

Dec. 9 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1998

remarks, he referred to original Tuskegee Airmen Col. Charles McGee, USAF (Ret.), Lt. Col. Woodrow Crockett, USAF (Ret.), and Col. William A. Campbell, USAF (Ret.); Janet Langhart, wife of Defense Secretary William S. Cohen;

former Secretary of Transportation William T. Coleman, Jr., and his son, William T. Coleman III, General Counsel, U.S. Army; and former Gov. Doug Wilder of Virginia.

Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree

December 9, 1997

Thank you very much. Thank you, John. I want to thank you and all the people responsible, again, for this wonderful, wonderful evening. I'd like to thank our performers: Tony Bennett, Leona Mitchell, Jose Feliciano, the "Cats" crew, the Paul Hill choir, Al Roker, who has been a great Santa Claus tonight. I'd like to thank our Brownie and Cub Scout, Jessica Scott and Edgar Allen Sheppard. And of course, I'd like to thank Sammy Sosa and Mrs. Sosa for joining us tonight. We're delighted to see them all.

Hillary and I look forward to this every year, and this, as you may know, is the 75th anniversary of this Christmas tree lighting. For us, Christmas always starts with this Pageant of Peace. Tonight we celebrate the beginning of this season of peace and hope, of sharing and giving, of family and friends. We celebrate the birth of the child we know as the Prince of Peace, who came into the world with only a stable's roof to shelter him but grew to teach a lesson of love that has lasted two millennia. "Blessed are the peacemakers," he said, and his words still call us to action.

The lights we illuminate tonight are more than the flickering bulbs on a beautiful Colorado blue spruce. They represent millions of individual acts of courage and compassion that light our lives. Like the Star of Bethlehem, these lights shine the promise of hope and renewal.

Like the candles of Hanukkah, they stand for freedom against tyranny. Like the lamps that will soon light the mosques in the coming months of Ramadan, they evoke a call to community.

We light this tree in Washington, but all over the world we thank God that the light of peace is glowing as never before in Northern Ireland, in Bosnia, in the Middle East. In the coming year, let us rededicate ourselves to building the bonds of peace on Earth. Let those of us who are Americans express our appreciation to those who serve us in uniform, represented tonight by the United States Air Force Band, who help to preserve peace for us.

Now I'd like to ask Sammy and Jessica and Edgar to come up here and join me as we light the Christmas tree, our national tree. Let the spirit of the holidays, of peace and good will, be our beacon all year long. Merry Christmas. Happy New Year. May God bless you all.

Now put your hands on the switch, and I'll count down to one. Three, two, one. Light the tree!

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:50 p.m. on the Ellipse during the annual Christmas Pageant of Peace. In his remarks, he referred to John J. Betchkal, president, Christmas Pageant of Peace; and baseball player Sammy Sosa, National League Most Valuable Player, and his wife, Sonia.

Message on the Observance of Hanukkah, 1998

December 9, 1998

Warm greetings to all those celebrating Hanukkah.

For eight consecutive nights during this twilight of the year, in Jewish homes across America and around the world, the flames of the