

NOTE: The exchange began at 1:42 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. In his remarks, the President referred to Representative Carolyn McCarthy and Sarah Brady, chair, Hand Gun Control, Inc. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany in Cologne

June 18, 1999

Character Education in Public Schools

Q. Mr. President, in another House action, the House has passed a measure which would permit the Ten Commandments to be posted in public schools. Do you think that's constitutional?

President Clinton. I think it raises constitutional questions. I think what they're trying to do is to say that the schools ought to teach basic elements of character education, and I agree with that. And Secretary Riley and I have worked on that for several years, now. So I would—what I would like to do is to—rather than get into a big constitutional fight, is to have the Secretary meet with the Members of Congress, show them what we're trying to do in this area that is plainly constitutional, and maybe get them to support that, so we can intensify our efforts.

And the idea that the schools ought to build the character of children I think is a very good idea. But it ought to be done in a way that respects the wide diversity of our student body and that doesn't lead to a long, drawn-out legal challenge.

I understand the impulse behind it, and I think the impulse is good. We just have to be—we don't want to raise constitutional questions. There is another option here that I think achieves their objective. I'm going to—when I get home I'm going to talk to them about it.

NATO-Russia Negotiations on Kosovo

Q. [*Inaudible*—you think there will be a solution with the Russians concerning the problems in Kosovo?

President Clinton. I do. The Chancellor and I—we're going to talk about it.

I'd like to begin by thanking the *Bundeskanzler* for hosting this and for doing such an outstanding job, not only leading the G-8 but also leading the EU in this period and for being a wonderful leader in our Alliance in the campaign in Kosovo.

We have been working very hard in the last days, as you know, to get our troops in as the Serbs leave. Today, we have 19,000 in; 35,000 of theirs have gone. And this is a good day. And I do believe, based on what I have just heard, that we have a good chance of reaching a resolution today on the role in the Russians in our KFOR. So we have to discuss this, but I think if we can get everybody together on this in the next couple of hours, we'll have an agreement. I'm hoping.

Debt Relief

Q. Chancellor Schroeder, the indebted nations want debt forgiveness now, about \$100 billion. Is that doable?

Chancellor Schroeder. I think that sum will certainly not be achieved, whatever it will get to. But we certainly get together here during the summit to talk about the fact that we would like to assist the poorest countries with their development and their debt problems.

We, of course, have to—we're at the beginning of the summit—have to go in and discuss the more finite detail, and then we'll come up with a result which we'll share with you at the end of the summit, and not now, at the beginning. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The exchange began at 2:51 p.m. in the Isabellensaal Room at the Gurzenich. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Statement on House Action on Gun Control Legislation

June 18, 1999

Instead of closing the deadly gun show loophole, the House of Representatives voted in the dark of night to let criminals keep buying guns at gun shows. This vote will not stand the light of day. I will keep working until the Congress stands up to the gun lobby and makes the commonsense measures passed by the Senate the law of

the land. We owe it to the families of the children who died in Littleton to give all Americans the safety they deserve.

Statement on House Action on Gun Control Legislation

June 18, 1999

This week, instead of listening to the American people and strengthening our gun laws, the House of Representatives listened to the gun lobby and did nothing at all. The House leadership gutted this bill in the dark of night to keep commonsense gun legislation from seeing the light of day.

The American people will not stand for this. Our Nation is waiting for Washington to pass a real law that keeps guns away from children and out of the hands of criminals. I call on the Congress to stop playing politics and start living up to its responsibility to help save lives.

Proclamation 7205—Father's Day, 1999

June 18, 1999

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Each year on Father's Day, Americans take special joy in remembering the many cherished moments they have shared with their fathers through the years. Reading stories before bedtime, playing catch after dinner, camping out in the backyard, sharing driving lessons—at these moments and countless others throughout a lifetime, devoted fathers are there to guide their sons and daughters, to instill confidence in them, and to provide for them and protect them in times of need.

The impact of these moments on children's development and future is immeasurable. Although children may not understand it until they become parents themselves, these are the times when fathers impart to their sons and daughters strong values and teach them important lessons about love, responsibility, faith, hard work, and determination. In these moments, fathers imbue

in their children the strength and self-esteem they need to achieve their full potential.

As children grow and mature—from toddlers carried on their fathers' shoulders to teenagers who need help navigating the challenges of adolescence to young men and women who need guidance on life, love, family, and career—their relationships with their fathers change as well. Yet, the need for a father's friendship and wisdom continues to grow; and throughout all the seasons of life, fathers remain role models, teachers, heroes, and friends.

Vice President Gore and I have challenged fathers to be actively involved in their children's lives and to provide both emotional and financial support. Last June, the Vice President released a report showing that children who grow up without fathers are more likely to do poorly in school, to get into trouble with the law, and to have difficulty in getting and keeping a job. But our fathers cannot always meet their responsibilities to their children without help. That is why it is crucial that we lift up our fathers through efforts like the reauthorization of the Welfare-to-Work program so that more low income fathers can work, pay child support, and become more involved with their children.

We can never truly repay our fathers—whether biological, adoptive, foster, or step-father—for their many precious gifts to us, for their steadfast faith in our potential and abilities, for their unwavering devotion and unconditional love. We can, however, express our deep appreciation for all they have done and thank them for the many sacrifices they have made to create a better life for us. There is no more fitting national tribute to fathers than reserving a day in their honor, and there is no more appropriate celebration of their profound impact on the lives of their children and the strength of our Nation.

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, in accordance with a joint resolution of the Congress approved April 24, 1972 (36 U.S.C. 142a), do hereby proclaim Sunday, June 20, 1999, as Father's Day. I invite the States, communities across the country, and all the citizens of the United States to observe this