The President. No. First of all, I'm going to complete this mission—we're going to complete this mission. And the Republican leaders will have to decide how to do their job. That's not for me to comment on.

Kuwait

Q. Can you confirm reports of Saddam Hussein possibly advancing and invading Kuwait and the possible use of ground troops, sir?

The President. No, I have no comment on that. I think that surely he knows what a disastrous mistake that would be.

Civilian Casualties in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, the Iraqis are saying there's been heavy civilian casualties in this. Do you have any information so far that that's true?

The President. I do not. I can tell you what I said last night: We did everything we could to carefully target military and national security targets and to minimize civilian casualties. There is always a prospect that the missiles will miss, that they will be interrupted because of the missiles being fired at them, trying to deflect them from their intended targets. I am quite sure there will be, as I said last evening, unintended casualties, and I regret that very much.

That's one of the reasons that I have bent over backwards, not just in November but also on previous occasions to avoid using force in this case. I did not want to do it; I think all of you know it. But in November, we literally had planes in the air, and I said that it would be the last chance. I think it is very important that we not allow Saddam Hussein to destroy the UNSCOM system without any penalty whatever, to eventually get all these sanctions lifted and to go right on just as if he never made any commitments that were unfulfilled on this score. I think it would have been a disaster for us to do this.

And so, regrettably, I made this decision. There is, I believe, no way to avoid some unintended civilian casualties, and I regret it very much. But I believe far, far more people would have died eventually from this man's regime had we not taken this action.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Richard Butler, executive chairman, United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM). A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Proclamation 7160—Wright Brothers Day, 1998

December 17, 1998

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

On a December morning 95 years ago, over the windswept sands of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, Orville and Wilbur Wright turned humanity's age-old dream of powered flight into reality. The two brothers, bicycle mechanics by trade and visionaries by nature, had worked painstakingly for years to construct the first power-driven craft that was heavier than air and capable of controlled, sustained flight. After persevering through many trials and discouraging setbacks, they made their fourth trip to Kitty Hawk in 1903 and, on December 17, with Orville at the controls and Wilbur running alongside, their airplane took flight and took us into a new era. The achievement of the Wright brothers was not only a great personal success and a vindication of years of creative effort and methodical experimentation—it was also a feat of historic significance for the future of humankind.

Almost a century later, the same passion and power of imagination that spurred the Wright brothers are fueling the dreams of a new generation of Americans. From John Glenn's second historic space flight to the construction of the International Space Station, we continue to open new frontiers and expand our horizons. Just as the Wright brothers' inventions and achievements created a new industry and revolutionized transportation, commerce, and communication, today's missions into space hold great promise for the development of new technologies and industries to benefit all humanity and strengthen our hopes for lasting peace and prosperity for nations across the globe.

This November, I was pleased to sign into law the Centennial of Flight Commemoration Act, which establishes a commission to coordinate the celebration in 2003 of the 100th anniversary of the Wright brothers' first flight. The commission's activities will raise public awareness of the enormous contributions of the Wright brothers to human progress; remind the world of the triumph of American ingenuity, inventiveness, and diligence in developing new technologies; and inspire all Americans to recognize that the daring, creativity, and spirit of adventure reflected in the achievement of the Wright brothers will be crucial to the success of our Nation in the 21st century.

The Congress, by a joint resolution approved December 17, 1963 (77 Stat. 402; 36 U.S.C. 169), has designated December 17 of each year as ''Wright Brothers Day'' and has authorized and requested the President to issue annually a proclamation inviting the people of the United States to observe that day with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim December 17, 1998, as Wright Brothers Day.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this seventeenth day of December, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-third.

William J. Clinton

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., December 21, 1998]

NOTE: This proclamation will be published in the *Federal Register* on December 22.

Executive Order 13109—Half-Day Closing of Executive Departments and Agencies of the Federal Government on Thursday, December 24, 1998

December 17, 1998

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, it is hereby ordered as follows:

Section 1. All executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government shall be closed and their employees excused from duty for the last half of the scheduled workday on Christmas Eve, December 24, 1998, except as provided in section 2 below.

Sec. 2. The heads of executive departments and agencies may determine that certain offices and installations of their organizations, or parts thereof, must remain open and that certain employees must remain on duty for the full scheduled workday on December 24, 1998, for reasons of national security or defense or for other essential public reasons.

Sec. 3. Thursday, December 24, 1998, shall be considered as falling within the scope of Executive Order 11582 and of 5 U.S.C. 5546 and 6103(b) and other similar statutes insofar as they relate to the pay and leave of employees of the United States.

Sec. 4. This order shall apply to executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government only and is not intended to direct or otherwise implicate departments or agencies of State or local governments.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
December 17, 1998.

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., December 21, 1998]

NOTE: This Executive order will be published in the *Federal Register* on December 22.

Remarks Honoring Eunice Kennedy Shriver at the Special Olympics Dinner

December 17, 1998

Thank you. Please be seated. Thank you. Pretty rowdy crowd tonight. [*Laughter*] I am delighted to join Hillary in welcoming all of you here. We're delighted to have you at this remarkable celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Special Olympics.

Let me say just for a moment, I am also thinking tonight about the brave American men and women in uniform who are carrying out our mission in Iraq with our British allies.