proud of you.

I'd like to single out a few groups for special thanks today. The pilots, the crews, the weaponeers, the maintenance personnel, who are part of the B-2 team stationed here at Whiteman should take special pride in proving what a truly remarkable aircraft can do, flying 30-hour sorties, dropping ordnance, returning to base, night after night. And as our Commander said, as far as we know, they still don't know you were there. Listen to this: The B-2's from Whiteman flew less than one percent of the total missions, but dropped 11 percent of the bombs.

We honor the pilots and the crews, but we should never forget that for every 2-man mission, about 60 people from the mission planning cell worked 2 or 3 days to make sure nothing went wrong. That's what I call teamwork. You put real meaning into the 509th's motto, "Follow Us." A lot of good people are about to follow you back home to Kosovo, and I thank you for it.

I would also like to thank the reservists of the 442d for all you do. I know how badly some of you wanted to take your Warthogs over to Serbia. I assure you, you're doing a fine job protecting us, just by being ready to drop everything at a moment's notice. And I want to thank the people who make Whiteman such a fine place to live and work, including the Missouri National Guard.

And lastly, I want to pay special tribute to the families who give strength and support to our airmen and women who do such a difficult job. The wives, the husbands, the children of our military personnel are a part

of our military team, and they serve our country in a very special way.

The statistics of Operation Allied Force tell the story better than I can. There were 30,000 sorties. Two planes were lost, but every single crew member returned safely, an extraordinary testament to your courage and skill. Of course, we cannot forget the two Army airmen we lost while training in Albania, and I hope you will remember them and their families in your prayers, Chief Warrant Officer David Gibbs and Chief Warrant Officer Kevin Reichert.

Let me say one other thing that I hope will try to illustrate what this is really about. I'm proud to be in Whiteman today for many reasons. For over half a century, the brave airmen of this base have been crucial to our efforts to build peace and support freedom. We may be far from Europe here in the heartland, and I suppose it's unlikely that Knob Noster will ever be invaded by a foreign power. [*Laughter*]

But you have always been close to the frontlines, and the people in that small community have supported you in being close to the frontlines. The 442d Fighter Wing supported the D-Day landings 55 years ago last Sunday. The 509th Bomber Wing distinguished itself in the Pacific theater. Whiteman was a bastion of strength throughout the cold war. Ten years ago, for example, who would have thought that a former leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, would come here to have you sing "Happy Birthday" to him? [*Laughter*] Or that he would have the gall to accuse General Barnidge of singing off-key. [*Laughter*]

In this decade, in the wake of the cold war, our men and women in uniform have played a crucial role, and so have you. And with the B-2, you have been even closer to the frontlines. From Iraq to Haiti to Bosnia to Kosovo, our men and women in uniform have shown dictators they can't shatter their people and threaten their neighbors with impunity.

But this is the point I want you to think about. You helped to put the lie to Mr. Milosevic's campaign of ethnic cleansing and killing in two ways, not one. First, and most obviously, you did it with the power of the bombing campaign. But second, you did it

with the power of your example. What do I mean by that? His whole justification for power has been to tell the Serbian people that they cannot and should not have to live with the Bosnian Muslims, with the Kosovar Albanian Muslims, with the Croatian Catholics, that the only pure and great people, worthy to be part of Greater Serbia, are those who share their ethnic background and their faith, that their country can only be great when everybody's just like everybody else. Well, look around here. You put the lie to that by the power of your example. And make no mistake about it, it is even more powerful than the power of our bombs.

I invite the people of this world today who say that people cannot get along across racial and ethnic and religious lines to have a good look at the United States military, to have a good look at the members of the United States Air Force in this hangar today. We have proved that when people are bound together by shared values, their differences make them stronger and make our community stronger, that everyone has a contribution to make and everyone is a child of God, worthy to be developed to the fullest of his or her own capacity, and that our differences make our lives more interesting, even more fun, as long as we recognize that, fundamentally, what is most important is our common humanity.

Make no mistake about it: every day you get up and go to work, every day you work through a difference you're having with somebody who comes from a different part of the country or a different background than you do, every day you learn to live by performing your mission better, working together, you put the lie to the idea that has driven Mr. Milosevic's power and that of every other dictator in this century who tried to get people to hate others because they had a different color skin, because they had a different ethnic background, because they worshiped God in a different way.

And make no mistake about it—in a world that is smaller and smaller and smaller, where we are growing closer through the Internet, through links of trade, through shared culture, where people will become more vulnerable to one another through open borders, it is a very important thing for

the safety and security of the United States for us to be able to hold up for the whole world the example of our men and women in uniform and say: This is the future we should all seek in the 21st century.

Yes, I am very proud of the B-2's. I am proud of the cooperation across the services. I know the Air Force is grateful for the radar jamming provided by Navy and Marine aircraft, the Navy TLAMS fired from ships in the Mediterranean that made the flights safer, the Army and Marine units taking care of the refugees. I'm grateful for all of that cooperation, but fundamentally, I am most grateful for the power of your example.

In our military, we have Asian-Americans, African-Americans, Latino-Americans, European-Americans of every stripe, including Albanian-Americans and Serbian-Americans. I don't want anybody to get the idea that we have a grudge or bad feelings about the people of Serbia. They were our allies in World War II. They fill many neighborhoods in some of our largest cities. We cheer for them on professional sports teams. Many of us know them as our friends. This is not about a people; this is about a rotten idea that needs to be wiped from the pages of history. That, you have helped to do.

And I say to you, we have to keep working on it. If we want to be a force for good around the world, we've got to keep working to be good at home. We've got to keep working to live up to the ideas of our Founders, that we are all created equal, that we have a constant obligation throughout our lives to broaden the circle of opportunity and deepen the meaning of freedom and draw closer together as a national community.

These past months were a defining moment for the forces of freedom in our Alliance. This was the longest and most difficult military campaign NATO ever engaged in, in its entire 50 years. Mr. Milosevic, who believed that strength comes from everything being the same, thought that his campaign for Greater Serbia would break the unity of the incredible diversity of the NATO Alliance. He thought open societies with free dissent—where, as you know, everybody in America was free to tell me I was wrong about this from the get-go—he thought that made us weak.

But he turned out to be wrong. He turned out to be wrong, yes, because the B-2 is a great aircraft and the people flying the fighters out of Germany and Italy did a brilliant job, and the ships firing the TLAMS were great and because the leaders were strong and tough and they hung together. That's fine, and that had a lot to do with it.

But what made all that possible? How did we get to that moment in the first place? Because we had made a decision as a free people to respect the inherent dignity of every person, to give everybody a chance, to learn from people who are different, to be on the same team. Let me tell you, that is something money can't buy and propaganda can't erase, and it is an example that I hope the world will see all the more clearly in the aftermath of your success in Kosovo.

Think what would have happened if we hadn't done this. Mr. Milosevic's victory would have been a license for despots around the world to deal with ethnic minorities simply by murdering or expelling them from their land. Whenever people have trouble with people who were different, they say, "Well, just get rid of them. Kill as many as you want. Nobody will do anything, and if you run them out of your country, the rich countries will take care of them, anyway. Just ethnically cleanse everyplace so you will never have to think about or look at or consider the interest of anybody that's the slightest bit different from you."

But instead, we end the 20th century and begin a new one with a respect for human rights and human dignity and international law. This is not America's first victory over tyranny, and unfortunately, it probably will not be our last. But it is a moment for all of you to thank God for the opportunity we have had to live in our country and serve our country at this moment in history, to reap the benefits of its opportunities, and to have a chance to move it a little closer to its ideals.

As we celebrate the victory, I also ask you to remember this: There are challenges ahead. We still have to win the peace. Those folks have to go home, and they've got to have a roof over their head before it gets too cold to be outside. We've got landmines to take up and businesses to rebuild and a future to make.

That work, too, can be dangerous for those who follow in your footsteps in the peace-keeping missions. But it is very much in our interest to help them rebuild, and to draw together—to teach them what we already know—that if they have something to look forward to and something to work for and something to get up in the morning and smile about, it's a lot easier for people with superficial differences to find common interests. And so we have to be a part of that, as well.

Whenever I come to Missouri, a State I've always loved, since I grew up to the south, in Arkansas, I think of President Truman, who was the President when I was born and whom my family idolized. Congressman Skelton knew Harry Truman, and I think that we would all admit that Harry Truman knew something about standing up for what he believed in. President Truman would be very, very proud of the Whiteman family today.

In the final days of World War II, Harry Truman said, "It is easier to remove tyrants and destroy concentration camps than it is to kill the ideas which gave them birth and strength. Victory on the battlefield was essential, but it was not enough. For a good peace, a lasting peace, decent people of the Earth must remain determined to strike down the evil spirit which has hung over the world for the last decade."

Well, the decent people of the world are determined to rebuild Kosovo and the Balkans. Think about the spirit.

If you don't remember anything else I said today, remember this. Your victory was achieved for two reasons: one, the power and skill and courage of our pilots and our crews and the awesome capacity of our planes and our bombs; but two, the power of the example that you set in our military, a stern rebuke, on a daily basis, to ethnic cleansing and a reaffirmation of the moral worth and the sheer joy of working together as equal human beings for a good cause.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:50 a.m. in Building 1117. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. Lester Lyles, USAF, Vice Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force; Brig. Gen. Leroy Barnidge, Jr., USAF, Wing Commander, 509th Bomb Wing; and President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). This item

was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

## **Proclamation 7203—Gay and Lesbian Pride Month, 1999**

*June 11, 1999*

*By the President of the United States  
of America*

### **A Proclamation**

Thirty years ago this month, at the Stonewall Inn in New York City, a courageous group of citizens resisted harassment and mistreatment, setting in motion a chain of events that would become known as the Stonewall Uprising and the birth of the modern gay and lesbian civil rights movement. Gays and lesbians, their families and friends, celebrate the anniversary of Stonewall every June in America as Gay and Lesbian Pride Month; and, earlier this month, the National Park Service added the Stonewall Inn, as well as the nearby park and neighborhood streets surrounding it, to the National Register of Historic Places.

I am proud of the measures my Administration has taken to end discrimination against gays and lesbians and ensure that they have the same rights guaranteed to their fellow Americans. Last year, I signed an Executive order that amends Federal equal employment opportunity policy to prohibit discrimination in the Federal civilian work force based on sexual orientation. We have also banned discrimination based on sexual orientation in the granting of security clearances. As a result of these and other policies, gay and lesbian Americans serve openly and proudly throughout the Federal Government. My Administration is also working with congressional leaders to pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which would prohibit most private employers from firing workers solely because of their sexual orientation.

America's diversity is our greatest strength. But, while we have come a long way on our journey toward tolerance, understanding, and mutual respect, we still have a long way to go in our efforts to end discrimination. During the past year, people across our country have been shaken by violent acts that