strength of some of these very powerful tornadoes before they hit, and we'll be working on that.

The last point I would like to make is something I'd like everyone who lost a home to think about. We believe—no, I take that back—we know that lives can be saved under almost all conditions if there is at least one room properly encased and protected with concrete in a house. Now, in the loans which will be given for rebuilding the homes, 20 percent of the loan money can be used for protective purposes, for preventive purposes. Isn't that right? Yes—to make safe rooms. The average cost of one of these safe closets, if you do it with a closet, is only about $2,000. The Governor will have discretionary funds available from the Federal Government that will actually permit him to contribute some of that money to families whose incomes are so modest they can't afford it on their own.

So if you don't remember anything else I say today, remember this: For goodness sake, build a safe room in your house when you rebuild. Go in and do the—any kind of alterations you have to do. It will be the cheapest $2,000 you ever spent. If you don't have the money, get in touch with the right people at the State. We'll try to get them enough money to provide some help. But we will be able to save nearly everybody if we can do this. And in this rebuilding, once again, Oklahoma can show the way for America, if the word gets out that everybody here is determined to have one of these safe, reinforced closets in their homes.

We can't promise you that there will never be another tornado. We can promise you we'll do our best to continue to improve the warning. We'll see if the frontiers of science can widen to the point where we can dilute the strength of the storm. We'll put Oklahoma at the center of that.

But you can do something to help and to set an example for people throughout the United States in the areas that are vulnerable to tornadoes, by rebuilding with these safe and reinforced rooms.

Again, I'm sorry. Our hearts are with you. We'll be with you throughout the rebuilding. But thank you—thank you for once again showing the whole country what is best about America.

God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:40 p.m. in the Del Aire neighborhood at the corner of 42d Street and Angela Drive. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Frank Keating, and his wife, Cathy; Director Raymond Lloyd (Buddy) Young, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Region VI; Mayor Glenn Lewis of Moore, OK; Mayor Harry L. Nelson of Del City, OK; and Mayor Eddie O. Reed of Midwest City, OK.

Remarks on Departure From Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma, and an Exchange With Reporters

May 8, 1999

Bombing of Chinese Embassy in Belgrade

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, as all of you know, last night the NATO airstrikes included a number of command and control targets in Belgrade, targets that involved Mr. Milosevic's ability to do what he has done in Kosovo to run the people out and repress them. Unfortunately, the Chinese Embassy was inadvertently damaged, and people lost their lives, and others have been injured.

It was a tragic mistake, and I want to offer my sincere regret and my condolences to both the leaders and the people of China.

Having said that, let me also remind you that it is clear that we're doing everything we can to avoid innocent civilian casualties. Because the television and other media are in Belgrade, you know every one that's occurred, but I would remind you that well over 10,000 sorties have now been flown, with massive ordinance having been dropped. And that is evidence that we're working very hard to avoid this.

It doesn't remove the sadness from the people in China and from the other innocent civilians that have been hurt, but we are doing our best. And I think it's important to remember why these airstrikes are necessary. Many thousands of Kosovars have been killed. There have been rapes; they have been burned out of their homes; their records have been destroyed; and hundreds of thousands have been turned into refugees.

This can all end tomorrow with an agreement that meets the minimum conditions to

restore Kosovo to civilized life; that is: the Serb forces have to leave; a multinational security force with NATO involvement has to come in; the Kosovars have to be able to go home with security and autonomy.

And we're working hard to achieve that goal. We made some progress last week, diplomatically. And meanwhile, I think it's important that NATO stay the course.

International Reaction

Q. There are protests around the world. Russia is calling this ''barbaric.'' Could this derail the diplomatic efforts you're making toward a peace deal?

The President. Well, it wasn't barbaric. What is barbaric is what Mr. Milosevic has done. It's tragic. It's awful. But it's a tragedy, and it was an accident. What is barbaric is the intentional ethnic cleansing that he has provoked for a decade now, first in Bosnia where a quarter of a million people lost their lives and 2½ million people were made refugees, and now here. That is what is barbaric.

And I believe that Russia recognizes that, which is why they've shown so much leadership on the diplomatic front. And I would encourage them to stay on that course. If they want the bombing to end, then the Kosovars need to come home. We need to reverse the ethnic cleansing. We need to know they'll be secure.

And that's what I would urge everyone to think about here. You know, I'd like to see a few more demonstrations against the helpless—I mean, the treatment against the helpless Kosovars.

I don't blame people for being upset about it; I'm upset about it. But it is clearly—if you remember that over 10,000 sorties have been flown here, it is obvious that the NATO—the generals and the pilots have worked very hard to avoid this.

I know when I was in Germany, I talked to pilots that literally had risked their own lives to avoid innocent civilian casualties when weapons being fired against them were being fired from heavily populated civilian areas—on roofs and things like that—and they didn't fire back. They risked their own lives to avoid this sort of thing.

So this will happen if you drop this much ordinance over this period of time. I think the campaign is necessary. And what we need to do to end it is to meet the conditions necessary for the Kosovars to go home with safety and autonomy.

Impact on Balkan Peace Process

Q. Is this a setback for peace?

The President. No. What I hope it will do—I'm convinced that NATO should continue its mission. And what I think it should do is to make everybody who's interested in peace redouble their efforts to get Mr. Milosevic to reverse ethnic cleansing here. We need some sense of proportion here. Look at the numbers of people involved: thousands of people killed—of Kosovars; hundreds of thousands driven out of their homes, their homes burned, their records burned—coming on top of what happened in Bosnia. Let's not forget what the record is here.

And I hate this. And as I said, I send my regrets and my profound condolences to the leaders and the people of China, and to the innocent people in Serbia who have perished. I hate it. But someone sometime has got to stand up against this sort of ethnic cleansing and killing people wholesale and uprooting them and trashing them and destroying their lives by the hundreds of thousands, solely because of their religion and ethnicity. Otherwise, there will be far greater tragedies.

You know, these things are not easy. But someone had to do it sometime. And the answer is for everyone who wants an end to it to put some pressure on the Serbs and get this diplomatic thing even more energized. And let's keep working and put it behind us. No one would be happier than me when it's over. But what we're doing is the right thing to do.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:35 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

Remarks at the White House Strategy Meeting on Children, Violence, and Responsibility

May 10, 1999

Bombing of Chinese Embassy in Belgrade

Before I make my opening remarks, I would like to begin by saying a word about the tragic bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. I have already expressed our apology and our condolences to President Jiang and to the Chinese people. And I have reaffirmed my commitment to strengthen our relationship with China.

But I think it's very important to remember that this was an isolated, tragic event, while the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo, which has led to the killing of thousands of people and the relocation of hundreds of thousands, is a deliberate and systematic crime. Until NATO's simple conditions are met, therefore, the military campaign will continue.

But again, I want to say to the Chinese people and to the leaders of China, I apologize; I regret this. But I think it is very important to draw a clear distinction between a tragic mistake and a deliberate act of ethnic cleansing. And the United States will continue to make that distinction.

White House Strategy Meeting

Now, let me say as I look around this room today, I want to say on behalf of the Vice President and Mrs. Gore, and Hillary and myself, first, we appreciate all of you coming. This is a very diverse and distinguished group of Americans. We have leaders of Congress from both parties here; leaders of the faith community; we have activists among parents and students and educators, and people in music and people in the entertainment communities; people who represent the gun manufacturers of our country. This is a truly impressive and diverse array of Americans.

Obviously, we have asked you to come here to see what we can do together to give our children safer childhoods. The four of us, both individually and together, have worked on many of the matters that will be discussed here today for years. We have made particular efforts to give our children safe streets and safe schools.

But I think that we, and the members of the Cabinet and the administration who are here, like all Americans, were profoundly affected by the events in Littleton, Colorado, coming as they did after so many tragic incidents in our schools last year. And we were determined to see what we could do to bring the American people together, to get beyond the divisions that often attend many of the subjects here, which is not to say that we shouldn't have a serious discussion today, and to try to move forward on something really big that can make a difference.

Now, last Friday I announced, therefore, that we would launch a national campaign to prevent youth violence, a grassroots effort that would involve all Americans, from every community and all walks of life. I expect the ideas and recommendations generated here today in our discussion to lay the groundwork, the common groundwork for that campaign. We are not here to place blame but to shoulder responsibility.

In the weeks to come, I will work with Congress to pass legislation that makes our schools and streets safer and keeps guns out of the wrong hands, because that's part of our responsibility. And again I want to say how very much I appreciate the representatives of the gun manufacturers for being here today and supporting some of the specific legislative proposals that have already been publicized.

Today I'm also directing the Surgeon General to prepare the first report in more than a decade on youth violence and its causes. This report will infuse our efforts with new understanding and new urgency.

Let me just briefly say that, with representatives of the manufacturers of guns today, I want to say to the press and to the public that we have found common grounds on some common sense measures: banning violent juveniles from buying guns, raising the age for handgun ownership from 18 to 21, closing the gun show loophole, holding reckless parents responsible for giving children access to guns, reducing illegal gun trafficking by helping law enforcement trace weapons used in crimes. Again, I commend the gun manufacturers here today for taking that kind of responsibility. Others have agreed to do their part.