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Dayton Peace Accords Series

JASON GALANES

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An 18-year veteran of the U.S. Congress, Jason Galanes has lived and worked in Washington, D.C. for two decades. At the time of this interview he was serving as Chief of Staff to Representative Mike Turner as well as Secretary of the U.S. delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Jason led the organization of the 2025 NATO PA summit in Dayton, Ohio.

INTERVIEW

Q: All right. This is a Dayton Peace Accords interview with Jason Galanes. This is part one. Today is Friday, June 13th. Jason, can you tell me a little bit about yourself? Where did you grow up, and how did you get into congressional work?

GALANES: I grew up in Dover, which is on the seacoast of New Hampshire. I went to college in Los Angeles and then grad school in Washington, DC, where I was offered my first job on Capitol Hill for a U.S. Senator from Maine, Olympia Snowe, in her press operations. Then subsequently switched over to the House of Representatives where I worked for a member from New Jersey, Frank LoBiondo, which I staffed for about half his career. So, twelve years with him congressionally, rising up to Chief of Staff, and then was recruited by Congressman Mike Turner, my current boss, and became his chief of staff in 2022

Q: Okay, and then can you tell me a little bit about how you got involved with the NATO PA and organizing the 30th anniversary of the conference in Dayton?

GALANES: When I first joined Mr. Turner's office in March of 2022, on the first day, my predecessor asked me, "Would you like the NATO PA portfolio?" And I'm like, "I don't know what NATO PA is." And he goes, "It means you go to Europe four times a year." I'm like, "Sure." It means a whole lot more than that. It is not that simple, but it has become quite rewarding—that was in March of 2022. In May 2022, I had my first trip with Mr. Turner for NATO PA. It was to Vilnius, Lithuania. It was for their spring session. (NATO PA has four trips a year, with meetings in February, a leadership meeting in March or April, a spring session in May, and then the annual session in the fall.) And

we're in Vilnius, and the NATO PA announced that they were looking for hosts for 2025 and beyond for the sessions. Mr. Turner, in his leadership meeting, talked about it being the 30th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Accords and where to commemorate that and focus some issues on the Balkans.

At this time, Ukraine had already been invaded by Russia. So we knew [that] a lot of energy for the next couple of years, and even now, would be focused on Ukraine and then whatever other threats come around. But the Balkans have been a simmering issue since the Dayton Peace Accords were signed thirty years ago. And Mr. Turner said, "The only place you can do the 30th anniversary of Dayton Peace Accords is Dayton, Ohio." The United States had not hosted, at that time, in more than twenty years, a session, and so that was my first task [for] NATO PA, to identify what we needed to do to host, what money we needed to secure and how to best go about approaching this to see if Dayton, Ohio could indeed host the 2025, spring session of NATO PA.

Q: Great. So let me ask you: Did you have any background with the Dayton Accords? Were you familiar with the Accords?

GALANES: I had no background on the Dayton Accords. I got briefed. I had no background with NATO PA. This is my first trip. I had never been to Lithuania. So, I'm learning all this on the fly. And obviously, Mr. Turner was the mayor of Dayton during the Dayton Peace Accord signing. So, he's been intimately involved throughout his entire career, and I knew I had to bone up on both Dayton Peace Accords, NATO, NATO PA and all that, and I happily did, right?

Q: So, how did you prepare yourself for that assignment? Did you read history books? You mentioned the briefings, but I'm curious: how was your preparation for that?

GALANES: The first book recommended to me was Holbrooke's book. It is a testament to Dayton. So, I read Richard Holbrooke's book. I also went back in terms of the NATO side of it. Read the NATO Charter, and kind of in the last several sessions in NATO PA, the reports and declarations they put out. And then I just started talking to Mr. Turner about the Dayton Peace Accords and what he envisioned if we actually were successful in bringing this NATO PA to Dayton. Also, who in the community might be worthy of engaging in this project, and who in the community should we not engage?

Q: Can you walk me through your involvement in organizing the conference? How did that go and even lessons that you've learned through that process?

GALANES: Yeah, the first part of the whole thing was securing federal funds for this. This was going to become a congressionally led event for the U.S. delegation from NATO PA, not a traditional Secretary of State or White House-driven event within the executive branch. We had conversations immediately with Senator Lindsey Graham and Congressman Mario Díaz-Balart, who were both the Chairman of the State and Foreign Ops Appropriations Bills. NATO PA gave us a number of what they said a traditional

session costs. We inflated that number to two million, knowing that it was a couple of years off in hosting.

We don't know what kind of cost we're going to run into, and you're only going to get one shot at the apple for federal funding once we were able to secure that money. We could confirm to NATO PA that we were the hosts, and that ended up being in the spring of 2024, which is generally a lot longer [than normal]. Hosts are usually known a lot sooner than that, but they kept it quiet for us so that we could make sure we could secure the money. And so, we made the announcements in Tallinn, Estonia, during the spring session, where we were able to announce that Dayton would be hosting the following year. And when I made the announcement to my counterparts in each of the delegations, I told them they were coming back to the United States after twenty years, and we're not going to DC; we're not going to the coast; we're going to Middle America. And they kind of got excited and, like, "Chicago?" And I'm like, "Not Chicago." And so, when I said "Dayton, Ohio," they all pulled out their phones and started googling what Dayton, Ohio, was. And the Dayton Peace Accords came up, of course.

This is probably a lesson learned. We told NATO PA and our delegates before we told the governor or the mayor that we were even trying to do this. And what I probably would do differently is, once the money was secured, I probably would have told the governor and the mayor first. Fortunately, everyone was very supportive. They immediately recognized the importance and the opportunity that was presented, not for Dayton but for Ohio. And so that was kind of great. Then we did the public announcement. The governor joined for that, and then I assembled a team of the various stakeholders in Dayton that would really be needed—the venue hosts, the Chamber of Commerce, the city, the representatives from the city, the law enforcement aspect of it. I looked at finding a person who can handle media and those kinds of things. And we set a schedule, at least for that far out, which is over a year. At that point, the first Monday of every month we'd meet, I'd give an updated agenda of the program; it started off at a page and a half and it ended up being a total of fifteen pages at the end of how the whole weekend played out. So, it was one of those [things] that we worked through.

My first initial meetings with the State Department were last summer. In August of '24, they came into my office here at Capitol Hill, their budget people, their protocol people, their policy people, and like, "We understand, you're going to be hosting the NATO Parliamentary Assembly spring session. This is what we'll do. We'll do this for free. We'll take this over," to which I kind of put a pause on them. I had the Speaker's team as well in the meeting and was like, "No, this is a congressionally driven event by Mr. Turner and the U.S. delegation. So, the State Department will serve a consulting role." They will not be the lead agency for this, which the State Department accepted, surprisingly, but they've never really played a consulting role in an international conference on U.S. soil. They were going to learn some things about this as well about how processes would work. They also received the funding that we had secured.

The two million went into a State Department account rather than going into the congressional account. The lawyers got involved, and they put it into the State

Department's major events account. So, I had to work within the State Department's guidelines of what could be paid for and what couldn't be because the money was in their account, even though we secured it. And there are different guidelines, as I came to learn pretty quickly, what the congressional accounts can pay for.

A great example is the State Department will not pay for anything that's security related. Security is strictly a local and state jurisdictional issue. They do not pay for any of that. They will not pay for water or coffee or any of those continuous coffee services that you would see. They won't even pay for the tables that food is on. But if you have a table that someone's writing on or a desk, they'll pay for that. They'll pay for the lounging furniture in a lounge for staging, which is very funny to me. So, the State Department's accounts were different. We agreed that I would also use the congressional account for the things that I could cover there, like water. You need water. That was one of the things to navigate and learn. And as the process was going through, the governor and the state were involved. The state had to pick up the security costs. Of course, we were getting a sense of who was who. We knew the delegates were coming from all the countries. That was pretty easy to know. It was: "Who else would be interested, and who else do we want to invite? Because it is the 30th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Accords."

Mr. Turner wanted to invite the Presidents and Prime Ministers of the Balkan countries. In the end, we ended up inviting eight countries. The Secretary General of NATO was also coming, of course. And then, who in the U.S. government should we invite? Which ended up being the Secretary of State, Rubio, the Vice President, and the President. And just how big is this going to get? And then, different from a normal NATO PA spring session, we decided to broaden two aspects of this.

One was creating a public forum so that the community of Dayton, but also academia, think tanks and international organizations, to have a dialog, not just a retrospective, but also a perspective of what's going on in the Balkans and what still needs to be addressed. And in that case, we could have people who were there from the original thirty years ago, like Ambassador Chris Hill and Dame Karen Pierce and whatnot, but also people who are engaged in the region now. We invited the U.S. ambassadors for each of the countries from back thirty years ago and the most recent ambassadors so that we can then and now have conversations because a lot of those posts have not been fulfilled or refilled under the new Trump administration at this point.

And then we started getting RSVPs, and the first head of state we got was Albania's President. And once the first one happened, I had several inquiries throughout the process, "Hey, what's the latest? Hey, what's the update?" Because nobody really wants to be the first. But as soon as the first happened, then it just started. I remember shooting a text on the group text chain that the first one had come from Albania. They're like, "Okay." And then security is like, "Okay. Now we have to start thinking through motorcades. The Secret Service is going to get involved, diplomatic security, and all those." And it snowballed. And at the end, we got up to eleven that we would have Secret Service protection for, so eight heads of state and whatnot. Once we got [word of] the first head of state coming, the second element that we added to this that is not standard in

the spring session is [that] we wanted to have an area that was quiet to the public, to most participants who didn't know what's going on, that was available for high-level diplomacy, in the event the State Department or NATO Headquarters want to engage in that.

For bilateral meetings, trilateral meetings, whatnot, we had Sinclair Community College that was near the venues for NATO PA, but outside the security zone, and no one knew its involvement until after it had happened. Each head of state was given their own office space and bilateral rooms for the entire weekend. I think it was like two dozen meetings that actually ended up happening over there. [We] Completely secured the building and kept it very quiet. I think only five people of the college's staff, including the President, knew what was really going on there. And it was an important part of this that we were going to get all these world leaders together, and a lot of them won't go into each other's countries in the Balkans, but they'll all come to America. We can start the dialog on some of these issues, whether it's regional security, whether it's Russia and China misinformation or encroachment, whether it's drug trafficking, whatever. Trade and tariffs were a popular topic, of course; let's do that, and let's use this opportunity because everybody's here.

Q: Yeah, meaning it was a big undertaking, right? Being there and seeing all the different components, from security to each of the talks in the dialog at the NATO public forum, was a big undertaking. How long did it take you to get everything sorted on the fly during the conference, or was everything pre-negotiated?

GALANES: Pre-negotiated for which aspect of it?

Q: Meaning in the sense of the program. I know the program was done earlier because I remember when you were sending me the drafts. But I'm curious: what were some surprises that you were resolving during the conference, or were there some parts where you were moving around?

GALANES: Some of the advice I got from the State Department's protocol people back in August was invaluable. I'm like, "Am I going to get more [things to handle]? Does it get more intense as you get as you're running up to and getting to an event?" And they're like, "No, if you really thought through a plan, then it actually will get really calm when you get to the execution part." What I found happened was it got very calm to the execution part of it, to the fact that I had several hours at various times where I could just sit and watch the events happen as they played out. They played out in terms of planning the session itself; the actual NATO PA sessions are pretty much plug-and-play. They happen every time. So, we knew that the programming itself was pretty easy to set up. That meant I could focus more on the social side of things, whether it was organizing a reception or putting together a museum that showcased not just Dayton's history but also NATO's. And I contacted the presidential libraries of Clinton and Truman, and got artifacts from them donated. So that was kind of great to create a museum. Managing the media, we knew there'd be higher media interests in Dayton than there were necessarily in other sessions.

For comparison, the annual session, which is always the largest attended event in the fall—Montreal hosted last year, Montreal had twelve registered media. Montreal also had protests, and then cars burning and everything, which is why we took security seriously. We learned our security from Montreal and decided to do it a lot stricter for Dayton, and did a complete secure village called NATO Village. For us, we had over 200 media credentialed, and NATO PA had not seen that since [the] Madrid [session], back in 2022—there was a high interest, and that was right after Ukraine. As for planning through it, there are some elements that pop up the day of or little fires you have to put out while they're going on. But really, going into it, when the State Department and NATO started to arrive several days before the session, and the delegates and the heads of state arrived, it was relatively calm. It was just buttoning things up and praying for the weather to cooperate. Ohio weather in May can be unpredictable, and I had a couple of outdoor events. I had to worry about a couple of surprises with contingency plans, of course, if something happened. But, it worked out.

Q: Yeah. It did work out. So, what did you learn about a protocol from all this when you were organizing? I'm curious about that because I know the State Department is pretty proud of it on their own. What did you learn from a congressional standpoint?

GALANES: They were great. I had a little bit of prior training for this, only because eleven months prior, I held the NATO Parliamentary Summit. I created it with my Democratic colleague and executed it at the U.S. Capitol. That was in conjunction with the NATO Washington Summit that was going on. That was July of 2024. Part of that was knowing that we had twenty-three of the thirty-two speakers of Parliament here, so the speaker was Johnson-level or equivalent. There's a lot of protocol to that. And I worked closely with the Capitol Protocol Team on how the flags have to look, what order flags have to be, delegations have to be limited in what size, who needs interpretation, who has armed guards, who is very touchy about their shoes being touched during security etc. They're very interesting delegations. That's come through in planning for Dayton. I had a member of one of the delegations wanting to bring their religious knife, a dagger that they keep on their body at all times.

Q: Oh my God.

GALANES: And we're like, "That's not going to happen." But how do I say that's not going to happen while I have armed guards with heads of state walking through, so it's those kinds of diplomatic things, making sure that you have the correct meals. Halal meat is important, obviously, to the Muslim members in terms of protocol for the final dinner. I have eight heads of state tables. Well, I had a certain kind of country that felt that they should not be in the corner and should be more center stage, even though they're not a signatory to the Dayton Peace Accords. Another protocol issue that we had is that we have Serbia, which doesn't have the best relations with all of its neighbors and people in the region, so you couldn't necessarily sit them next to all the other people. You had to find which countries they had decent relations with to kind of have them in their own little area. That came down to holding rooms and their office space at Sinclair College. It

also came down to when we were figuring out the VIP gifts for the heads of state. We ended up going with an Air Force bomber jacket with their name embroidered on there. But there was obviously a concern of, "Okay, well, this region was bombed with the U.S. American planes, so what can we do?" But we are doing this on an Air Force base, this event. So, how do you properly account for that and make sure that we're not offending any of the delegations? It's very fascinating in that sense.

And also the flags. The flags are my favorite by far. Props to the State Department flag team, they came out to Dayton and they were there the entire time. They made all the flags look great. And there was this little controversy. I called it "Flag Gate" for a couple of days.

Q: Was that the one with Chris Hill and Peter Galbraith? Over—

GALANES: No, that was separate. That was over at the base. The "Flag Gate" that was going on was in the main hall at the Schuster Center. One morning, on the first day, the Italian flag was missing. We don't know what happened to it, so you had to find it. The second day, the North Macedonian flag was moved and hidden in a corner in a different room. The only people who are going to notice flags are those delegations. If you're looking at a stage of fifty flags. I'm not going to notice that one is missing, but that delegation is absolutely going to notice. And so it started becoming this, like, "Okay, who is intentionally messing with these flags? And how do we figure this out?" Like, we have to pay special attention. And I actually told my counterpart in North Macedonia, like, "Yeah, your flag got messed with" And they were just like, "We don't anger anybody! We like everybody!" I didn't want them to have a diplomatic issue. But yeah, it was pretty entertaining.

Q: Right? Yeah, because I remember when we were over on the base, or actually the Hope Hotel, when Peter, Chris, and Carl Bildt were looking at flags and were like, "This is not good."

GALANES: Yeah, that was another one.

Q: I know when we were over at the Hope Hotel, I remember even seeing that the room's name was removed or covered with a curtain. So they were paying attention to so many different details in order to not offend someone or make sure that everything was in order, which, from my own standpoint, was a pretty complex operation.

GALANES: Yeah, it was a lot of fun. It was a wonderful experience, and a great team. The entire community of Dayton came together, as you can tell, very welcoming, very excited by the project. We tried to add details that are not standard at these events to really make the delegates feel welcome and make all the international community feel welcome. So whether that was the flag banners up and down Main Street of Dayton, of the individual countries of NATO, or whether that was the personalized NATO cookies and the gift bags, it was one of those things that we really [did] try to think through all the

details, which is why I think that there was a lot less panic that I had to worry about towards the end.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about the Dayton sign, the one that you produced and put up, and then also about the gift bags, the gift bag that was made out of the firefighting uniforms? I'm curious about how that came along and the reasons.

GALANES: Sure. One of these projects was fully supported by the State Department, and one was absolutely opposed by the State Department. I'll start with the gift bags. One of the State Department protocol people, they came several times throughout the year, and they have a guy, Tyler Savoy, who is really kind of an expert in cuisine, the gift bags, those kind of little, small touches. He came to Dayton in December of 2024, and that was when we did a series of meetings with caterers to talk about what the food should look like. He approved, personally, every menu that was served, and we did changes based on whatever he said we needed to change, and he was the flag guy.

He helped me with interpretation, but his key thing was he brought all the gift bags from the last five years of summits that the U.S. had planned from various cities [like] Seattle, LA, New York, and to give us an idea [of what to do]. We were way off base of what we were thinking because we knew we wanted to keep it made in America and what we were putting inside the gift bag, but the actual vessel itself, we did not know. And so he came in, and we're running out of time. It's December, it's the holidays. You're not going to get any answers. And you gotta give whoever we decide the opportunity to produce these before May 2025.

We're buying 650 of these in bulk. And so, some companies can do that pretty quickly if it's a large company, but if it's small, it's not [as fast]. I'm trying to keep it very localized. So, I contacted the Dayton Sewing Collaborative, which is a nonprofit which has three full-time staff. Their annual budget is maybe \$50,000. It's not anybody's full-time job, really. They're all kind of part-time, but they teach people who are interested in learning how to sew.

I went there, and I met with their head, Brenda, and one of their design people, and it's like, "Look, this is what we're trying to do. I need you to keep it quiet if you're interested. I'm going to give you ten days to not only come up with a prototype design but create the prototype for it." And they knew they had a partnership with a local manufacturer called Lion that does gear for firefighters. They had material that was being donated they could work with, because they had a long-standing partnership. In ten days, they gave me two messenger bags. They added elements to this that ended up becoming the messenger bags that Congressman Turner just loved. They're like, "We could make it in two colors." The fabric was all donated. So that was a wonderful partnership. They found a local producer of 3D printing to make little Wright Brothers airplanes for the zippers. They found an awesome Wright Brothers print for inside, and we made messenger bags that could fit a laptop but could collapse so that people can bring them back to their countries easily in their luggage. And it was awesome, to the point that Dayton Sewing Collaborative started getting requests from the community once we had announced publicly what the gift bag

looked like for them to be made. And so I believe they made a limited edition NATO batch in it for the community to sell to help offset some of their costs. I was happy enough that the rate they charged me ended up covering their budget for a year, and it was still within what I could work with and what was appropriate. So that was great.

Q: Yeah, no, those bags are great. I'm using it for work. So thanks for giving us them. They're amazing.

GALANES: So then the—

Q: The Dayton Sign.

GALANES: The Dayton Peace Sign. Yeah. So, a big part of this whole process was, I wanted to make sure and Mr. Turner was very clear, "What if we're coming here to Dayton and the only takeaway is that we came and left? Then we failed the objective, right?" There's got to be some takeaways, both for the Balkans and for the region's diplomacy, but also for the community. One of my first changes in my monthly meetings was that there are two elements to this. I want to leave something lasting in the community so that it can remember this event and that they will play this role again thirty years later in international peace. But I also want to make sure we tie in elements of the community in all [the] events of the weekend, even if the community can't participate in some of these events. So examples would be art and culture.

We incorporated some kind of art aspect into every event we did. If it was an event that was closed to the community, we made sure that an art piece remained before or after the delegates had left. For example, [the] Sarajevo Philharmonic. We flew them in. They stayed beyond NATO [PA] and did a concert for the community that [they] could participate in. It was a sold-out concert of 2,500 people at the Schuster Center. So, another element of that is the Dayton Peace Sign.

You go to larger cities, and they have an oversized sign that people love to use for social media and take photos, to climb all over, and whatnot. Dayton didn't have one, so it was pitched to me by Downtown Dayton Partnership early on: "We'd like to create this. Can you fund it? It'll cost \$130,000, but it won't be the Dayton Peace Sign. It will have a plaque on it commemorating not only the Peace Accords but also NATO PA coming for the spring session." It was immediately the first thing I said yes to and also the first thing that the State Department started pushing back on, not that it was outside of what is allowed. It was completely a permissible purchase. They were questioning if I wanted to spend \$130,000 on a sign that far out, not knowing what else was going to come up. It was after the fourth time of them raising it that several months later, I said, "It's already in production. It's non-negotiable. Move on." And that sign, once [the] State Department got to Dayton and saw it, said, "This is awesome!" This was important for the community. And you could see people lining up for a while to take pictures. The governor is taking pictures with it. Delegates were using it. It's great.

Q: So, speaking of that community aspect, can you talk a little bit about the meaning that this conference had on the community and, in more general terms, the importance of the Dayton community to help organize the conference, but also, the broader contributions that Dayton as a city is going to feel from the conference.

GALANES: As I said, we wanted to make sure the community feels included as much as possible. You have to consider security and NATO PA working sessions but we created a public forum over at the University of Dayton that allowed the community to have access to some of the conversations that were going on.

In the end, we had twelve panels over four days at the University of Dayton, and it was called the Dayton Dialogue, conversations about peace and security in the Balkans. We had foreign ministers go there. We had ambassadors, including the current ambassador for the U.S. to NATO. We had two heads of state. The European Parliament, President Roberta Metsola, gave remarks there, as did the President of Kosovo. We had academics for the audience; it was live-streamed around the world for each panel. So that was kind of great that we allowed them to have access. We could do it beyond just being [present] there for those who didn't feel comfortable [going] or weren't able to attend.

We had a culture panel where it was about cultural exchange and how that helps diplomacy with the director of the Sarajevo Philharmonic and the director of one of our dance troupes in Dayton. So, it was a great kind of way to have the community involved. We had more volunteers than I could actually use from the community trying to help out with various events in Dayton, which was wonderful. I've always thought that was gonna be the case where we would have more than I need, and so we had to turn some away. But from arrival at the airports, we had people from the Dayton community there to greet and welcome people all the way through to arrival at the hotels and in every aspect of what we ended up executing.

Q: Let me ask you, what did you learn from this process? And I know we talked about lessons learned throughout the interview, but I'm curious: what are some general lessons that you've learned from it that you can apply to your current career, but also the lessons that you might not have known that you would advise your younger self from two years ago? What would be some general lessons?

GALANES: The first and foremost is to make sure you make a list of who needs to be notified and at what times so that you don't surprise people, particularly if you're bringing an international conference to the community. So I appreciate Dayton Mayor Mims being a good sport about it. [I] probably should have let him in on that secret a little while beforehand. I would say that, have a clear vision and keep the key people involved, but also recognize who doesn't need to be involved at every step. A good example would be the airports; they wanted to be included in every monthly meeting. And I'm like, "There is no need, you will be contacted. We're going to come to your facility, we're going to do a walk-through. We're going to talk about what we need from you, but you don't need to know the rest of the aspects of what's going on because you're the first and last person they're gonna see, but you're not really involved in anything else."

And that was an element of both PR and security that only the people who needed to know knew and kept it on close hold. From early on, I established with all partners—because we knew the media would be asking questions and try to just jump around to different partners to get different pieces together—that any and all media requests had to go through me. It doesn't mean I'm going to answer for every agency. I'm going to say, “We will do this interview. Can I please have the city manager do this one, or can I have the police handle this interview.” But all requests, regardless, would go through me, and I sat down with the media about six months [before NATO PA and said], “This is what's coming. This is what we're planning. We'll roll out various events, so you guys will have it. I'll keep you informed on the schedule. But stop asking everybody for things. You're not going to get the answers.” And they did, right? And then, we did some more community outreach. That was part of it, enlisting the community. We announced this a year before it happened, so no one in the community didn't know it was coming. And those who said they didn't know the impact, then they clearly were not paying attention to what we were putting out on social media. We had a website dedicated to it. We had mailers going out, obviously, news coverage. You're not going to reach everybody, but I was very comfortable with our communication strategy. So that was something I took away, that I thought we did very well.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about the lessons, given that this was a congressional effort versus a State Department effort? And in more terms, what were some of the benefits that you guys were in charge of the event? Also, talk about a partnership in more general terms when Congress takes a role over an international conference of this scope.

GALANES: Yeah, so this is very unusual, [especially when] Congress takes a role in an international conference that's outside the Capitol Complex, particularly outside of Washington, DC. I'm not sure of the other ones other than obviously, Orlando in 2002, was the last session for NATO PA, and I'm not actually sure if that was congressionally run or State Department. To tell you the truth, a lot of people aren't around from twenty years ago. What was kind of great about that is we can work congressionally. We can make decisions much quicker. I didn't need to get approval from anyone to make decisions on execution or elements other than Congressman Turner. And to his credit, he gave me a wide latitude that I probably cleared about 10% of what happened with him, and I kept him informed of “This is what's going to happen” and whatnot. But a lot of it was just decision-making with me and what I thought was best for the community.

Community partners were bringing ideas to the table. And there are actually elements of the events that I never told the Congressman about as a personal surprise for him, including that for one of the lunches, we had his high school marching band perform. So that was kind of fun. [The] Europeans were all excited about it. But, for Mr. Turner, it was much more emotional for him.

I [didn't] have to worry about the administration and the foreign policy objectives or whatnot going through an approval process for anyone. [A] Great example of that is we invited the three Presidents of Bosnia. Well, the current President, the Chairwoman, is

under U.S. sanctions and has been for two years. She's not allowed to come to the United States, and she RSVP'd a yes. So I had to send it to the State Department like, "So what do you want me to do with this?" And it was, I think, in some ways, her way of calling my bluff. And to the State Department's credit, they granted her a visa, and she came. That was one of those things where, after the State Department saw who I was and that I kept them informed throughout the process of who we were inviting, they started suggesting people to invite, which was great. So they became more of a partner in that sense.

Q: Yeah, right. And that's interesting because it was pretty much the major international conference, primarily for the Balkans, this year, but also with all the leaders present in the U.S. I remember, I was at the hotel interviewing, I think, the President of Kosovo, and then the Chairwoman of the Bosnian Presidency walked out with the Secret Service, and we were looking at her, and we were like, "Yeah, that's her, the one that is under sanctions." But it was amazing to see them even just mingling like a sort of back-channel in the hallways and talking. And it felt like everybody was actually talking rather than fighting.

GALANES: Yeah, it was the conversations they were having, both in public and then the private diplomatic things, whether it's at Sinclair or at various events for dinners. It was great.

Q: Let me ask you one final question: Looking back at it now in a retrospective, I'm curious whether you've accomplished everything you were trying to accomplish, whether everything went well, and whether there were some things that you would change or was everything perfect?

GALANES: So, no, I mean, not everything's perfect. It can't be perfect. I'm very pleased with the execution. I'm overjoyed by the weather that cooperated quite nicely, and the elements of surprise and the community support that came from it and those aspects in terms of the goal. One of the goals that Mr. Turner had was for this to be the 30th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Accords, the international celebration and commemoration of that. And I believe that it was. The congressman and I are going to the region in November for various anniversary aspects of this, but we do not expect those to be on any scale compared to what Dayton 2025 was. So in that sense, that goal was accomplished. Despite Ukraine, despite what's going on [in] the Middle East, despite the Indo-Pacific concerns, or whatever else is going on [in] the world, we were able to set this marker, and this time with this much participation and interest from the heads of states in those regions, to come to the United States to do this right now.

I think one disappointment, maybe and possibly, because it's a new administration, possibly because, also it was a Memorial Day weekend and that's a tough weekend for Americans, that's a really sacrosanct holiday, is, I would have liked a stronger U.S. participation.

I think there's an opportunity, a missed opportunity, in some ways, to have more in-depth dialog with these world leaders on Balkan issues or on bilateral issues. A lot of them are concerned about tariffs or security arrangements or whatnot. Also, an opportunity to push for more, greater transatlantic unification and alliance, and EU integration for NATO. So I think that was, perhaps, a missed opportunity in that sense. But I can't make everything happen. We created the venue and the opportunity for it, and those who want to take the opportunity to engage did, and those who didn't or couldn't, well, they'll figure out their own.

End of interview