

June 13 / Administration of George Bush, 1991

and the very special kids that you love.
Thank you all very much.

Note: The President spoke at 10:02 a.m. on the grounds of the hospital. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis W. Sullivan; Antonia

C. Novello, Surgeon General of the Public Health Service; Constance U. Battle, chief executive officer and medical director of the hospital; Stephen Montgomery, chairman of the hospital's board of directors; and patient Bobetta Ricks.

Remarks on Signing the Baltic Freedom Day Proclamation

June 13, 1991

Welcome everybody, and please be seated. First of all, may I welcome Senator Riegle from Michigan and Congressmen Ritter and Hertel with us here today. Just delighted to have you here. And let me begin by thanking all of you. I'm sure it's inconvenient coming from as far away as some of you have, but you're welcome here, and we're delighted to have you.

I had the pleasure of meeting some of you all a few months ago here at the White House. And I, frankly, valued and got a lot out of the exchange of views on the situations in the Baltic. And I pledged then and pledge again our desire to continue close consultation with Baltic-Americans from whatever State and, of course, the Congress as well on these important questions.

And it's an honor to mark this occasion, this important occasion with so many of the men and women who champion the cause—and have for years—of freedom for the Baltics.

More than 50 years have passed since the dark days of June in 1940, when three sovereign nations were subjugated by superior force. In those 50 years, the courage of the Baltic peoples has shown that force can subjugate a nation, but it cannot rob a people of their desire to be free.

Never has anyone in this room believed that the fate of the Baltic States was sealed by that secret pact between Hitler and Stalin. Never has the United States recognized the forcible incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union. Never in five long decades have the people there and all of you too, I might add, lost hope: the

indomitable spirit that sustains the history and heritage of the Baltics. Generations of sons and daughters who have never known freedom have faith that the Baltics will one day once more be free. Today, that dream of self-determination, the Baltics' democratic destiny, burns fiercely and bright.

In Estonia, in Lithuania, and Latvia, freely elected legislatures now govern in the name of the people. The popular will has expressed its clear and unmistakable desire for freedom. And in the face of violence and intimidation, the Baltic peoples and their freely elected leaders have steadfastly refused to answer violence with violence, preferring the path of peace and principle.

The resumption of negotiations between the Soviet Government and the Baltic States is a positive step. And yet there's much reason to be concerned about recent Soviet actions against customs posts in Lithuania and Latvia and the ongoing Soviet occupation of broadcast facilities in Vilnius—acts that are incompatible with the process of peaceful change. Good-faith negotiations cannot go forward in an atmosphere of threat and intimidation.

And this nation has taken steps to demonstrate our support of the Baltic nations, the people there. In February, through the generous support of many of the groups represented here today, the U.S. shipped emergency medical supplies to Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia. And I'm proud to say that since the response from the Baltic-American community has been so tremendous, we'll soon send a second shipment to the Baltics. These shipments are but one side of the affinity we feel as Americans with the

aspirations of all the Baltic peoples.

In May, I met here in the White House with the elected leaders of Lithuania and Estonia and Latvia—and my sixth meeting, incidentally, sixth meeting with the Baltic leaders in the past 12 months. And I will tell you today what I told them: At every opportunity, I and other members of our administration have made clear to President Gorbachev and to the other Soviet leaders this nation's firm belief in the legitimate aspirations of the Baltic States. The fate of freedom in the Baltics will remain high on our agenda.

So, once more, keep up your good work. I think the educational process that all of you are engaged in as you help other Americans understand what's at stake here is very

important to the ultimate solution to these problems. And I'm delighted to have you here. And may I say, God bless the people of the Baltics. And now I want to ask the Members of Congress to come up with me as I sign the proclamation designating June 14, 1991, Baltic Freedom Day.

Thank you all very much.

Note: The President spoke at 2:20 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Donald W. Riegle, Jr.; Representatives Don Ritter and Dennis M. Hertel; and President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union. The proclamation is listed in Appendix E at the end of this volume.

Statement on Signing the Bill Providing Humanitarian Assistance for Iraqi Refugees and Displaced Persons

June 13, 1991

Today I have signed H.R. 2251, an Act that provides supplemental appropriations for humanitarian assistance to refugees and displaced persons in and around Iraq and for peacekeeping activities.

I am pleased by the demonstration of bipartisan cooperation and the speed with which the Congress has worked to complete action on this legislation. This Act will enable the Departments of State and Defense and the Agency for International Development to continue their efforts on behalf of the refugees and displaced persons in and around Iraq, and to replenish those accounts which have been drawn down by the immense effort of Operation Provide Comfort. The funds provided in this Act are incremental costs of Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm.

In the 68 days since the initiation of Operation Provide Comfort, the United States has delivered by air and land over 17,000 tons of relief supplies and provided medical

assistance for thousands of Iraqi refugees and displaced persons who fled to the Turkey/Iraq border area. Countless lives were saved. Through American leadership, spearheaded so well by the military, 650,000 Iraqi refugees and displaced persons have left the inhospitable mountains and traveled to or through relief camps we built. Most are now returning to their homes. The last mountain camp has closed. The task of responding to this human tragedy is not over, but we can be grateful for what has been accomplished by the United States, the United Nations, and the international community.

GEORGE BUSH

The White House,
June 13, 1991.

Note: H.R. 2251, approved June 13, was assigned Public Law No. 102-55.