

What is also outrageous is the reaction of the Health Benefits Coalition, a group of business organizations and health insurers that is lobbying against patients' rights in Congress. No sooner had Ganske put out his thoughtful proposal than the coalition issued a press release with the headline: Ganske Managed Care Reform Act—A Kennedy-Dingell Clone?

The headline referred to Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., and Rep. John D. Dingell, D-Mich., authors of a much tougher patients' rights proposal that contains no punitive damage protection for health plans.

The press release said: "Ganske describes his new bill as an affordable, common sense approach to health care. In fact, it is neither: It increases health care costs at a time when families and businesses are facing the biggest hike in health care costs in several years."

There is no support in the press release for the claim of higher costs. What's more, the charge is undercut by a press release from the Business Roundtable, a key coalition member, that reveals that the Congressional Budget Office has not estimated the cost of Ganske's proposal. The budget office is the independent reviewer in disputes over the impact of legislative proposals.

So what's going on? Take a look at the coalition's record. Earlier this year, it said it was disappointed when Rep. Michael Bilirakis, R-Fla., introduced a modest patients' rights proposal. It said Sen. John H. Chafee, R-R.I., and several co-sponsors had introduced "far left" proposal that contains many extreme measures. John Chafee, leftist? And, of course, it thinks the Kennedy-Dingell bill would be the end of health care as we know it.

The coalition is right to be concerned about costs. But the persistent No-No-No chorus coming from the group indicates it wants to pretend there is no problem when doctor-legislators and others know better.

This week, Ganske received an endorsement for his bill from the 88,000-member American Academy of Family Physicians. "These are the doctors who have the most contact with managed care," Ganske said. "They know intimately what needs to be done and what should not be done in legislation."

Coalition members ought to take a second look. Ganske's proposal may be the best deal they see in a long time.

Madam Speaker, it is also important to state what this bill does not do to ERISA plans. It does not eliminate ERISA or otherwise force large multistate health plans to meet the individual consumer protection and benefit mandates of each State. This is a very important point.

Just last week I had representatives of a large national company, headquartered in the upper Midwest, in my office. They urged me to rethink my legislation because, they alleged, it would force them to comply with the benefit mandates of each State and that the resulting rise in costs would force them to discontinue offering health insurance to employees.

Frankly, Madam Speaker, I was stunned by their comments, because their fears were totally incorrect and misplaced. It is true that my bill would lower the shield of ERISA and allow plans to be held responsible for their negligence; but, Madam Speaker, it would not alter the ability of group health plans to design their own benefits package.

Let me be absolutely clear on this point: The ERISA amendments in my bill would allow States to pass laws to hold health plans accountable for their actions. It would not allow States to subject ERISA plans to a variety of health benefit mandates or additional consumer protections.

Madam Speaker, there are other pressing issues that require our prompt attention. In particular, the crisis in the Balkans is becoming a humanitarian tragedy of unspeakable proportions. Congress should exercise its constitutional responsibility and decide whether to authorize the use of ground troops, and I am very pleased Congressman CAMPBELL will be bringing this to the floor tomorrow.

However that vote turns out though, we must not turn our backs on our own domestic problems. It would be irresponsible of Congress to ignore the people that are being harmed daily by medically negligent decisions by HMOs around the country. The need for meaningful patient protection legislation continues to fester every day.

□ 2100

And to repeat, Madam Speaker, I have recently heard that the leadership of the House is not going to allow debate on patient protection until October at the earliest. Why the delay? We could move this in committee next month. We could bring this to the floor before the August recess, and we should. The clock is ticking, Madam Speaker, and patients' lives are on the line.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to working with all of my colleagues to see that passage of real HMO reform legislation is an accomplishment of the 106th Congress that we can all go home and be proud about. I urge my colleagues to cosponsor H.R. 719, the Managed Care Reform Act of 1999.

ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR SOLVING THE CONFLICT IN KOSOVO

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, I rise this evening to continue the discussion on the situation that we face in Kosovo, and what I think is an historic opportunity that hopefully we have not yet missed to solve that crisis without putting our troops into further harm's way.

In fact, today, Madam Speaker, the President called up 2,116 military reserve troops to active duty and authorized 33,000 reservists to be called up in the near future. The air war continues, the bombing and the destruction continues, yet the resolve of the Serbs seems to also continue with no end in sight.

Many of us are concerned that we do not have a solid plan to end the con-

flict and that we do not have a strategy to win the conflict. Therefore, this continuing escalation of the aerial assault on the former Yugoslavia causes a great deal of concern for our colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

Tomorrow, Madam Speaker, we are going to be asked to vote on one of several alternatives, including the War Powers Act resolution to withdraw our troops from the former Yugoslavia. A second alternative is to declare war against Yugoslavia, and a third option is an alternative that would have us say to the administration that no dollars can be expended for the insertion of ground troops unless the Congress has given its approval.

Now, we all know, Madam Speaker, that these resolutions may or may not pass, but this administration will continue on its course. They have not consulted with the Congress in the past; I do not think that is going to change. I think we are going to continue to see a movement that is aggressively pursuing the aerial campaign and eventually, perhaps, the insertion of ground troops. If that time comes, Madam Speaker, we face some very dangerous prospects.

One only has to look at history to understand how the Serbs stood up against Hitler from the period of 1941 to 1945. Even though the Germans had not only their 22 divisions but the help of 200,000 Croatians, Slovenian and Bosnian Muslim volunteer auxiliaries, they were able to repel Hitler, they were able to retain the control of their land and, in fact, in the end, they won a victory.

Now, I am not saying that if we get involved in a direct confrontation with Serbia that we cannot win. Make no mistake about it, we can. We have the finest fighting force in the world, and with the help of our NATO allies, I am sure we could prevail, but it would not be without cost. Furthermore, Madam Speaker, what really concerns me is the position that perhaps we will put the Russians in.

Russia has already indicated it will not honor our naval blockade that is designed to prevent additional oil supplies from getting into Serbia to resupply the military and the economy. Russia could be put into a position where it is asked to protect the resupply efforts to get food and necessary materials into Serbia. In either of those cases, we set up a situation where the United States and Russia could come into direct conflict, perhaps even hostile action, our troops against theirs, the NATO troops against the Russians and the Serbs. That would be catastrophic. Again, not because I do not think we would win that battle, because I think we would. But the toll that it would take in loss of life and the ending result of us then having to control the former Yugoslavia and partition it and the extensive amount of investment that we would have to make leads me to believe that that is not the right course for us to be taking.

Madam Speaker, there is an alternative. Almost one month ago I first proposed that alternative. In fact, in the first week of April I sent out "Dear Colleague" letters and a press release calling for this administration to involve the leadership in Russia in a more direct way, to get the Russian government and the Russian officials to help us bring Milosevic to the table. I felt very simply that Russia owed us that, partly because we are putting almost \$1 billion a year into Russia's economy, all of which I support. We are providing food supplies to the Russian people. But I also think with that aid comes a responsibility for Russia to assist us in bringing Milosevic and the Serbian leadership to the table so that we can try to find a way to end this conflict short of an all-out ground war.

Interestingly enough, Madam Speaker, the Russians agree with us. In fact, Madam Speaker, Russia has made overtures to us that they would like to provide the assistance of both the government and the parliamentarians to help bring Milosevic to understand that this conflict must end and that he must agree to world opinion and the NATO guidelines that have been established to allow the Kosovar people to return to their homelands, to withdraw his troops, to agree to the ability of the Kosovar people to live without fear and intimidation and without the ethnic cleansing that has occurred, and to allow the establishment of a multinational ground force to monitor compliance with the peace agreement.

In fact, Madam Speaker, I did two special orders on April 12 and 13 where I outlined in great detail my concerns about the conflict and the need to get Russia involved. Well, Madam Speaker, we have had that opportunity and I want to outline that in detail tonight.

Over three weeks ago I was contacted by my friends in the Russian Duma. As my colleagues know, five years ago I asked for the support of then Speaker Gingrich to approach the Russian Speaker, Seleznyov on the day that he was sworn into the Speaker's position to propose the establishment of a new direct relationship between the parliaments of our two nations, the Russian Duma and the American Congress. The Russian side accepted and Speaker Gingrich and Minority Leader GEPHARDT also accepted, and for one year, working with my counterpart in the Russian Duma Vladimir Luhkin, the chairman of the International Affairs Committee and former Ambassador from the Soviet Union and Russia to the U.S., we met and established the parameters for our meetings. I made it crystal-clear that in all of our discussions with the Russians, all the factions, all of the political factions in Russia must be involved. Not just the mainstream factions like the Our Home Russia party, the Yabloko party, and the People's Power party, but also the Communists who in fact control the majority or the largest sector of the Duma in terms of votes. The re-

gional coalition, the Agrarian faction and even the LDPR faction, which is the Liberal Democratic party of Vladimir Zhirinovskii. The Russians agreed to that.

Over the past five years, we have had numerous face-to-face meetings with our Russian counterparts in Moscow and in Washington. Time and again we have discussed difficult issues, trying to find common ground. Many times we have found areas where we can agree. Sometimes we found areas that we cannot agree. But we have developed a friendship and relationships that allow us to discuss difficult issues with a feeling of mutual respect and admiration.

So it was not surprising to me, Madam Speaker, that over three weeks ago senior leaders from the Russian Duma would approach me as they did, ask me to begin a dialogue of possible ways to avoid the escalation of the Kosovo conflict and to also find ways to try to bring an end to the situation on the terms established by our country and NATO.

Now, I was surprised, Madam Speaker, because I said to my Russian friends, send something to me in writing, over three weeks ago. These are the three foundations that they said they thought could be the basis of further discussion to resolve the conflict in Kosovo. Number one, that Russia would guarantee that there would be no more ethnic cleansing in Kosovo or the former Yugoslavia. Number two, that Serbia must agree to all NATO conditions, including the presence of international troops in the former Yugoslavia. Russia, however, suggested that the force be comprised primarily of countries not directly involved in the bombing of the former Yugoslavia, a point that I do not disagree with. The troops would agree to stay in Kosovo for at least a period of 10 years. And number three, the Russians proposed the establishment of an inter-parliamentary group that would include the United States, Russia, and NATO countries to be formed to help monitor compliance with all agreements. And, working together, this group would cooperate with the offices of the United Nations.

Madam Speaker, these initiatives and these ideas were proposed over three weeks ago by senior Russian parliamentarians. Immediately after I received this overture, so as not to convey the impression that I was somehow operating out of the bounds of the Government of the United States, I called the Vice President's top National Security Adviser, Leon Fuerth. I briefed him on what the Russians had proposed. In discussions with him, it was agreed that I should call Carlos Pascual from the National Security Council at the White House. I did that. I sent each of these men letters outlining what the Russians had said, what I responded, and the fact that I was going to engage the Russians to try to find some way to bring us to-

gether, to try to find a common conclusion and a successful conclusion to the hostilities in Kosovo.

In fact, Madam Speaker, the following week I called the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, George Tenet, and in a phone conversation I briefed him about the offer made by the Russians that we begin serious discussions. Also that week, Madam Speaker, I talked to Ambassador Steve Sestanovich who works directly for Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott. Sistanovic has been a friend of mine for some time involved in Russian issues, and he was someone who now has the responsibility for affairs in the former Soviet States.

I said to Dr. Sestanovich, I told him about our discussions between the Russians and myself, the exchange of communications, the telephone conversations we had, and I had further discussions on an ongoing basis that weekend with one of his top assistants, Andre Lewis. The whole purpose, Madam Speaker, was to let the administration know that my discussions with the Russians were meant to provide a constructive role in trying to find a way out of this conflict, a way that would allow the Russians to use their significant leverage to allow us to find a solution in terms of the Kosovo crisis.

Also that week, Madam Speaker, I approached two Members of Congress. Neither of them were Republicans. They were both Democrats, and they are good friends of mine, people who I trust and admire, and people who I know are also trusted by the administration: The gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) and the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. MURTHA).

□ 2115

The gentleman from Maryland (Mr. STENY HOYER) is my counterpart and colleague in the Russian Duma-Congress initiative. He and I travel to Russia together. He and I host the meetings with the Duma deputies when they come to Washington.

I went into the discussion with each of them about my efforts, and asked them to make contact with the administration to let the administration know my purpose. The gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) said he would talk to Secretary Talbott, and the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. MURTHA) said he would try to talk to the President and/or Sandy Berger.

I took each of them at their words, and I am sure they did that, even though I heard nothing from either Sandy Berger nor from Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott.

The discussions with the Russians continued, however, Madam Speaker, throughout that week and the weekend until finally the first Deputy Speaker of the Russian Duma, a good friend of mine, Vladimir Ryshkov, contacted me by telephone and made a verbal offer.

He said, Congressman, I think through our discussions that we may have an opportunity to find common

ground. He said, I would like you to bring a delegation of Republicans and Democrats to meet with a delegation of Russian leaders in a neutral country. He suggested that we meet in Hungary, in Budapest.

He said, in having one day of discussions, that that could be followed, assuming we were in agreement, with a prearranged trip to Belgrade, where we would meet firsthand, directly, face-to-face with Milosevic to try to convince Milosevic that Republicans and Democrats and Russians across the spectrum were united in the understanding that Milosevic must agree to NATO's terms, and that it was in Serbia's best interests to come to the table and agree with the position taken by our governments and the NATO governments.

I said to first Deputy Speaker Ryshkov, I said, Vladimir, I want to you to do five things for me before I will even raise this issue with the leadership in the country and in the Congress.

I said, number one, I want to you to put that request in writing. Give me a letter from you, as the First Deputy Speaker, asking me to arrange such a meeting.

Number two, give me a list of the Russian delegates, the Duma deputies and party leaders who would be a part of the Russian side of this effort.

Number three, give me a date certain and an exact time when we would meet as a delegation face-to-face with Milosevic in Belgrade.

Number four, get me a meeting with our POWs, so that we can tell whether or not they are safe and whether or not they are in good health.

And number 5, travel with me, the entire Russian delegation, and the American delegation to a refugee camp of our choice in Macedonia, under the supervision of our military, so that you can see with us the horror and the terrible atrocities that have been committed by Milosevic and the Serbs on the people of Kosovo.

On Wednesday of last week, Madam Speaker, Ryshkov wrote back to me and agreed to all five requests that I made. He put the request in writing. He identified the Duma deputies that would be involved in these discussions.

It was an historic group: Ryshkov himself, a member of the Nash Dom faction, the party leader for Chernomyrdin's own party.

The second member was Luhkin, a leader in the Yablako faction, a mainstream pro-west faction. In fact, Luhkin said it would have been the first time ever that the Yablako faction would insert itself into the issue of Yugoslavia, but they thought it was so important that they engaged with us in the Congress on this issue that he would come himself for these meetings, both in Budapest as well as in Belgrade.

The third member of the delegation would be sharp an off, a senior Communist leader who would have the ear and would have the support of the

Speaker of the Duma, Gennady Seleznyov, the Communist party leader who has the largest number of votes in the Duma, and he would in fact be able to represent that faction.

The fourth member of the delegation was Mr. Greshin, a member of the Peoples' Power faction, a very respected member of the Duma.

The fifth member would have been Sergei Konovalenko, the chief protocol officer of the Russian Duma and a good friend of mine.

That was the delegation, Madam Speaker, a solid group of progressive Russian leaders, not the hardline people that we have heard so much about in the past; not the people that Yeltsin referred to in the Duma as thugs and rogues, and not the people that we have heard in the West have been trivialized as nonplayers.

These are the future of Russia, good, solid leaders that want the same thing that we want in America: a stable country, stable economic growth, free democracy, and a closer, stronger relationship with the U.S.

The third request was for the date and time certain for the meeting with Milosevic. The Russians got that assurance from Milosevic's top aide. We were to have met face-to-face with Milosevic yesterday, Monday, at 1 p.m. in Belgrade. The Russians told me that they would not go into Belgrade, did they not have that commitment to meet face-to-face with Milosevic.

The fourth request was to meet with our POWs. The Russians certified to me that Milosevic had agreed with that request. We would have been the first body, even prior to the Red Cross, to meet with our POWs to make sure they were okay and to let them know that we had not forgotten them.

The last request was also agreed to. That was to have the five Russian leaders travel with us to a Macedonian refugee camp of our choice. In fact, I consulted with the State Department to obtain the location of the two most dramatic refugee camps, to let the Russians see the terrible problems that Milosevic has brought to bear on the people of Kosovo.

The Russians agreed to all of those issues. In fact, we were set up to do this this past weekend. We would have left the theater by going back to Sofia, Bulgaria. The American side would have come back to Washington. The Russians would have gone to Moscow. The following week we would have met in Washington to continue our discussions, a good-faith effort on the part of the Russians to find common ground.

Madam Speaker, all last week I could not get an answer from the administration. I called Sandy Berger three times. I told his staff what I wanted. I said I had briefed the administration, I had briefed the CIA, I had briefed the intelligence community, I had briefed the State Department, I had briefed the White House. I have not told any Republicans. This is a good-faith effort that I have gone to Democrats with to

try to find a way to reach common ground.

Sandy Berger never returned my phone calls, and neither did Strobe Talbott, until I went to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) again and I said to my good friend and colleague, can you help us get a face-to-face meeting with Strobe Talbott? He said, I have talked to him. You need to call him.

On Thursday, after I had briefed the gentleman from Illinois (Speaker DENNY HASTERT) in the morning and asked for his cooperation, the response of the gentleman from Illinois (Speaker HASTERT) was that he was supportive, but that I should keep working with the administration, and I told him that I was.

About 12:30 on Thursday, I finally reached Strobe Talbott, and Deputy Secretary Talbott said, I will meet with you today. I said that I wanted to bring the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) with me.

About 1 o'clock we traveled down to the State Department and had a sandwich with the Deputy Secretary of State, and for about 1½, Madam Speaker, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. STENY HOYER) and I met with Strobe Talbott and three of his senior staff experts on Russia to discuss the initiative in detail.

I went through all the background. I talked about the purpose, that we were not going to Belgrade to negotiate because we were not representatives of the administration, we are not Secretaries of State. That was never our intent, and that would never be our desire.

We were there to present a common, unified front, Russian elected officials, American elected officials, in solidarity to Milosevic saying that this must end, and he must understand that as individuals who both supported the President and opposed the President, we now felt it important to give him one last chance to find a way to peacefully resolve this situation, or we would go back to America and use our collective voices to bring every ounce of energy we had in finding ways to solve this situation militarily.

After the briefing, Deputy Secretary of State Talbott responded that he did not think it was a good idea, and he gave us two reasons. He said, first of all, I am concerned for your safety. I responded, Mr. Secretary, I am concerned for my safety, as well. I would not do something that I felt inside of me was going to endanger my own life, let alone the lives of my colleagues.

I felt confident, I told him, that the Russians, in going with us, along with one of the senior advisers to Milosevic on the bus ride from Hungary, from Budapest down to Belgrade, would in fact make sure we were protected. And by having the U.S. Army as our escort, we knew full well that our military would be briefed as to our whereabouts.

The second issue that was raised by Deputy Secretary of State Talbott was,

well, we think Milosevic may try to use you in this very laudable effort.

I said to Deputy Secretary Talbott, well, how would he use us? He said, well, he may try to say things that really are not your intent. My response was, Mr. Secretary, I have been in politics for 20 years. I understand that people try to use other people in politics. We were not naive.

And in fact, Milosevic only had one TV station operating. I said, how much spin can Milosevic create on our visit to Belgrade, when we were going to follow that visit by taking five of the senior leaders of the Russian political parties to a refugee camp where hundreds of western media, cameras, and reporters could photograph an interview, senior Russian officials holding the children of Kosovo refugees, speaking to the wives and daughters of husbands, fathers, sons and brothers who have been massacred by Milosevic?

Far better would we have had the western media report on our effort by that visit of the senior Russian officials than to worry about somehow Milosevic misinterpreting our attempt in going to Belgrade.

In fact, Madam Speaker, because Strobe Talbott saw that he could not convince me of his position, we ended our conversation after 1½ hours with him telling me that he would take the request of support to both Sandy Berger and to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright; that he was about to go into a meeting with the President, and he would meet with them prior to that meeting, and would call us back Thursday evening.

I had to move on this issue, Madam Speaker, because we were scheduled to leave on Saturday, if it was to come about. On Thursday night we got the word back from the State Department that it was the feeling of Secretary Albright and Strobe Talbott and Sandy Berger that we should not go to meet with the Russians, that we should not seize the opportunity to find a peaceful way to resolve this crisis.

I was extremely upset and frustrated. On Friday morning I held a press conference and announced the fact that I had called the Russians and told them that we were postponing our trip, much to our dismay. The Russians were devastated.

In fact, Ryshkov had a press conference, Luhkin had a press conference and talked about the initiative, and talked about the willingness of the Congress, Democrats and Republicans, to try to find common ground to end this conflict without additional American bloodshed, as well as bloodshed from other nations.

It was interesting, Madam Speaker, that I was scheduled at noon on Friday in advance to host the President of Ukraine for lunch. President Kuchma was in town, and as a leader of the Ukrainian American initiative, I had agreed with eight of my colleagues to host him in the lunchroom downstairs.

We did that, and following the luncheon we went to an adjacent room for a

press conference. Several members of the President's party stood up and praised president Kuchma for coming to Washington for the NATO summit, to be a part of the partnership for peace effort.

One of my colleagues praised president Kuchma and said this, that President Kuchma and Ukraine are to be commended because they understand the role that America is taking, and they support the effort to try to find a solution to this crisis.

It is interesting, Madam Speaker, that when President Kuchma spoke, he gave his vision for a solution to the Kosovo crisis, which I will include in the RECORD.

The material referred to is as follows:

REMARKS BY PRESIDENT LEONID KUCHMA

Congressman Oberstar, Congressman Lantos and members of the press: I am delighted to be here with you today and honored to receive the distinguished leadership award from the International Management and Development Institute. Since my election I have made it my goal to ensure that Ukraine becomes and is recognized as an important partner in the global community in all facets including security, trade and cooperation. Our close relations with the United States and Europe are particularly important during this difficult time.

I have recently put forth a peace plan that calls for all sides to cease military action, a withdrawal of all Serbe security forces and a return of displaced persons under international supervision and protection. I am committed to working with all parties involved in the Balkan crisis including the United States and Russia to ensure a speedy and just resolution. I would like to express my confidence that we will continue to be partners in peace.

Thank you.

President Kuchma from the Ukraine had exactly the same solution proposed by the Russians 3½ weeks ago that was praised by members of the President's own party at the press conference on Friday afternoon.

Very upset by the fact that we had to cancel or postpone the trip to meet with the Russians, over the weekend I continued to have a dialogue with my Russian colleagues.

□ 2130

Deputy Ryshkov came back and said he still had a desire to meet. I said that I thought that was something we should do, and on Monday morning of this week, yesterday morning, I proposed that this week we meet again; that this time we meet in a European capital, perhaps Vienna, perhaps Sofia, but a capital that is from a nonaligned area where both our Russian friends and Americans, of both Republican and Democrat persuasions, can come together and see if we cannot find common ground.

Madam Speaker, that meeting will take place on Friday, and at this point in time I believe it will be held in Vienna. We will meet in a frank and candid manner, informally. We are not representing the U.S. Government. We are not negotiating on behalf of this President. We are not negotiating on

behalf of Secretary Albright. In fact, we are doing what Strobe Talbott suggested in our meeting on Thursday was proper and appropriate, and that is continuing a dialogue with our Russian colleagues in the Duma.

The dialogue will focus on whether or not we, as Americans, Democrats and Republicans, and Russians of the seven major factions in the Duma, can come together in a common solution that Russia can live with and that Russia feels they can convince Milosevic to accept and, at the same time, an agreement that retains the dignity and the respect of NATO and our government.

Madam Speaker, I think that is possible. I see the real difficult issue right now not in getting the Russians to agree that NATO's initiatives, its 5-point plan, should be agreed to. The Russians have already said that they understand the need for NATO to play that key role.

The key issue for the Russians and for Milosevic and the Serbs is their contention that the multinational ground force that is put into place to enforce the agreement should not include any ground troops from those countries that are currently bombing Serbia. Obviously, that includes the U.S. and Great Britain, because our two nations are flying almost 90 percent of the bombing sorties in the former Yugoslavia.

Now, Madam Speaker, personally, I do not have a problem with that. In fact, I think it is the right thing to do. If Britain and America are completing 90 percent of the bombing sorties, I think it only fair that the multinational force on the ground should be made up primarily of European countries, and, in this case, NATO countries.

Now, the Russians have even gone so far as to suggested where some of those troops might come from. They suggested Greece, the Netherlands, Poland, and Albania. They even suggested Russia itself would put troops in, if that be our desire. The key issue for us is convincing the Russians and having them convince the Serbs and Milosevic that the oversight of that international peacekeeping effort must involve NATO and must involve the U.S.

Madam Speaker, we have an opportunity to resolve this crisis without further bloodshed. I was hoping, Madam Speaker, that we would not have to vote tomorrow on these resolutions, because they are not the kind of resolutions that are constructive in this debate. I was hoping, and I proposed to our leadership and I am going to propose to the Committee on Rules, as I did to the Committee on International Relations today, that tomorrow we postpone the actual vote on these resolutions until next week, to give a delegation of this body a chance to reach out with our Russian colleagues to see whether or not we can come to agreement on a common agenda for peace that maintains and retains the dignity of NATO and the United

States, and also allows Russia to play that critical role in leveraging Milosevic and the Serbs to come to the table.

I am confident that we can do that, Madam Speaker, because I understand the intensity of the Russians in their conversations with me. And I understand the fact that they are talking to some of Milosevic's most senior advisers, people who are helping to fund his regime in Belgrade, people who are supporting him politically. They now have come to the belief that we have to find some common way out of this situation, short of a continuation of this massive aerial assault and, eventually, the insertion of American and allied troops in what will be a costly and bloody ground war.

Madam Speaker, we should not lose this opportunity. The Russians have come to the table. I think we should take them up on this initiative.

Now, some would say, wait a minute; on Saturday Chernomyrdin was sent to Belgrade to discuss with Milosevic the terms of a possible settlement. We welcomed that, Madam Speaker. That was critically important. And, in fact, when I talked to Ryshkov I asked about that, and he said that Chernomyrdin was entirely supportive of the efforts of the Duma to work with us to continue to explore common ground. In fact, he also said that not only was Chernomyrdin supportive, but also supportive of the leader of the Communist faction Seleznyov; an unbelievable opportunity to bring all the factions together to try to find a common solution.

Those who follow Russia understand that Yeltsin right now is very unpopular. His popularity in Russia is below 10 percent. He only hangs onto his title but does not enjoy the broad-based support of the Russian people. Our administration, Madam Speaker, has been working for the last 7 years and up until this day with the Yeltsin government, with Chernomyrdin. Our initiative does not just stop with the Yeltsin government. We bring in all the other factions: the Communist faction, the Yablako faction, the Nosh Dom faction, the People's Power faction, the agrarians, the regional faction, and even the LDPR, and we present a broad-based coalition of the future of Russia. Not the past of Russia, not the Yeltsin government, which is on its way out this year, but the future of Russian government, those parties from where the leadership of Russia will come in the elections to be held later this year.

Our goal is to engage that new group of leaders to find a way that we can come together that retains the dignity of NATO and the dignity of our government. This was not, in any stretch of the imagination, an attempt to undermine the hard work being done by this administration. And I applaud the efforts that are now underway and the recent visit, after our meeting on Thursday with Strobe Talbott, the de-

ployment of Strobe Talbott to Moscow over the weekend, where he has held meetings with Chernomyrdin.

What I am saying, Madam Speaker, is that this Congress can play and should play a legitimate role. We have an opportunity that we must not let pass by, and I would ask our colleagues to rise up with one voice to both Democrat leaders and Republican leaders and say the time for partisanship is over. We have a bipartisan opportunity, with Democrats and Republicans working together, to reach out to our colleagues in the Duma of all factions and find common ground to let the Russians exert their leverage over Milosevic to end this crisis in a peaceful way.

I see my good friend and colleague has arrived. He was one of those that I first went to last week after I went to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) and the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. MURTHA). The third Democrat that I approached was the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. NEIL ABERCROMBIE). He had just returned from Kosovo. He knew the situation firsthand. I value his judgment and his respect among his colleagues, not just on his side but in the entire Congress.

I wanted the gentleman from Hawaii involved. Along with the gentleman from Hawaii, I approached the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. ROD BLAGOJEVICH), and I did so because the Chicago Democrat is the only one I know of with an ethnic Serbian heritage. I felt it was critically important to have him involved in this effort as well. And I also approached the gentleman from New York (Mr. MAURICE HINCHEY) because he had accompanied me on a trip to Russia in December and I was impressed with his willingness to work with the Russians.

These were the five Democrats I approached, Madam Speaker, before I approached even one Republican. This was an attempt at bipartisanship, and I hope that we can continue to build momentum, to show the world that we do not want this to end up in war but we do want to resolve this conflict peacefully.

Madam Speaker, I yield to my good friend and colleague from Hawaii.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman very much, and I particularly want to at this time commend the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON), although I know he never looks for that kind of approbation because he is devoted to his duty here in the Congress of the United States, but, nonetheless, I want to indicate the great affection and personal regard I have for him, not only on the basis of his commitment to his duties but on the basis of his commitment to us here in the Congress and trying to resolve this issue in a manner that can be seen as honorable by all parties concerned.

I would like to enter, Madam Speaker, into a little bit of a dialogue with the gentleman from Pennsylvania on

the basis that all of us who are consumed by this issue virtually daily now may be very familiar with the terms of our discussion, the terms of our dialogue, perhaps even the context within which we hope a dialogue will be taking place not only in the Congress but perhaps internationally as well; but not all of our colleagues necessarily may be familiar with all the terms and the individuals, all the particular contexts, and certainly those who may review the record and hear us speaking may not be entirely familiar. So what I would like to do, if it is all right with the gentleman from Pennsylvania, is perhaps engage him in a bit of discussion that will, hopefully, illuminate some of the details.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Absolutely.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. I think it is crucial for us to understand that this is not some kind of, even if it is bipartisan, it is not some kind of a bipartisan rump group that may have suddenly come together in an ad hoc way, attempting to substitute itself for either the State Department or the administration or, for that matter, the will of the Congress.

I think that is an accurate statement, and we need to flesh it out a little bit in order to make clear that that kind of an accusation or that kind of a conclusion that someone might draw superficially is inaccurate.

The reason I say that it is inaccurate is there not a Duma-Congress working group formally established between the Congress of the United States, the House of Representatives for certain, and members of the Duma that actually has a working relationship which, in fact, has been taking place over some period of time now, not only in Russia but in the very halls of the Congress.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. In fact, the gentleman is absolutely correct. As I mentioned at the outset, this initiative was supported initially by both Speaker Gingrich and the minority leader, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GEPHARDT), and has had the highest support of the senior leadership of the Russian Duma, Speaker Seleznyov. There was an exchange of letters and a formal process established.

The gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER), is the Democrat co-chair; I am the Republican co-chair. We have met on a regular basis, twice a year, once in Russia, once in this country, and we have discussed serious issues that in some cases are really issues involving our two foreign affairs agencies in operations or issues involving the presidents.

Our role has never been to try to give the impression that we were speaking for anyone other than ourselves in that relationship.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. So the individuals involved here have been those who have expressed an interest in trying to take up the challenge that has been

presented to us with the ending of the Cold War in order to establish relations between Russia, not the former Soviet Union, but Russia and the Newly Independent States with the United States of America in a manner and in a context which will help to establish not only peaceful relations but relations which will help to bring stability.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. In fact, I would say to the gentleman that not only is that the case and that that has been our mission, I can provide for the record to any Member who would so choose, statements from former Secretary of Defense Perry, current Secretary of Defense Cohen, current Ambassador for the U.S. in Moscow, Jim Collins, and a whole host of other people who have issued praise for the work that we have undertaken in building long-term, more stable relationships because of our efforts.

In fact, when the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) and I met with Strobe Talbott, he spent 10 minutes of that discussion praising us for the work that we have been doing, telling us how important that work is for his job at the State Department in negotiating with Russia, telling us how important it is for the President to have a supporting congressional group.

In fact, during the Gore-Chernomyridin Commission of 5 years ago, when we established this, it was Vice President GORE and Victor Chernomyrdin who had us stand alongside them, and said we are proud to see the formation of a formal working relationship because it is so critically important for solving the long-term problems we face.

And a further example of our efforts in the area of relations involving foreign affairs was when the Russian Duma did not support President Clinton's bombing of Baghdad and the bombing of Saddam Hussein.

□ 2145

I agreed on behalf of the administration to travel to Moscow and to meet with Duma deputies as a citizen and as a parliamentarian to convince them of why I was supporting the President. I was not there to negotiate. I was there to convince them of the President's position.

And when they came over to America, Luhkin chaired a six-member delegation from the Duma from all factions. The first stop he made after he landed at Dulles Airport was in my office. They spent 2 hours one night, where I dialogued with them, I showed them evidence, and I tried to convince them of the reason why I, as a Republican, supported the President and his position in dealing with Saddam Hussein.

So anyone that would somehow misconstrue what we are doing can be totally refuted by the facts.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. So this is not, in fact, a paper organization or merely something that was signed for the pro forma effect, but rather a working rela-

tionship that, if I remember correctly, just this year had over in the Rayburn Building a formal meeting complete with simultaneous translators and minutes being kept of exchanges between the Duma and Members of the United States Congress.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, in fact, I would tell my colleague not only is he true and correct, but when I led a delegation in December to Moscow for our part of the exchange, we were the first western Democratic parliament to be taken into the Duma chambers while they were in session, not something that would never happen in this body because of our House rules.

The Speaker of the Duma who was conducting this session with the Duma members in attendance, and they seat 450 in that auditorium, saw us up in the balcony, stopped the proceedings, and announced that up in the balcony were the Democrat and Republican Members of the American Congress who were working together with the Duma deputies to find common solutions to common problems.

The Duma then gave us a standing ovation and stopping their proceedings in acknowledging our presence and the importance of our work.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. And is not one of the reasons, then, that we are trying to pursue this particular course, regardless of the individual items right now which may not make up an agenda that we might want to present, is it not the case, then, that what we are trying to do here with what might be called a Balkan working group is to try to take advantage then of the good relations that have been built up, to try to take advantage of the opportunity that exists as parliamentarians, fellow parliamentarians, reaching out to them to ask for them to utilize their good offices in this instance?

It is not us dictating a particular set of terms or acting as some kind of front men for any particular stands or positions that have been concocted in one venue or another, but rather that we are making a good-faith effort to reach out to in this instance particularly members of the Duma, to ask them to utilize a diplomatic effort which has a long history, a long and honorable history, that is to say the utilization of good offices and in this instance with the Government of Yugoslavia?

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Absolutely. In fact, my good friend and colleague knows my reputation. I am one of Russia's strongest critics. In fact, it was not too long ago I was on this floor offering a bill strongly opposed by the administration that would in fact require us to deploy a national missile defense.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Yes. I had to explain myself ever since for supporting it.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Many of our colleagues felt that this would endanger our relationship with Russia.

I am at one and the same time Russia's strongest critic on proliferation, on transparency, on strategic relationships. But I also consider myself their best friend.

The Russians believe in strength, consistency, and candor. When we are strong with them, when we are consistent, and when we are candid they want to work with us. Our relationship with the Russians has been built on that. And the reason why this is so critically important gets back to that first series of phone calls that were made to me.

Our Russian friends, the pro-Western leaders, were pleading with me saying, "CURT, you have to understand what is happening here. We have not seen the hostility toward America this bad since pre-1991. We are hearing people in the Duma who have been our friends say nasty things about America and are driving us to support the nationalists who are calling for more aggressive action on Russia's part."

They said, "You have to understand America. We are going to have our parliamentary elections this year. If this continues, you may well drive Russia into electing an entirely communist Duma and perhaps a reactionary leader of our country. That is the worst thing you want in America."

What they said is, "You have to assist us, help us find a way as supporters of our western involvement, as people who want to have stronger ties with your country, help us find a way to find that middle ground that lets you have the dignity you need and comes out with the kind of effort that you want to come out of this through NATO's negotiations but also lets us have a plan that we can convince Milosevic that he must accept."

That was the kind of message that was given to me by the Duma deputies who pleaded 3½ weeks ago for us to reach out with them and try to find this common solution.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. In terms of our motivation, which I think is really sufficient just in the explanation that we have been giving right now on the basis of this dialog, I think that is more than sufficient to justify the effort being made.

But there may be some who are somewhat skeptical of the idea that this is a bipartisan situation or that, regardless of the sincerity that my colleague and I may have or others may have in association with this, that perhaps there is going to end up a situation in which blame will be cast and accusations will be made, fingers will be pointed.

But I think it would be fair to say, and I would be interested in the comments of my colleague or observations on my remarks, I think it is fair to say that we are concerned about whether or not this is going to work both from a practical military standpoint and from the idea also very, very important as to the future of NATO, the future of defense alliances, the future of the

United States in terms of its credibility.

The initial premises upon which the military activity was instigated included the prevention of ethnic cleansing, or certainly its alleviation, the easing of tensions in the Balkan region, and the extension of the credibility of NATO as a defensive alliance.

And I think it is fair to say for many of us in the Congress, those premises are not only not being met but we believe that unless and until an alternative resolution can be found, those premises are being undermined if not actually thwarted or contradicted. And if this situation is not resolved, if we just continue on with the bombing so that the bombing becomes its own reason for being, then we will find ourselves in a situation in which the Congress, at a minimum, let alone the people of the United States, will find themselves in a position of having to passively stand by and let events get in the saddle and ride us.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Absolutely. To get to the first point of the gentleman, the blame game has got to end. This should not be a time, with American troops in harm's way, that we pick partisan fights back and forth over who can blame the other side the most. We are where we are.

And I would say to the gentleman, I would say that probably 99, if not all of our colleagues, 99 percent of them agree with us that the end game is the same for all of us. We all think that Milosevic's activities have been outrageous. In fact, many of us think he should be held for war crimes that are being committed by the Serbs.

We all feel that this conflict must be ended while keeping the dignity and the coordination of NATO intact. We all want to have the reputation of the U.S. intact. Our end results that all of us want are the same. The question is, how do we get there?

Do we continue this massive aerial bombing campaign? Do we allow ourselves to slide into a ground war which could pose a direct confrontation between NATO and the U.S. and Russia, which would be dangerous, or do we try to find out using whatever means we have to figure if there is an alternative?

We have a means that no one else has, and that means was established 5 years ago. We did not approach the Russians. The Russians came to me 3½ weeks ago and they pleaded with me to reach out to see if we could find a new way. And in doing this, and I want to repeat this, I talked to no Member of the Republican party. Every contact I had for the 3 weeks that I was talking to the Russians in over 20 conversations and exchanges of information were with leaders from the administration, the intelligence community, the Security Council, or Members of the other side.

It was not until last week that I spent 5 minutes briefing the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) and then

I briefed the Speaker of the House. They were the only two Republicans.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. I was smiling a bit, because the Members of the other side, of course, are the Democrats, not the Russians.

That does highlight the point we are trying to make here that this is an effort being made by American parliamentarians with counterparts in the Russian Duma on the basis that we have a vehicle for discussion that is formally established and institutionalized between the Congress and the Russian parliament, known as the Duma, and that we want to take full advantage of that in the interest of peace.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Absolutely, totally correct. Nothing else can be inferred from what we are doing. No one should raise the issue of arm-chair secretaries of State because that is not what we are about.

If we reach a conclusion in our discussions over the weekend with our Russian colleagues that they feel Milosevic will accept, we then have to come back and convince our Government that this is, in fact, something that they too can live with. That is not our call as to whether or not they will accept it. That is up to our Government to decide the ultimate position of the U.S.

But we do have the right as parliamentarians to negotiate with our counterparts along the lines of what we think will work but also what we think our administration would accept. If they do not accept it, that is their choice. If they do, all of us are better.

In fact, when I had originally planned to go over there, I had offered to take an employee of the State Department with me. Andre Lewis works with Steve Sestanovich and he was going to go with us so we would have a State Department spokesperson there.

I even went as far as to say this to Strobe Talbott. I said, "If we go ahead with this, you script out what you want us to say and we will read your words." There was never an attempt to try to usurp the authority of the executive branch to do its job. We are simply using contacts that we have to go a different route.

And the reason why this is so important: For the past 7 years, the relationship between Russia and the U.S. has been primarily based on two people, the two presidents, Clinton and Yeltsin. And that was great when Yeltsin was strong. Yeltsin is no longer strong. And yet we did not pursue the other power centers in Russia the way we should have.

We did in our relationship. And our strength is in those other power centers, in those other factions who will provide the future leadership of Russia. And that is why what we are doing is so important because it complements the discussions that are being held between the White House and the Yeltsin, Primakov, Chernomyrdin effort in Moscow.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. So while we expect the administration to do its job,

we in the Congress have a job also, we in the Congress have a constitutional duty to perform, particularly when it comes to issues of war and peace, when it comes to deciding budgets and deciding directions and policies with respect to war and peace. That is, in fact, our obligation and our duty.

So it is important I think, then, as we move towards, hopefully, some opportunity to pursue the initiative that my colleague has outlined so well I think it is important that we then have as the bottom-line motivation to be understood, not only by our colleagues but by the American people, we have as the bottom-line motivation that we want the interests of the United States to be protected by all means, and there is no question about that, but that the interest of the United States of America in terms of not being an Imperial power, not being a 21st century version of old Rome, in terms of attempting to make a good-faith effort to secure the universal declaration of human rights in a meaningful way, to see to it that, as American power is exercised, it is exercised on behalf of peace and the poor and the helpless.

□ 2200

Those are not abstract philosophical elements as we see it, I believe. I think I am speaking for you as well as myself under these circumstances.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Absolutely.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. And those who are wanting to join with us in this effort with the Russians. We are not engaged in an academic exercise. What this is is carrying out our fundamental duty as Members of Congress, working together on behalf of the interests of the United States and the peace of the world, and to the degree, to any degree that we can advance that cause, I think then that it is our solemn and serious duty to carry forward with it. Now, I know that is acceptable to you. I hope it is acceptable to our colleagues. That is in fact our motivation, that is our interest, that is our intention. I trust that at the conclusion of tonight's special order and as we moved to the days ahead that we will be able to carry through on the task that we have set before us. My hope is that others will join us, that this is by no means an exclusive group or any kind of self-appointed points on any diplomatic spear or anything of that kind. We are just reaching out to one another in an open way with a working group based on the Duma-Congressional relationship that we hope will succeed in at least helping to form a foundation for a peaceful resolution of the current situation.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. The gentleman is absolutely correct. In fact, as he well knows, we had our first kind of like organizational meeting this evening at 7 o'clock or 8 o'clock down in the HC-6 room. We agreed that tomorrow night, we would have a second meeting and we would welcome

any of our colleagues from either party to come in and sit down with us as we strategize the way to move forward. In fact, I would ask, Madam Speaker, to insert in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD this Dear Colleague memo that I sent to every one of the 435 House Members today which outlines in detail exactly what we have done up until now.

The text of the memo is as follows:

APRIL 27, 1999.

DUMA-CONGRESS PEACE PLAN ON KOSOVO
REBUFFED BY ADMINISTRATION; BI-LATERAL
DISCUSSIONS CONTINUE

DEAR COLLEAGUE. As you may know, late last week I was forced to cancel a proposed joint mission to Belgrade by Russian and American members of the Duma-Congress Working Group. This trip would have been the culmination of a proactive effort by many of the top leaders in Russia to solve the Kosovo without resorting to ground combat. At the eleventh hour, Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott informed me that the Administration did not support the trip. Without the support of my own government, I decided to cancel the trip.

I want to give the House a full accounting of the genesis of this proposed trip, and the painstaking efforts that were made to make it a success. I firmly believe that the Clinton Administration missed a potentially historic opportunity to bring this conflict to an end without further bloodshed.

THE DUMA'S PROPOSAL

The idea of a joint U.S.-Russian delegation to Belgrade was first broached in an e-mail to me from Sergei Konovalevko, the secretary of the Russian Duma, on April 8. He suggested the following be used as the basis for a joint U.S.-Russian peace proposal for Kosovo. I think you will agree that it is especially forthcoming:

1. Russia guarantees that there will be no more ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.

2. Serbia agree to all NATO conditions, including international troops in Kosovo. (Russia suggested, however, that the force be comprised primarily of countries not involved in the NATO bombing campaign.) The troops would agree to stay in Kosovo for at least ten years.

3. An interparliamentary group from Russia, the U.S. and NATO countries be formed to monitor all agreements. The group would be under the auspices of the U.N.

Amazingly, the Russians had proposed a peace agreement that complied with all the NATO demands.

The Russian parliamentarians, representing all the factions of the Duma, had just returned from a delegation trip to Belgrade. This delegation met with the entire Serbian high command, including extensive meetings with Milosevic himself. The Duma leaders felt confident that they (as friends of Milosevic) could get him to agree with these conditions.

The following week, I wrote to my Duma counterpart, Vladimir Ryzhkov (Deputy Speaker of the Duma, who would lead the Duma delegation) and made four requests of him. First, that an official invitation be extended in writing from the Duma, including the names of the entire Duma delegation. Second, that the trip to Belgrade include a face to face meeting with Milosevic himself. Third, that the Duma set up a meeting with the American POWs. Lastly, that the Duma delegation agree to accompany our delegation to a Kosovar refugee camp of our choosing.

On April 21, Deputy Ryzhkov wrote to me, with agreement on all issues.

THE DUMA VIEWPOINT

There are many reasons why the Russians were so proactive and engaging on such a

crucial issue. First, these Duma leaders, many of whom are young, well-informed and realistic about the U.S. and the west, represent the future of Russia. The tottering, unpopular and reactive Yeltsin regime represents the past. Unfortunately, this Administration has embraced Yeltsin with all the misplaced fervor with which its predecessor embraced Gorbachev. Then as now, we cling to the current regime to the detriment of our relations with other emerging power centers in Russia.

In addition, these Duma leaders are extremely wary of the rising nationalist fervor that the conflict in Kosovo has triggered in Russia. The perception that Russia is unimportant to the Kosovo operation does not sit well with Russians accustomed to superpower status. The Duma leadership is worried that Yeltsin will respond to this nationalism by taking drastic actions that could further isolate Russia from the west.

It is therefore in Russia's interest to have this conflict over quickly. The Duma leaders are realists, however. They understand that NATO has the upper hand and will only end the conflict on terms of its own choosing. That is why they are willing to support an end to the conflict largely on NATO's terms.

ATTEMPTING TO WORK WITH THE
ADMINISTRATION

Given this major breakthrough in the official Russian position, I immediately attempted to win Administration support for the joint effort. During that same week, I spoke with Leon Feurth of the Vice President's staff and NSC staff member Carlos Pascual.

During that same week, I briefed by phone CIA Director George Tenet and Ambassador Steve Sestanovich, the State Department official in charge of Russia and the Newly Independent States.

With this agreement in hand, I began to brief key Democrats to urge that they enlist the Administration's support. After several calls to National Security Adviser Sandy Berger went unreturned, Congressman Hoyer set up a face to face meeting with Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott on April 22. That meeting lasted more than two hours. At that meeting Congressman Hoyer and I made clear that our goal and the Administration's goal was the same—to get Milosevic to agree to NATO's conditions. Period. We would not be there to negotiate. Our presence was critical only to demonstrate to Milosevic that Russia and the U.S. were united on this critical issue.

That same day, I briefed Speaker Hastert and Majority Leader Armey. The Speaker agreed to authorize the trip if the Administration did not object.

That evening, Deputy Secretary Talbott called to inform me that after discussions with the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense, the Administration would not support the joint delegation. I feel strongly that the Clinton-Gore team allowed a tremendous opportunity to slip through its fingers.

NEXT STEPS FOR U.S.-RUSSIAN COOPERATION ON
KOSOVO

I cannot understand why the Administration would reject out of hand an offer by the Russians to help NATO achieve its goals. After spending the better part of a week urging the Russians to act constructively, our government rebuffed a good-faith effort by some of the top leaders in Russia to help end the crisis on NATO's terms. To say that I am puzzled would be an understatement.

Many Republicans and Democrats want to stay the course with the Russians. In fact, the Administration itself supported the idea of the two delegations meeting in a neutral country to work out a joint agreement which could then be presented to Milosevic.

I am inclined to pursue this option—and so are our Russian counterparts. To that end, I would like to form a special House Working Group on U.S.-Russian Cooperation on Kosovo to pursue specific initiatives to help us resolve the Kosovo crisis without a ground campaign. If you would like to join me in this effort, please contact me or Erin Coyle in my office at 5-2011.

Sincerely,

CURT WELDON,
Member of Congress.

I would encourage my good friend to invite those from his side and I will invite those from my side to join us in this effort. I think not only can we play a role in engaging the Duma to show them that we appreciate their good work, but hopefully to find a commonality between us. But I think by doing this, we send the signal to both the administration and other nations that we want to find a way to resolve this conflict that leaves respect for all of us and for NATO.

I called some of the NATO governments today, Greece, Italy, Germany. I told you about the Ukraine statement of President Kuchma, trying to ascertain what their feelings are. Surprisingly, many of our allies also want to retain the strength and dignity of NATO but also want to see the kind of efforts that we are doing succeed. They do not want to see this under any circumstance result in a ground war that causes significant loss of life and could well lead to a world conflict because of the potential confrontation of the U.S. with Russia. I think we are on the right track. We know where we are going. This is not some radical effort. I could have gone over to Belgrade on Sunday. I did not have to have the permission of our government.

DUMA-CONGRESS PEACE PLAN ON
KOSOVO

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. I thank my colleague and friend for yielding.

I would just say that we could have gone that route. We could have gone into Belgrade. We could have done that as other people have done and as people are doing right now. Jesse Jackson, I understand, is over there right now without the support of this government. We did not do that. We chose the constructive route. We will continue that route.

I just want to say in closing, I want to thank my friend and colleague for his effort, because he has received criticism on his side as I have on mine. In the end we know we are doing the right thing.