

tant, it helps to reinforce America's highest ideals—our respect for diversity, community, and freedom.

During this time of celebration and learning we are inspired by the courage, wisdom, and vision of men and women such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Carter G. Woodson, and Fannie Lou Hamer. These great Americans dedicated their lives to ensuring that the ideals of freedom and equality are guaranteed to all. Their noble efforts—and the efforts of those they inspired—renewed the spirit of our founding creed: "All men are created equal." As we approach the 21st century, it is more vital than ever that we remain vigilant in protecting the ideals these visionary leaders fought so hard to uphold. We must continue to extend the circle of equality, justice, and opportunity until it embraces every American.

As we pay homage to our past, throughout the month of February and all year long, let us, with enlightened minds and emboldened hearts, continue the legacy of the civil rights movement. Let us present a diverse but united front to those who would reverse the vital progress that has been made. As the world's beacon of hope and freedom, let us approach the new millennium keeping this vigil.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim February 1997 as National African American History Month. I call upon public officials, educators, librarians, and all the people of the United States to observe this month with appropriate ceremonies, activities, and programs that raise awareness of African American history.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this thirtieth day of January, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-first.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Proclamation 6971 of February 1, 1997

American Heart Month, 1997

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

More than 700,000 men and women die each year of heart disease, making it the leading cause of death in our country. Annually, about 1.5 million Americans suffer heart attacks, one-third of which are fatal. Collectively, diseases of the heart and blood vessels claim about 960,000 American lives annually. These statistics only hint at the individual and collective tragedy brought on by heart disease and stroke and underscore the need for us to do everything possible to combat cardiovascular diseases.

Research has brought dramatic improvements to our knowledge of heart disease and how to combat it. We have learned much in recent years and now know that the processes leading to heart disease typically begin early in life and worsen over the years; symptoms often do

not appear for decades. We also better understand the effects of genetics, gender, and lifestyle. High blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, smoking, diabetes, and obesity increase the risk of developing heart disease; physical activity can reduce the risk of suffering from cardiovascular disease, including stroke.

Additionally, research has brought improved diagnostic methods and treatments for those afflicted with heart disease. Noninvasive imaging devices can now show the heart at work inside the body, giving doctors more precise information about their patient's condition. And new tests and therapies allow us to detect and treat a heart attack more effectively and minimize damage to the heart muscle.

These striking developments in biomedical techniques and increased public awareness and education have helped reduce the death rate from heart disease by nearly 60 percent in the past 30 years, and deaths from stroke by about 65 percent.

The Federal Government has contributed to these advances by supporting research and public education programs of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, part of the National Institutes of Health. The American Heart Association also has played a crucial role in bringing about these remarkable accomplishments through its research and education programs and the work of dedicated volunteers.

Yet much remains to be done. The incidence of obesity has risen dramatically over the past 30 years, and renewed efforts are needed to make all Americans aware of how they can lower the risks of heart disease by adopting a commonsense regimen of diet, exercise, and, in some cases, medication.

More, too, must be done to help survivors of initial heart attacks live full lives. Within six years of a heart attack, for instance, more than a third of those afflicted develop severe and often disabling chest pain. One-fourth or more of them will have another heart attack, and another fifth suffer heart failure. The challenges posed by heart disease are becoming ever more pressing as America ages and more of us live beyond age 65—the group most affected by this disease.

In the face of these daunting challenges, we Americans, acting individually and collectively, can fight heart disease and give ourselves and our families a healthy future.

In recognition of these important needs in the ongoing battle against cardiovascular disease, the Congress, by Joint Resolution approved December 30, 1963 (77 Stat. 843; 36 U.S.C. 169b), has requested that the President issue an annual proclamation designating February as "American Heart Month."

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim February 1997, as American Heart Month. I invite the Governors of the States, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, officials of other areas subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, and the American people to join me in reaffirming our commitment to combating cardiovascular disease and stroke.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this first day of February, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-

seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-first.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Proclamation 6972 of February 8, 1997

National Child Passenger Safety Week, 1997

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Children are our Nation's most precious gift, and one of our most profound responsibilities is protecting their health, well-being, and safety. Nowhere is this duty more critical than on America's streets and highways.

Automobile accidents are the leading cause of death for America's young people. It is tragic that a high proportion of these deaths could be prevented, but are not. For example, we know that seat belts save lives—last year they prevented the deaths of almost 10,000 Americans—and, yet, many still fail to wear them.

I encourage all Americans to take a few simple steps to ensure that their families travel safely. The most important rule is also the simplest: The safest place for children is the back seat. Also, parents and guardians must always make sure that children are secured, either in a locked seat belt or in an appropriate child safety seat.

I commend the Department of Transportation for its "Patterns for Life" program, begun in 1996 to focus attention on correct child safety seat use and the proper positioning of children and their safety seats away from air bags. Working through national safety organizations and State public safety and highway offices, this program offers a network of qualified child passenger safety trainers to provide communities with the valuable resources they need to reduce motor vehicle-related deaths and injuries.

Laws exist in every State and the District of Columbia that require proper restraints for younger children. However, 40 percent of our children under five are still not properly restrained. We must do better to enforce the existing laws and protect our precious cargo.

The steps we take now will make our roads safer and our children more secure. My Administration is striving to increase the use of seat belts throughout the Nation. We are also working with automobile makers, car dealers, private organizations, and insurance companies to teach parents how to install child safety seats properly, and new technologies will eventually make air bags safer for children.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim February 9 through February 15, 1997, as National Child Passenger Safety Week. I urge all Americans to help reduce injuries and the tragic loss of life on our highways by buckling up every child in an approved restraint, in the vehicle's back seat. And let us all help spread these important