

Apr. 19 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 2000

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:05 p.m. on the memorial grounds. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Frank Keating of Oklahoma and his wife, Cathy; Mayor Kirk Humphreys and former Mayor Ronald Norick of Oklahoma City; Robert M. Johnson and Karen Luke, cochairs, Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation; Gen. Donald

F. Ferrell, USAF (Ret.), chairman, board of directors, Oklahoma City National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism and Violence; memorial designers Hans-Ekkehard and Torrey Butzer and Sven Berg, Butzer Design Partnership; and Shawntel Smith, Miss America 1996, who sang the national anthem.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting a Report on Efforts To Achieve Sustainable Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina

April 19, 2000

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

As required by section 7 of the 1998 Supplemental Appropriations and Rescissions Act (Public Law 105–174) (the Levin Amendment), and section 1203 of the Strom Thurmond National Defense Authorization Act for FY 1999 (Public Law 105–261), I transmit herewith a report on progress made toward achieving benchmarks for a sustainable peace process.

In July 1999, I sent the second semiannual report to the Congress under Public Law 105–174, detailing progress towards achieving the 10 benchmarks adopted by the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) and the North Atlantic Council (NAC) for evaluating implementation of the Dayton Peace Accords. This report provides

an updated assessment of progress on the benchmarks covering the period from July 1 through December 31, 1999.

In addition to the semiannual reporting requirement of Public Law 105–174, this report fulfills the requirements of section 1203 in connection with my Administration's request for funds for FY 2001.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Albert Gore, Jr., President of the Senate. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 20.

Remarks Prior to Discussions With Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority and an Exchange With Reporters

April 20, 2000

The President. Hello, everyone. Let me just briefly say that I am very, very glad to have Chairman Arafat back here at the White House. And I'm looking forward to our talks. We've reached a very serious time in the peace process. He and Prime Minister Barak have set for themselves an ambitious timetable to reach a framework agreement as soon as they can, and then a final agreement by the middle of September. So we're working hard on it, and I think we'll get some things done today.

Elian Gonzalez

Q. Mr. President, a short time ago, Juan Miguel Gonzalez came out and called on the American people to help him urge you and your Attorney General to reunite him with his son. Do you have a message for Juan Miguel Gonzalez? And also, what steps is your administration prepared to take if the boy's Miami relatives won't turn him—

The President. First of all, I think he should be reunited with his son. That is the law. And the main argument of the family in Miami for not doing so has now been removed. I mean,

their main argument was, if we let him go back to his father before the court rules, he might go back to Cuba. The court has now said he shouldn't go back to Cuba. The Justice Department agrees with that, and he has agreed to that.

So there is now no conceivable argument for his not being able to be reunited with his son. And that is what the lawful process has said. The immigration law is clear, and the determination of the INS and a Federal court are clear. So I think he should be united in as prompt and orderly way as possible.

Q. Well, what about the appeals court suggestion that a 6-year-old maybe has some rights to say where he wants to live and apply for asylum on his own behalf?

The President. Well, even if the appeals court were to say that, which would be a rather dramatic departure from the law, then there would have to be some setup at a trial level for determining that. And in the meanwhile, while all this legal process plays out, as a matter of law the INS determined and a Federal court affirmed that the father should have custody.

So, clearly, he should be reunited. And the argument that he might go back to Cuba before this thing can be finally resolved in the courts is no longer there. That's not an argument anymore.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, did you write a letter for former Prime Minister Netanyahu, promising him that Israel would keep its nuclear or mass destruction weapons in case they reach an agreement with the Palestinians?

The President. I don't believe that issue ever came up in connection with an agreement with the Palestinians, with Mr. Netanyahu or any other Israeli Prime Minister. To the best of my memory, it did not.

I think you all know what the issues are between the Israelis and the Palestinians. They are difficult, but I think they can be bridged. If the parties want to do this, we will do everything we can to help them and to minimize the difficulties and the risks involved. There are risks and difficulties involved for Chairman Arafat; there are risks and difficulties involved for Prime Minister Barak, for the Palestinian people, and for the Israeli people. I believe they are not nearly as great as the risks and difficulties of not making a peace agreement, so I hope they will do it. And if they want to do it, I'll do whatever I can to help them.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:54 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ehud Barak and former Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel.

Statement on the Budget Surplus and Debt Reduction

April 20, 2000

When I came into office, the budget deficit was a record \$290 billion, confidence in the economy was shaky, and unemployment was too high. Seven years of fiscal discipline have turned that situation around, creating an era of record budget surpluses.

Today we received more good news that our economic strategy is working and that the budget surplus is growing. The Treasury Department released Government financial information showing that the comparable budget balance for the first half of this fiscal year improved by more than \$30 billion from the first half of

last year. This keeps us on track to pay down a record \$300 billion of debt over 3 years.

In addition, today, for the third time this year, the Treasury Department is buying back some of our debt. If we maintain our fiscal discipline, we can make America debt-free by 2013 for the first time since Andrew Jackson was President. This will keep interest rates lower, helping to maintain strong investment and growth while saving money for American families.