What is also outrageous is the reaction of the Health Benefits Coalition, a group of business organizations and health insurers that is lobbing against patients' rights in Congress. Ganske properly evaluted this thoughtless proposal than the coalition issued a press release with the headline: Ganske Managed Care Reform Act—A Kennedy-Dingell Cure? The headline referred to Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., and Rep. John D. Dingell, D-Mich., toughening the patients' rights proposal that contains no punitive damage protection for health plans.

The press release said: "Ganske describes his net 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 that his net bill would have a solid plan to end the conflict 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 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 be able to make leads me to believe that is not the right course for us to be taking.

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, 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.

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 week. We could bring this to the floor and have a vote. 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 conflict 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 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 be able to make leads me to believe 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 U.S. more directly in the conflict, to 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 today 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 Kosovo people to return to their homes, 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 which allowed the movement of our 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 Russian counterpart from the National Security Committee and former Ambassador Sestanovich who works directly for the Vice President. I went into the discussion with each of them, and 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 parliamentarians of our two nations, the Russian Duma and the American Congress.

Now, I was surprised, Madam Speaker, because I said to my Russian friends in Congress 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. When I received this offer, 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 Panetta. 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 I 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 together, 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 we had a personal 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. Strobe 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 Lebedev. 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 find a peaceful solution in terms of the Kosovo crisis.

Also that week, Madam Speaker, I approached two Members of Congress. Neither of them were Republicans. They are both Democrats, and they are good friends of mine 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).

The gentleman from Maryland (Mr. STENY HOYER) is my counterpart and colleague in the Russian Duma-Congress initiative. 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 both by telephone and by a formal offer. He said, Congressman, I think through our discussions that we may have an opportunity to find common
Milosevic must agree to NATO
were united in the understanding that
face with Milosevic to try to convince
in Budapest.
He suggested that we meet in Hungary,
bring a delegation of Republicans and
ground. He said, I would like you to
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made. He put the request in writing. He
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Speaker, Ryshkov wrote back to me
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s the own party.
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s terms,

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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, I having one day of discus-
sions that could be followed, as-
suming 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 Demor-
crats were united across the spectrum
were in the understanding that
Milosevic must agree to NATO's terms,
and that it was in Serbia's best inter-
ests to come to the table and agree
with the position taken by our govern-
m ents 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 lead-
ership in the country and in the Con-
gress.
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 ter-
rible atrocities that have been com-
mitted 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 party.
The second member was Luhkin,
a leader in the Yabloko faction, a main-
stream pro-west faction. In fact,
Luhkin said it would have been the
first time ever that the Yabloko fac-
tion 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 Bel-
grade.
The third member of the delegation
would be sharp an off, a senior Com-
munist 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. Gorbachev, a member of the Peo-
ples' Power faction, a very respected
member of the Duma.
The fifth member would have been
Sergei Konovalevko, 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 peo-
ple 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
as we want: a stable world, a stable
country, stable economic growth, free
democracy, and a closer, stronger rela-
tionship with the U.S.
The third request was for the date
and time certain for the meeting with
Milosevic. The Russians got that assur-
ance from Mr. Hoyer's to Merv}
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?
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 lead-
ers travel with us to a Macedonian ref-
ugee camp of our choice. In fact, I con-
Sulted with the State Department to
obtain the location of the two most
dramatic refugee camps, to let the Rus-
sians 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 met face to face with Mr. Hoyer
in Sofia, and the Russians would have
gone to Moscow.
The following week we would have
met in Washington to continue our dis-
cussions, 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 administra-
tion. 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 intel-
lence community, I had briefed the
president, I had briefed the Deputy
White House. I have not told any Repub-
licans. 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 me 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 (Speak-
er HASTERT) was that he was sup-
portive, 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 sand-
wich with the Deputy Secretary of
State, and for about 1½, Madam Spea-
cer, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr.
HOYER), Strobe Talbott and three of his senior staff ex-

pert s on Russia to discuss the initia-
tive in detail.
I went through all the background.
I talked about the purpose, that we were
not going to Belgrade for the reason be-
cause we were not representatives of
the administration, we are not Secre-
taries of State. That was never our in-
tent, and that would never be our de-
sire.
We were there to present a common,
unified front. Russian elected officials,
American elected officials, in soli-
darity to Milosevic saying that this
must end, and he must understand that
as individuals who both supported the
Yeltsins and opposed the President,
we now felt it important to give him
one last chance to find a way to peace-
fully 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, be-
cause we were not representatives of
the administration, we are not Secret-
taries of State. That was never our in-
tent, and that would never be our de-
sire.
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unified front, Russian elected officials,
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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.

The second issue that was raised by
Deputy Secretary of State Talbott was,
Conrad's fearless; he has none of your usual patience. What you think of him?
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 advisors, 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. No, I 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 this and he thought 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.

The way I understand it, the 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 Yabloko 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 regime, which looks like this Pensyl-

employment 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, and we cannot 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 to reach out and 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 mayor is one man who 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 HINCHLEY) 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 indicate the great affection and personal regard I have for the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON), although I know he never looks for that kind of appro-

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 group that has 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.

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), 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 operating 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 in a manner and in a context which will help to establish not only peaceful relations but situations 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 Strohauser 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-Chernomyrdin Commission of 5 years ago, when we established this, it was Vice President Gore and Victor Chernomyrdin who had us stand alongside of them and frame 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.

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 now 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?

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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.

I think it is important that we 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 special relationship 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 armchair secretaries of State because that is not what we are about.

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. Their words 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 Strobe Talbott. I said, ‘If we go ahead this way, that Milosevic will accept, we then have to come back and convince our Government that this is in fact, something that they 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.

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Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Absolutely. We all want to have the reputation of the U.S. intact. Our end results that all of us want to have the reputation of the United States, will find themselves 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 way and ride us.

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 and not approved by 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
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 House member 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

DEAR COLLEAGUE. As you may know, late last week I was asked 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 was given 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 believe that the 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 Konovalenko, the secretary of the Russian Duma, on April 8. He suggested that the trip 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 ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.
2. Serbia agrees 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 to 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. I was pleased to learn that the Duma delegation agreed to stay in Kosovo for at least ten years.

Second, that the trip to Belgrade include a face-to-face meeting with Milosevic himself. The Duma leaders felt confident that they (as friends of Milosevic) could get him to agree to these conditions.

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, agreeing to all these items.

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 totering, government-repopulated states in Europe represent 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. Without the support of my own government, they felt unable to bring this conflict to an end. 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 remarkable approach in the official Russian position, I immediately attempted to win Administration support for the joint effort. During that same week, I spoke with Leonid Kuchma, President Yeltsin’s counterpart, Vladimir Ryzhkov (Deputy Speaker of the Duma), and several members 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 the U.S. had 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 a joint delegation 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 Coyler in my office at 5-2011.

Sincerely,

CURT WELDON
Member of Congress.