

Making the American Dream a Reality

From June 5th through 12th, the nation will celebrate the third annual National Homeownership Week. This weeklong celebration commemorates the anniversary of the National Homeownership Strategy developed by President Clinton to increase the number of homeowners across the country. Homeownership has long been recognized as a key component of the "American Dream". Last year, more Americans than ever before were able to turn their dream of homeownership into a reality. By the end of 1998, over 5.5 million households owned their homes.

In celebration of National Homeownership Week, local organizations across the country will sponsor more than 1,000 events to promote homeownership. These events will include homebuyer fairs, seminars and workshops, official proclamations and open houses. New national initiatives and the efforts of local partnership hard at work throughout the nation to promote homeownership will be featured. But more importantly, National Homeownership Week will give American families the information and the inspiration necessary to help them achieve their dream of buying a home.

The National Partners in Homeownership, a diverse mix of 66 national organizations, sponsor national homeownership Week.

Founded by President Clinton and led by U.S. Department of housing and urban development (HUD) Secretary Andrew Cuomo, the Partnership works towards a common goal - increasing the nation's homeownership rate to an all-time high of 67.5% by the end of the year 2000. Their work is already producing results. The national homeownership rate reached its highest point ever - 66.8%, a 2.2% increase since the formation of the Partnership in 1995. Some other impressive gains have also been made. In the period from 1995-1999:

- The African American homeownership rate increases from 42.5% to 45.9%
- The Hispanic homeownership rate increases from 41.2% to 45.7%
- The rate for female-headed households increased from 49.5% to 51.6%
- The rate for central city homeownership increases from 49.5% to 50.0%

An important member of this Partnership, HUD - and its Federal Housing Administration (FHA) mortgage insurance program - are spearheading national initiatives as a catalyst to generate affordable housing initiatives. Over the past few months, HUD and the FHA have been updating their programs and making them more accessible to homebuyers, especially first-time homebuyers.

The FHA loan limits has been

increased to keep pace with rising home prices, up to \$208,800 in high-cost areas and \$115,200 in low-cost areas. Check with a participating local lender for loan limits where you are.

• FHA has a newly simplified down payment calculation that requires homebuyers put down only 3% of the home purchase price, which is less than the 5% down payment required by many conventional loans.

• FHA allows homebuyers to use gifts for their entire down payment while conventional loans generally require that a portion of the down payment come from personal funds.

• FHA credit requirements offer more flexibility than do those of many conventional lenders.

• FHA lets borrowers carry more debt than a private mortgage insurer typically does.

Still, there is much to be done to ensure that more people can realize their very own American dream. National Homeownership Week offers a prime chance to reflect on the possibilities, and the realities, of homeownership by providing a focus and establishing a forum for education, discussions and new initiatives.

Look for National Homeownership Week events in your area. You can also call your local HUD office or access HUD's web site at www.hud.gov to find out which activities are taking place near you.

Yugoslavia Accepts Kosovo Peace Plan

By CANDICE HUGHES
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BELGRADE, Yugoslavia - After more than 2 1/2 months of NATO airstrikes, Slobodan Milosevic's government today accepted an international peace plan, capitulating on Western demands to end the Kosovo conflict.

The decision came right after Serb lawmakers in Belgrade overwhelmingly approved a peace deal to resolve the crisis and allow the return of more than 850,000 ethnic Albanians to Kosovo.

"Yugoslavia accepts the document for peace brought by the highest representatives of the European Union and Russia," the state Tanjug news agency said following talks between Milosevic, former Russian Premier Viktor Chernomyrdin and Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari.

Serb state media reported two people were seriously wounded in the attack on a Naftagas fuel depot near Sombor, close to the border with Hungary.

The plan would also require the return of all the ethnic Albanian refugees expelled - mostly to Albania and Macedonia - since March.

Finnish Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen told reporters at the EU summit in Cologne, Germany, that the agreement "will be subject to confirmation from all those involved, including the European Union. It's too serious to start partying yet."

A text of the statement on the peace plan that was distributed in the Serb parliament showed Milosevic was forced to accept NATO terms on

a broad range of issues.

Among those: quick and verifiable withdrawal of Yugoslav army and Serb forces from Kosovo; deployment to Kosovo of an "efficient" - shorthand but well-armed - force "with essential NATO participation" under "unified control"; and "substantial autonomy" for the majority ethnic Albanians of Kosovo.

NATO military spokesman Col. Konrad Freytag said Serb forces will also be responsible for clearing land mines they planted in Kosovo during their campaign to drive out ethnic Albanians and push back the Kosovo Liberation Army.

Some 16,000 NATO troops, to be part of a peacekeeping force for Kosovo, are already in Macedonia; NATO raise this figure Wednesday nearly twice as high, to 47,900 - including 7,000 U.S. troops.

The Serb Radical Party, which had backed the government until today's emergency session, broke away to vote against the peace plan that passed 136-74. "We voted against this deal because we believe that the withdrawal of our troops from Kosovo amid NATO criminal bombardment is unacceptable," said Serbian deputy premier Vojislav Seselj, leader of the Serb Radical Party. "We shall not sit in the government and await the arrival of NATO troops into Kosovo."

Serbia's Civic Alliance hailed the Yugoslav government acceptance of the peace deal but noted terms of the agreement are nearly the same as in the Rambouillet, France, peace talks that broke down right before NATO

bombings began.

"If the bombing is going to end, all citizens of Yugoslavia have reason to celebrate," party spokesman Goran Svilanovic said, adding hundreds of people died in bombings that could have been avoided.

The approval comes one day after a major diplomatic push in the Yugoslav capital, which represented the West's first official contact with the Belgrade leadership since the NATO campaign began.

It was also the first time Russia, Yugoslavia's main ally, has been largely in step with the Western powers.

Authorities have consistently demanded that any deal respect Yugoslav borders - shorthand for their rejection of independence for Kosovo - and that the United Nations be given a role in overseeing a Kosovo peace.

Parliament's endorsement of the plan showed Milosevic was willing to accept what the West says is a take-it-or-leave-it deal in which he must pull all Serb forces out of Kosovo and allow a NATO-led peacekeeping force into the embattled Serbian province.

Chernomyrdin was quoted as saying the agreement calls for Yugoslavia and NATO to work out a formula for the withdrawal of Serb troops from Kosovo. The allies have insisted their troops be "at the core" of a peacekeeping force, something Milosevic previously rejected.

Ninety percent of Kosovo's pre-war population of 2 million was ethnic Albanian. NATO intervened 13 months after Serb forces cracked down on ethnic Albanians, killing at least 2,000 people.

Antitrust Settlements Totalling \$50 Million

Attorney General Hardy Myers announced multi-state, antitrust settlements totaling \$40 million with national retailer Toys 'R' Us and toy manufacturers Mattel and The Little Tikes Company. The Oregon Department of Justice helped negotiate the settlements, which will result in the distribution of toys worth more than \$389,000 to needy children in Oregon for the next three holiday seasons and approximately \$150,000 in cash for children's programs.

"Oregon non-profit organizations and charities, which struggle every December to provide enough toys for needy children, can look forward to a bountiful distribution for the next three holiday seasons thanks to these settlements," Myers said. "Not only will there be more toys for our children but also money in the form of grants to educational programs that benefit children."

The settlements resolve the final

portion of a lawsuit filed in 1997 by the Attorneys General of 44 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico alleging that the defendants conspired for more than ten years to withhold popular toys from low margin warehouse clubs that undercut Toys 'R' Us prices. According to the lawsuit, the defendants, including Hasbro, Inc., reached illegal agreements to limit the sale of certain toys to warehouse clubs and to sell other popular toys to warehouse clubs only in combination packs. As a result, warehouse clubs could not compete in price with Toys 'R' Us, and consumers paid more for the toys. Hasbro settled with the multi-state group in December 1998 for \$5.95 million in toys and cash. Oregon received \$42,000 in toys from the Hasbro settlement.

Under the terms of the settlements, Oregon will receive \$321,300 in toys from Toys 'R' Us, \$58,700 in toys from

Mattel, the nation's largest toy manufacturer, and \$9,400 in toys from The Little Tikes Company. Oregon also will recover its attorney fees and investigative costs. In addition, it is a condition of the Toys 'R' Us settlement that the toys distributed to states not include toys guns or depict violent activities.

Attorney General Myers will announce details of Oregon's toy distribution by the U.S. Marine Corps' Toys for Tots program next fall. Information concerning applications for grants to youth programs will be available soon.

For more information concerning these settlements and other consumer protection issues, consumers may contact the Attorney General's hotline by calling (503) 378-4320 or (503) 229-5576 (Portland only) between the hours of 8:30 a.m. to noon, Monday through Friday or by writing Financial Fraud/Consumer Protection, 1162 Court Street, N.E. Salem, Oregon 97310

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