AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

Week Ending Friday, January 7, 2000

Remarks on Departure for Millennium Ceremonies and an Exchange With Reporters

December 31, 1999

Resignation of President Boris Yeltsin of Russia

The President. Good morning. Not long ago, I had about a 20-minute phone conversation with President Boris Yeltsin, who today ends his historic tenure as Russia's democratically elected President. Under his leadership, since 1991, the Russian people have faced the unprecedented challenge of building a new democracy and a new life after decades of corrosive Communist rule. His lasting achievement has been dismantling the Communist system and creating a vital democratic process within a constitutional framework. The fact that Prime Minister Putin assumes responsibility today as Acting President, in accordance with the Constitution, is the latest example of President Yeltsin's achievement.

The relationship between the United States and Russia under President Yeltsin has produced genuine progress for both our people. Five thousand strategic nuclear weapons have been dismantled. Our nuclear weapons are no longer targeted at each other. We have worked together to eliminate nuclear weapons from the other states of the former Soviet Union. Russia has withdrawn its troops from the Baltic nations, and now its troops are serving alongside Americans to maintain peace in the Balkans. In fact, Russia was instrumental in achieving the peace agreement in Kosovo.

Of course, we have also had our differences, but the starting point for our relationship has always been how Russia and America can work together to advance our common interests. In that spirit, I look forward to working with Acting President Putin, as the Russian people begin the process of making the transition from one democratically elected President to another.

To President Yeltsin, let me convey my appreciation again for the work we have done together. Hillary and I extend our warmest wishes to him, Naina, and their family.

Thank you very much.

Q. Mr. President, are you going to Moscow in February, at the invitation of the Prime Minister, Acting President?

The President. I have made no plans to do that yet.

Q. Mr. President, can you share some of your personal recollections of Boris Yeltsin? You seemed to have a warm personal relationship with him. What did you admire? What are your thoughts about him as a person now?

The President. Well, I liked him because he was always very forthright with me. He always did exactly what he said he would do, and he was willing to take chances to try to improve our relationship, to try to improve democracy in Russia. He took the Russian troops out of the Balkans. He recently agreed to take them out of Moldova and Georgia. We got rid of all those nuclear weapons in the other states of the former Soviet Union. We got rid of thousands of nuclear weapons. He's committed to START II, and I hope it will be ratified by the Russian Duma so we can quickly move to START III and reduce our nuclear arsenals even further.

I liked him because I think he genuinely deplored communism. He lived with it; he saw it; and he believed that democracy was the best system. I think it was in every fiber of his being. And we had our arguments; we had our fights; we had our genuine disagreement about our national interests from time to time. But I think that the Russian people are well-served to have a leader who honestly believed that their votes ought to determine who was running the show in Russia and what the future direction of the country should be.

I have to go. I'm sorry.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11 a.m. on the South Grounds at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who became Acting President on President Yeltsin's resignation; and Mr. Yeltsin's wife, Naina. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Statement on the Resignation of President Boris Yeltsin of Russia

December 31, 1999

Today President Yeltsin ends his historic tenure as Russia's first democratically elected President.

Under his leadership since 1991, the Russian people have faced the unprecedented challenge of creating new institutions and building a new life after decades of corrosive Communist rule. His lasting achievement has been dismantling that Communist system and building new political institutions under democratically elected leaders within a constitutional framework. The fact that Prime Minister Putin assumes responsibility today as acting President in accordance with the constitution is but the latest example of this achievement.

The relationship between the United States and Russia under President Yeltsin has produced genuine progress for both our people. Five thousand strategic nuclear weapons have been dismantled, and our nuclear weapons no longer are targeted at each other. We have worked together to eliminate nuclear weapons from the other states of the former Soviet Union. Russia has withdrawn its troops from the Baltic nations. Now its troops are serving alongside Americans to maintain the peace in the Balkans, and Russia was instrumental in achieving peace in Kosovo. We have also had our differences, such as on Chechnya. But President Yeltsin, and my starting point, has always been how Russia and America can work together to advance our common interests. In this spirit, I look forward to working with Acting President Putin as the Russian people begin the process of making the transition from one democratically elected President to another.

To President Yeltsin, let me convey my appreciation for the work we have done together. Hillary and I extend our warmest wishes to you and your family.

NOTE: In his statement, the President referred to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who became Acting President on President Yeltsin's resignation. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Remarks at Opening Ceremonies of the "America's Millennium" Celebration

December 31, 1999

Thank you very much. Thank you, good morning, Happy New Year. Thank you, Senator Daschle, to other Members of the Congress who are here. Thank you, Mayor Williams, for your kind comments to Hillary and to me and your outstanding leadership in this city. Thank you, Robert Pinsky, for being here today, and for opening the ears and eyes and hearts of so many young children to the wonders of poetry. Thank you, Dean Baxter. I want to thank the Children's Choir and the Military Band—they were wonderful today and the singing sergeants who have left. I want to thank Ellen Lovell and the members of our Millennial Council, and Terry McAuliffe and all those who made it possible for us to have all these wonderful events today. I also want to thank the Lord for this wonderful weather, so we all feel good being out here.

The New Millennium Choir sang "Rising Like the Sun." Their vitality and their voices are living proof that the light may be fading on the 20th century, but the Sun is still rising on America. Even though this is an opening ceremony, what we celebrate did not begin today, and it won't end tomorrow. Two years ago Hillary and I created the White House Millennium Council to bring Americans together, in her words, "to honor our past and imagine our future." Since then, she has hosted Millennium Evenings at the White House with some of our Nation's most gifted scholars and artists. And people all over the world have participated on the Internet. She has crisscrossed America to save our historical treasures, from Harriet Tubman's home