

Feb. 9 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1994

savings to the Government. And over a 5-year period, Senator Moynihan at the beginning of the day said the Government will spend \$7.5 trillion or something in the next 5 years. This \$70 billion, it's a big number, but spread out over 5 years we can easily work through it. I think we can reconcile that. I'm not worried about it.

President Boris Yeltsin of Russia

Q. Have you spoken to President Yeltsin on the Bosnia situation, Mr. President?

The President. Not yet. We're trying to set up telephone calls sometime today, and I think we'll talk today.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:54 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. The exchange portion of this item could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks to the World Jewish Congress February 9, 1994

The President. Thank you very much. Edgar Bronfman and Mr. Vice President and ladies and gentlemen, I'm delighted to be here with you today. It's a great honor for us to have you here at the White House. For 55 years, you have struggled in behalf of the Jewish people but also in behalf of all humanity. I thank you for that, and I thank you for your presence.

I'd also like to say a special word of appreciation for the example, for the vision, and the leadership of Edgar Bronfman. I know you know this, but I would also like to point out in this crowd that I am especially proud of the partnership I have enjoyed with the Vice President who has spoken out against bigotry and anti-Semitism not only in the United States but all over the world in the last year.

For all the good things that have happened in the last 10 years that the Vice President mentioned, we know a lot of very painful things have occurred also. We are everywhere reminded of the fragility of civilized life, of how easily people can fall back into the kinds of hatreds that lead to the blind actions that dehumanize all of us. That was brought home to me on my trip to Europe last month in many ways, perhaps most poignantly when I visited the Jewish cemetery in Prague.

I wish that bigotry were not all around us. I wish people still did not prefer killing and hating each other based on religious and ethnic differences anywhere, but it is a fact. It is also a fact that the insecurity and intolerance that we see tends to feed on itself so that after a while we look at places of conflict in the

world and we wonder why people are still killing each other over what may seem to be a very small piece of ground or a principle not worth the life of a single child. I think it is clear it is because of the accumulated impact of intolerance and hatred. Somehow all of us have to find a way in this world after the cold war, when we are not burdened by but also not as disciplined by conflicting ideologies, to get people to realize that they must move beyond these ancient, indeed antiquated, intolerances.

The Vice President told me a fascinating story today. We rode out to a place to announce the new drug policy of the administration, and we were talking about a lot of scientific subjects, which means that he mostly talked and I mostly listened, since he knows so much more about it than I do. But we started talking about the disappearance of Neanderthals and the various theories that exist about how Neanderthals disappeared and Homo sapiens emerged. And there are some who believe that, according to the Vice President, that the Neanderthals disappeared in what may be history's first instance of genocide.

There is something about human nature which causes us to hold fast to people we think are like us and sometimes be afraid of and want to be separate from people who are not. If it means a religious community living together in harmony with one another and respect for our neighbors, then it is a very positive and good and wholesome thing. If it gives cultures the chance to keep their families together and raise their children with strong values and with the

opportunity to be what God meant for them to be, then it is a good and strong thing. But how easily these differences spill over into hatreds that lead to bloodshed, and how difficult it is to put the world back together again once these things begin.

Since I have been President, we have tried to do what we could, consistent with our first obligation to rebuild the fabric of life in this country and the sense of harmony and community and respect for diversity in this country, to also deal with those problems around the world.

We have worked very hard to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, one that enhances Israel's security and offers the acceptance of normal life which has been too long denied to the citizens of that troubled region.

The first pillar of that approach is strengthening the relationship between the United States and Israel. When I first met Prime Minister Rabin last year, almost a year ago this week, he said that he would be willing to take risks for peace, and certainly he has been. Sometimes the opposition that he faces at home reminds me of the opposition I face from time to time. But clearly, he has been willing to take risks for peace. I told him if he should be willing to take those risks, then it was my responsibility as the President of the United States to minimize those risks. And I have tried to do that. The Prime Minister is fulfilling his commitment, and we are keeping ours. Our commitment to maintaining and enhancing the security of Israel is ironclad. And it is the precondition of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The second pillar of our approach is to ensure the successful implementation of the Israel-Palestinian Declaration of Principles. Both sides now have to begin to implement the agreement on the ground, and we are working hard to support that without interfering with it. Implementing the agreement on the ground is the only way to show the Israelis the agreement can enhance their security while providing a more normal life of more self-government for their Palestinian neighbors.

The third pillar of our approach is to get other negotiations back on track. The biggest challenge this year is to help Israel and Syria make peace. My meeting in Geneva with President Asad was designed to help to achieve that goal. As he said after the meeting, Syria has made a strategic decision for peace and wants

now, for the first time, normal, peaceful relations with Israel.

We have welcomed these statements, for they break new ground. We've also welcomed the Syrian decision to grant exit permits to all Syrian Jews who wish to leave. I understand the process of issuing visas is now virtually completed. But more will be required. Syria must demonstrate that it wants a full and meaningful peace to achieve the confidence of the people of Israel to make such a peace possible.

Finally, to achieve our goal of a comprehensive settlement, we are insisting that the Arab boycott of Israel end now. There must be a commitment to a new era of peace and prosperity which sees in the Middle East partnership with Israel. Israel must be the partner of these nations, no longer a pariah. And we are making progress on that.

Let me, if I might, speak briefly about the tragedy in Bosnia. I have been meeting with my national security team, and as I am sure most of you know, we have had urgent consultations which continue at this moment with our NATO allies in the wake of the atrocities last Saturday in Sarajevo.

Before I go forward, let me, as the Vice President did, note the presence of the president of the Jewish community of Sarajevo here, Mr. Ivan Ceresnjes, with whom I had a brief moment of conversation. We're glad to have you here, sir.

I expect that today, momentarily, NATO will agree on a firm response to the shelling of Sarajevo by the Serbs. But I also think that today we will begin to reinvigorate the negotiations to try to help to bring a permanent end to the bloodshed and aggression. Somehow the people of Bosnia must decide that it is not worth the continuation of killing each other. We are quite close, if you listen to what the parties say they want, to an agreement that all might be able to live with. Surely, surely in the wake of the horror last weekend, the parties will be able to, with a little support from the rest of us, reach an agreement that all can live with and honor.

Finally, let me say that here at home we need to retain our religious faith and our religious freedom as a source of our common community and strength and not as a source of division. The spiritual richness of our society was visible to many Americans and perhaps some of you in this room who attended a cere-

mony at the White House in November in which I signed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. It was a very important bill for Americans because it restored what the law was in our country before a decision of the Supreme Court. The law now says that in our country, the presumption is that people of any religious faith should be able to practice their faith and that the law should bend over backwards to let them do it, unless there is some serious and substantial damage to the public interest in so doing.

We had Jewish leaders here, the U.S. Catholic Conference, the National Association of Evangelicals, the National Islamic Prison Foundation. You wouldn't have believed all these people would stand together, arm in arm, to support a law. I hope that those groups in our country will not only support that law but will support its spirit. That is, we can't bend over backwards to respect each other's religious practices unless we actually do it in fact as well as in law. And we cannot use this power of political argument to beat down other people's religious convictions just because on occasion they conflict with our own. We are trying to do that in this country. I hope you will wish us well.

One of our counties, just one of our counties, Los Angeles County, has people from 150 different racial and ethnic groups. We believe this diversity can make America the greatest country in the world into the 21st century. But we have to find a way to take the guns out of the hands of our children, to restore peace and security to our streets and to our schools, to meet the basic needs of our people so that they will be

able to live with security and in comfort, not physical comfort but emotional comfort, the comfort that comes from believing you live in a just society where you are respected not only for your shared values but for the differences you have embraced.

That is the world we are working for. It may be that we will never achieve it, but it is certain that if we work together we will get much closer to our common goal.

Thank you very much.

Middle East and Bosnia

Q. Mr. President, will there be air strikes against the Serbs?

The President. Just a moment, I have an announcement.

I just was informed—I was hoping to announce this before we talked—that as I was speaking, in Cairo Foreign Minister Peres and Yasser Arafat announced an agreement on self-rule and on the terms of withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho. So I think another big milestone has been achieved today.

Thank you.

And from the questions in the back on Bosnia, we simply have not completed the NATO meeting yet. I thought we would have by now, but as soon as we have I will be glad to comment on that also. But the meeting is not over.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:07 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Edgar Bronfman, president, World Jewish Congress.

Remarks Announcing the NATO Decision on Air Strikes in Bosnia and an Exchange With Reporters

February 9, 1994

The President. Good evening. Over the past year, our administration has been working to do what we could to help to end the tragic conflict in Bosnia and to ease the suffering it has caused. Like people everywhere, I was outraged by the brutal killing of innocent civilians in the Sarajevo market last Saturday. The events of the past year and the events of the past

few days reinforce the belief that I have that more must be done to stop the shelling of Sarajevo and the murder of innocents.

Therefore, the United States, working with our allies, has developed a series of proposals to address the situation in Sarajevo and to reinvigorate the negotiations to bring the bloodshed and the aggression in Bosnia to an end. As a