AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

Serbia

Q. Mr. President, metaphorically speaking, you are the voice of America. [*Laughter*] I can't help but make the link now——

The President. Except for a few days ago. [*Laughter*]

Q. I can't help but make the link to Eastern Europe and the Serbia situation. What would you say to Mr. Milosevic?

The President. That elections should be respected and that the voice of the people should be heard, and that the human, political, and civil rights of the people should be respected. The United States has made its statement and its position clear. Neither we nor anyone else would seek to interfere in the internal events in Serbia, but our sympathies are always with free people who are struggling to express their freedom and want to have the integrity of their elections respected.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:54 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia.

Statement Announcing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Summit

December 10, 1996

Today, America and its NATO allies agreed to hold a NATO summit on July 8–9, 1997, in Madrid to take the crucial next steps on the enlargement and adaptation of the North Atlantic alliance for the 21st century. This marks an important milestone on the road to an integrated, democratic, and secure Europe.

The summit will seek to advance a strong and enduring NATO-Russia partnership; to strengthen partnership with all of Europe's new democracies; to approve adaptations within NATO to prepare the alliance to meet the challenges of the coming century; and to invite the first aspiring NATO members to begin accession talks to join the alliance. My goal is to see NATO take in its first new members by 1999, the 50th anniversary of NATO's founding and the 10th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

From the beginning of my administration, I have worked hard to end the cold war division of Europe and to create, for the first time in history, a Europe united in democracy, security, and free market prosperity. Now, we must continue to reach out to Russia, and include this great nation in the fabric of Europe's emerging community of democracies. We must open the doors of Europe's institutions that nurtured peace, prosperity, and security throughout the cold war to Europe's new democracies, excluding no nation that shares our values and is willing and able to shoulder our common responsibilities.

NATO has never threatened any other nation, nor will an enlarged NATO do so in the future. While NATO's new members will be full members of the alliance, NATO has no intention, no plan, and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members.

We have made tremendous progress over the last 4 years in realizing our vision of an undivided Europe at peace, and no one deserves more credit than Warren Christopher. Thanks to his efforts, Secretary-designate Madeleine Albright and my new national security team will have a strong foundation on which to achieve that important goal.

Remarks at a Democratic Leadership Council Luncheon

December 11, 1996

Thank you. The last person clapping is my first new Ambassador in the new term. [*Laughter*]

Thank you, Bernard Schwartz, for that wonderful introduction and for your life of private and public achievement. I was hearing you say all those terrific things, and I thought to myself, I'm glad you did what you did, but I'd like you even better if you owned a newspaper. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank my longtime friend Senator Lieberman and Governor Romer for their work for the DLC. And I see my predecessors as chairs out there: Senator Chuck Robb and Congressman Dave McCurdy. I thank them for the work they did at the DLC.

I brought a number of people from the administration here who were early DLC members, including Mack McLarty, who started with me back in '85; Bruce Reed and Linda Moore and Elaine Kamarck and Don Baer, my Communications Director. I'd also like to say a public word of thanks to Mark Penn, who did the research that all of you I think have been given, for the fine job that he and his partner, Doug Schoen, did in our campaign.

You know, I went jogging with Al From this morning. And the original theme of my speech was the era of big Government is over. The new speech will be the era of big Al is over. [*Laughter*] He's lost 75 pounds in 15 months. If that's not enough to make you optimistic about America, I don't know what is. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank all the Members of Congress and the newly elected Members of Congress who are here. I'm hesitant to mention any names because I can't see everyone who is here, but I know that Allen Boyd and Cal Dooley and Sandy Levin and Karen McCarthy and Bill Luther and Jim Moran, Tim Roemer, Debbie Stabenow, and Ellen Tauscher are here. There may be others, but if you're here, I thank you for being here, because this organization fought for the life and the future of the Democratic Party as it fought for the life and the future of America for a very long time. And all of us need to be continually open to the new ideas which are always debated here with such vigor and such careful forethought. And so I thank the Members and the newly elected Members who are here, and I hope more of your number will be coming to these events in the future.

I thank the business and community leaders who are here. Many of you have been with us for some time; some of you are coming in. But we need the kind of fermenting dialog that we have here from locally elected officials, from community leaders, and from the truly stunning array of business leaders who are here today. I thank you.

A year ago when I spoke here, our Nation was facing a time of great decision. That day the congressional majority was pressing its budget plan upon the Nation, and I told you why I didn't like it but why I hoped we could pass a balanced budget. That night at midnight the Government was shut down. It was a moment of fundamental decision about the direction of our Nation, the role of our Government in this age, the strength of our values. That day I said the great question before us was, can the center hold.

So, today the clamor of political conflict has subsided. A new landscape is taking shape. The answer is clear: The center can hold, the center has held, and the American people are demanding that it continue to do so.

By the stands that we have taken, the battles we've waged, the record that has been built, we've helped to forge a new American vision, a new consensus that can govern our country and move us all forward. The ground has shifted between our feet—beneath our feet—but we have clearly created a new center, not the lukewarm midpoint between overheated liberalism and chilly conservatism but instead a place where throughout our history, people of good will have tried to forge new approaches to new challenges; the vital center the DLC has been trying to forge with new ideas and mainstream values for more than a decade now; the vital center that has brought so much progress to our Nation in the last 4 years; the vital, dynamic center from which we now must finish the work of preparing America for the 21st century.

In this rare and fleeting moment of opportunity, we still have work to do, for while the era of big Government is over, the era of big challenges is not. Achieving educational excellence, finishing welfare reform and our campaign for safe streets, helping families to succeed at home and at work, balancing the budget, keeping America strong and prosperous, reforming campaign finance, and modernizing Government operations so that, together, we can meet the challenges and seize the opportunities of this remarkable time.

Our bridge to the 21st century must connect our newest challenges to our oldest values: opportunity for all Americans, responsibility from all Americans, a national community of all Americans, a national commitment to American leadership as the indispensable nation in the new world unfolding before us.

We all know how quickly this world is changing. We were smiling when Senator Lieberman was trying to describe the things that Bernard Schwartz has done in the area of technology. It's changing the way we work and live and relate to each other and to others around the globe. As in every other time of profound change, we must follow Lincoln's admonition to think anew and act anew. And as in every such time, the American people must come to a common understanding about how to proceed before we can hope to succeed.

Today I believe we have come to such an understanding. Today, a century after the Progressives, six decades after the New Deal, after half a century of cold war, we have once again been called upon to forge a new approach, to forge solutions to meet the challenges of today, not those of yesterday. That is what you and I have fought to do for several years now.

As I said before the DLC in Cleveland in 1991, our agenda isn't liberal or conservative, it's both and it's different. And we're not just out to save the Democratic Party, we're out to save the United States of America.

We said in 1991 we would offer opportunity for all, demand responsibility from all, build a stronger American community. We said that this era requires a Government that neither attempts to solve problems for people nor leaves them alone to fend for themselves. Instead, we envision a Government that gives people the tools to solve their own problems and make the most of their own lives.

When I became President, I was determined to bring this philosophy to our National Government. I didn't much care on what part of the political spectrum a minimum wage came from, or NAFTA, or family leave, or changing but not completely ending affirmative action, or banning assault weapons, or fighting to stop the advertising and sale of tobacco to our young people, or doing national service, or promoting charter schools, or promoting the reinventing Government effort, or so many other of the things we've done. They were hard to pigeonhole, and I think that made it frustrating for those who were trying to communicate to the larger citizenry about what it was we were about.

But the issue was not whether these things were from the right or the left of the political spectrum, but whether, instead, they were the right things to do. The issue is not what is liberal or conservative but what will move us forward together. These are ideas at the vital American center, ideas that have broken the gridlock that gripped Washington for too long. For years politicians treated our most vexing problems here, like crime and welfare and the budget deficit, as issues to be exploited, not problems to be solved. That's why they went on and on and on.

Before we passed the crime bill it had been debated in Washington for 6 years. Meanwhile, there was plainly at the grassroots level a consensus among people in law enforcement and the community groups working with them for safe streets about what ought to be done. We tried to change all that. We worked hard at it. And we have succeeded in many areas.

After decades in which the welfare system was trapped, generation after generation in a cycle of dependency, we said we had to replace welfare checks with paychecks and make responsibility a way of life. We said we would end welfare as we know it, and we have. Last week we learned that there are 2.1 million fewer people on welfare today than on the day I took office. That is the biggest drop in history.

After decades in which criminals occupied our streets, we said we needed a new approach to fighting crime, and we have provided it: tougher punishment, better prevention, above all, more police. Crime is down all across America for 4 years now.

After decades of debate over the size and scope of Government, we've reduced the size of the Federal Government by over 10 percent; eliminated hundreds of programs, thousands of pages of regulations; privatized more operations than any previous administration; and cut the deficit by 60 percent in 4 years. We also worked very hard to devolve more responsibilities in a spirit of partnership to State and local governments and to community groups. I want to pay special tribute in that regard to two of my Cabinet members, one of whom is here today, the HUD Sec-

retary, Henry Cisneros, and the Secretary of Transportation, Federico Peña, two former mayors who brought that spirit to our National Government. Thank you very much.

Both parties now agree that we must balance the budget and both parties now agree that we can only do it in a way that reflects our deepest values and garners support from members of both parties.

In each of these areas, we simply stopped asking who's to blame and started asking, what are we going to do. As a result, America is moving forward. And now we must capture that momentum and use it to finish the work of preparing our people for the new century. Let us commit together to mobilizing that vital center. Let us spend the next 50 months to prepare America for the next 50 years.

Now, our first task is to finish the job of balancing the budget. As we've cut the deficit by over 60 percent, the corresponding drop in interest rates has powered our economy—nearly 11 million new jobs now in less than 4 years. To keep the economy growing, we must finish the job. I'm determined to work with Congress to agree to a bipartisan balanced budget plan that does reflect our values.

We can, and we must, work together to reform Medicare and Medicaid so they continue to meet the promise to our parents and our children and continue to expand health care step by step to children in working families who don't have it. We can do that and balance the budget and take advantage of the fact that new models are clearly making it possible to lower the rate of medical inflation in a way that advances the quality of health care as well as the quality of our long-term objectives in balancing the budget and investing in the future of America. I know it can be done, and I am determined to get it done.

Second, we must give our young people the best education in the world. We must dramatically reform our public schools, demanding high standards and accountability from every teacher and every student, promoting reforms like public choice, school choice, and charter schools in every State.

Let me just say a word here especially with respect to Governor Romer. We've worked hard to support local control of the schools. We've worked hard to reduce the paperwork and the regulations that were unnecessary. Secretary Riley has done a fine job of giving more discretion to promote grassroots reform to local school districts. But we have largely local control in America. And yet, we do not have today recognized national standards in every critical area of study and a recognized measurement that can go across the Nation that can tell us how all of our children are doing. I am for local control; I am not for Federal Government national standards. But I am for national standards of excellence and a means of measuring it so we know what our children are learning.

We must open the doors of college so that the 13th and 14th years of school, at least 2 years after high school, are as universal in 4 years as high school is today.

We must modernize our system of training, collapsing overlapping and outdated training programs into a "GI bill" for America's workers, something the DLC has long advocated, so that all working people who need it have access to the skills they need in a changing workplace.

The third thing we have to do is to bring the under class into the American mainstream, breaking the cycle of dependence and poverty. Already, over 4 years, the welfare rolls have been reduced by 2.1 million, partly, of course, because of the improving economy but largely because we have worked with the States of this country to forge new approaches to move people from welfare to work, recognizing that most people on welfare want to get off and want to go to work, and recognizing that responsibility should be a way of life and welfare should be a second chance.

The welfare reform legislation I recently signed is just the next step, not the end of the road. We have a moral obligation now, all of us, particularly in the DLC who fought for welfare reform for so long, to make welfare reform work, to end the culture of isolated, permanent dependency. We have demanded responsibility of welfare recipients; indeed, we have written it into the law. And now we must meet our responsibilities by providing them the opportunity to work. We must bring the freshest ideas to bear on how we can bring the power of private business

to the inner city, where, today, there are simply not enough jobs for those who will no longer be eligible for permanent welfare.

Last year in Chicago, for example, there were six job applicants for every entry-level job opening. In St. Louis, there were nine job applicants for every entry-level job opening. These jobs we know because of the conditions of the Federal budget must come primarily from the private sector with incentives from the Government, like tax credits and wage and training subsidies.

Now, how can we do this? Can we do it? I believe we plainly can if all of you will help. And I think it is a good thing that people will not be moving from welfare to work where they'll only be working with large numbers of other people who are on welfare in large-scale public works projects, because we want, again—the rolls have been reduced by 2.1 million, so a lot of the easy work has been done. Now we have to go out and give people a chance to move from a culture of isolated dependence into the mainstream of American life.

But if you look, for example, at the Kansas City model, where they have set up a full employment council, where the business community and the service providers and the educators and welfare recipients are all represented; and where, under an agreement with our administration, the State of Missouri says to employers, ''If you will hire someone off welfare, we will give you the welfare check as a wage and training subsidy for up to 4 years, and we will give you, if you don't provide health insurance for your employees, the opportunity for this person to keep the Medicaid not just for a year, but for up to 4 years. And if you want, you can have this slot for 10 years. We'll tell you right now, we want you to participate in this program; so when you move somebody from the welfare slot into a higher wage category, we'll let you have another person, and we'd like you to participate.''

Now, think what this means. This means small business, medium-sized and big businesses can all participate. And it is working. I met a man who had a business with 25 people in it filling an interesting little niche—he stores data for the Federal Government. Even Washington, with all its buildings, can't hold all the data of the Federal Government. Five of his 25 employees are former welfare recipients. Many of them fit a profile where you would say they're the least likely people we could get into the work force. They are doing well.

And you think about it—if every State will authorize—and they don't have to ask me for permission anymore, that's what the welfare bill does. The welfare bill basically says, we'll have a national guarantee of nutrition and health care for poor families and the children, but that portion of the Federal Government's money that used to go with the State government's money into a welfare check now will be given to the State and they can decide what to do with it.

So now it's up to the States. And this welfare reform movement has to shift in large measure to an argument at every State level. But if you've got a system like this one in Kansas City—and we know that's what the laboratories of democracies are supposed to do, we know this will work—then there is no excuse for every State not to do that.

Yes, I'm going to try to get Congress to pass some more tax credits to give further incentives. Yes, I'm going to try to get Congress to set aside some funds for the cities where unemployment is critically high and there are more and more and more job applicants for the jobs that are open, to give some other kinds of work to people when their welfare time limit has run. But the main answer to this is for small, medium-sized, and large businesses all across America to examine themselves and say, ''If I were to get this sort of help, shouldn't I stretch and put somebody on and give them a chance to move into the American mainstream.'' And the DLC ought to lead the fight because you've been up here, along with me, screaming for welfare reform for a decade. You have it. Now we have to do something with it, and I challenge you to do so.

The fourth thing we have to do is to press our fight against gangs and guns and drugs and violence by finishing our community policing project, finishing the job of putting 100,000 police on the street, getting guns off the street and out of the hands of children, cracking down on violent teen gangs, and

teaching our children that drugs are wrong, illegal, and dangerous.

Fifth, we must strengthen our families and help our people to succeed at home and at work. You know, when I go across the country and I talk to people from all walks of life, this is the one theme that continually comes up: How can I do a good job raising my children and a good job at my work? We have an obligation to help parents do that, first, by supporting them as they try to pass along their values to their children in an age in which children at younger and younger ages are exposed to different kinds of values.

I think we should expand family leave in a very limited way so that parents can take some time off to go to regular parent-teacher conferences at school and to take their children to regular doctor's appointments, not just when they're desperately ill. I think we should give workers the choice of more flextime, so that when they work overtime they ought to have the choice to take the overtime in cash or time at home with the family if they need it.

I believe we have to continue to help parents protect their children from harmful outside influences, whether they come from tobacco or television violence. I think we must fight continually, as we have, to protect the water our children drink, the air they breathe, the food they eat, and especially we must clean up two-thirds of the most dangerous toxic waste sites in the country over the next 4 years so that our children will be growing up next to parks, not poison.

Sixth, we have to renew our democracy and—you want to clap for that? I'll stop. [*Applause*] Thank you. These Embassies are going fast. [*Laughter*]

The sixth thing we have to do is to renew our democracy and restore the confidence of the American people in their Government by passing meaningful campaign finance reform legislation and modernizing Government operations. This will require consistent, disciplined, and honest effort. We know that the thing which has driven the cost of campaigns through the roof is the cost of communications, primarily television advertising, also radio advertising, direct mail, and other forms of communicating with the voters.

We know that the actual enterprise of raising the money and the burden of spending it threatens to overwhelm other aspects of our electoral system. Anyone who has been part of this system, in a moment of candor must accept some responsibility for this and agree that it needs to change. There simply is too much money in our politics; it takes too much time to raise, and inevitably, it raises too many questions.

We know from bitter experience, however, that this is one of these things that everybody's for in general but few are for in particular. We know from bitter experience that delay is the enemy of reform. Now, Senators McCain and Feingold have a plan that is real, bipartisan, and tough. Six times in recent years, just since I've been President, reasonable campaign finance reform has been killed by Senate filibusters. Now Congress should go on and pass campaign finance reform and pass it without delay. And we need a bipartisan coalition of business and community leaders to support the Congress and to demand that it be done. There are no more excuses. The people are finally focused on it; let's get the job done.

But let me also say we cannot minimize the other reform effort that must continue, and that is the reinventing Government effort that has been headed so brilliantly by Vice President Gore for the last 4 years. The DLC was one of the first organizations to focus on the possibility of actually reforming our Government so that it could be downsized and improve the quality of its operations at the same time. That has largely been achieved because of the disciplined, sustained efforts that we have made. And I thank Elaine Kamarck in particular for her leadership in that regard.

But we have more to do. We have some new tools, like the line-item veto, which can be helpful in that regard. But this is hard work. And it is not headline-grabbing work, but it makes a huge difference to whether we can balance the budget and have the funds to invest in our future and inspire confidence in the American people. So I urge the DLC to continue your emphasis on reinventing Government. It will never be a headline-grabbing issue, but it will always be an important part of what we are trying to

do to prepare our country for the 21st century and to continue to increase the confidence of the American people that they're getting their money's worth from their investment in their National Government.

Seventh, we must harness the remarkable forces of science and technology that are remaking our world. We must continue our mission to connect every classroom and library to the information superhighway by the year 2000. We must press on to develop the next generation of the Internet, to let universities send data to each other 1,000 times faster than today.

We must continue to expand the mission of our laboratories and make sure they have a strong peacetime mission that is contributing to America's future. And we must continue to invest and do more in medical and scientific research so that we can do great things that are plainly within our grasp, like finding cures for cancer and AIDS. We can make this age of science and technology a true age of possibility for all the American people, but we must invest in it and do it wisely if we expect to get a return.

Finally, we have to finish the mission of building new structures of peace and security around the world. We must complete the unfinished business of the cold war, building an undivided Europe of democracies at peace, with an expanded NATO and a strong NATO-Russian partnership; meeting the challenge of change in Asia with strength and steadiness; strengthening the hands of peace and democracy from Bosnia to the Middle East to Africa.

We must combat the new threats we face in terrorism, international drug running and organized crime, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. And we cannot weaken in our efforts to open more of the world's markets to our goods and services, from Asia to Latin America.

American trade is at an all-time high, with over 200 new trade agreements in the last 4 years alone—21 with Japan where our exports in those 21 areas have gone up 85 percent in 4 years—GATT, NAFTA, and many others. Our work now is no less important than the work that was done by the generation after World War II. We must create the structures of peace and security and the partnerships for peace and security and prosperity that will permit the American people to make the most of the 21st century.

Again, let me say the DLC can play an important role here. I think Senator Robb would admit that sometimes one of our most frustrating efforts as Democrats has been to convince our fellow Democrats that trade, if it's free and fair, is good for all the American people, and it's essential for America's future. Another frustration we have had is trying to get the public at large, that has shown so much interest and so much sophistication in economic and social issues, to understand the connections between our foreign and our domestic policies, our security policies and our economic policies.

There are no more simple dividing lines between foreign and domestic in the world we're living in. We need your help to continue to raise public awareness of these fundamental facts, so that when decisions have to be taken in the area of foreign affairs they will resonate at home in the way that so many of the DLC ideas have resonated with the American people in domestic policy. And I hope you will pay some attention to that in the next year.

Well, these are the great goals that I believe we must pursue if we are to prepare America for the 21st century. They must not only be pursued, they must be achieved. And what I want to say to you is, they can be achieved. But they can be achieved only if there is a vital American center, where there is cooperation across lines of party and philosophy.

This is an irreplaceable moment for breaking new ground in America. All our political leaders say we will work together. The public wants us to work together. And our progress demands that we work together. I stand ready to forge a coalition of the center, a broad consensus for creative and consistent and unflinching action. And I invite people of good will of all parties, or no party, to join in this endeavor. I have spoken to Majority Leader Lott and Speaker Gingrich on several occasions since the election; I believe they share this mission. All of us have heard the voters' mandate in this election; we heard it again yesterday loud and clear in Texas.

But it is not enough to hear; now we must act.

Let me make this final point. Now that the era of big Government is over, we clearly need a new kind of national leadership, leadership that does not rely alone on Washington's answers because the changes in the economy, the changes in technology, the changes in information and communication make it possible for people to be more empowered at lower levels of government and lower levels of business, indeed, individually and in their own families. But we must also recognize that the very changes that are empowering people to move apart from each other require us to work together in teams if we are to maximize the benefits of the opportunities before us.

Therefore, our Nation's leaders must chart a new course that calls upon people to think about their own responsibilities more and what new patterns of partnership we will have. Among other things, we have got to make a decision to cherish and respect our diversity instead of using it as a wedge to divide the American people. That is killing other countries, and we cannot tolerate it here.

For all of our differences, we have to identify the challenges we face in common as Americans and find ways to go after them in common. We must mobilize people in every walk of life to meet those challenges, and we must shine a spotlight on what works anywhere in America so that it can be adopted everywhere in America. And all of our citizens must be willing to serve. The nearly 70,000 Americans who have served in AmeriCorps, the national service program so long championed by the DLC, have proven that we can do great things together.

If we are all willing to serve, we will build a new faith in ourselves and in our ability to meet our challenges and protect our values. In so doing, we will build a new faith in America. Today I pledge to you that I will do everything in my power to summon that sense of responsibility from our people. My job does not end in Washington; it only begins here. So when business and communities join together to provide jobs for welfare recipients, I will be there as I was in Kansas City to tell every American community they must do the same. When parents and State legislators work to establish and uphold the toughest standards for our schools, I will be there. When communities band together to bring values, discipline, and hope to their children through school uniforms or imposing curfews or enforcing truancy laws, I will continue to be there.

I intend to spend the next 4 years doing everything I can to help communities to help themselves, to educate all Americans about what is working and to create, in the process, a national community of purpose. The progress we have made already should prove to all of us that when we apply our oldest values to our newest challenges, we can master this moment of change.

It will require us, however, to believe that our fellow Americans are capable of doing this. National standards and local reform requires you to believe all children can learn. Welfare reform requires you to believe that everybody is capable of being responsible and working if they have the mental and physical wherewithal to do it.

And I just want to leave you with this little story. Before I came over here this morning, I had the National Advisory Committee—that was actually started under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson—on Mental Health come in and give me two of their reports. John Kennedy, Jr., was one of the members. But the most impressive member today was a young woman from New Hampshire with Down's syndrome. And I appointed the first two people with mental retardation to the board.

So this young girl comes in, shakes my hand, tells me where she's from, gives me a letter, gives me a résumé, tells me what I need to do, and then says, "And I want you to have one of my buttons." And it said, "Down's syndrome" on it, and "Down" was marked out, and it had "Up" on it. Does that person have limits on what she can achieve? Sure, there are some. So do I. So do you. But if you spend all your time thinking about it, you won't think about what will be up instead of down. You must believe in the potential of the American people. We cannot afford to patronize each other with cynicism.

And finally, we cannot afford to continue the politics of personal destruction and divi-

sion that have taken too much of the lifeblood of this country already. Shortly before he died, the late Cardinal Bernardin, who Hillary and I had the privilege to know and revere, gave a remarkable speech about reconciling the conflicts within the Catholic Church over great issues in a way that would permit people to disagree honestly to try to preserve reconciliation. And he said this, knowing that his death was imminent: "It is wrong to waste the precious gift of time given to us on acrimony and division."

My fellow Americans, for all the problems of this country, we have been given more from God than any nation in history. And at this moment in history, we have more opportunities and more responsibilities than ever before. To make this democracy work, we must create a vital and dynamic center that is a place of action. We cannot waste the precious gift of this moment.

You have worked hard to create that vital center. Anchored by our oldest convictions, strengthened by our newest successes, certain of our national purpose, let us go forward from that center to build our bridge to the 21st century.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:50 p.m. at the Sheraton Washington Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Bernard Schwartz, event chairman; Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado; Al From, executive director, Democratic Leadership Council; and Mark Penn and Doug Schoen of Penn + Schoen Associates.

Message on the Observance of Christmas 1996

December 11, 1996

Warm greetings to everyone celebrating Christmas.

Each year during this blessed season, the world pauses to look back across the centuries to the birth of a Child. This Child was born to poor but loving parents in the small town of Bethlehem—born into a world where few noticed His coming, except for some simple shepherds and a few wise men. He was the Son of God and the King of Kings, but He chose to come among us as servant and Savior.

Though two thousand years have passed since Jesus first walked the earth, much remains the same. Today's world is still caught up in the challenges and cares of everyday existence, and too often we crowd God into the background of our experience. Too often we still ignore His loving presence in our lives and the precious gifts of peace and hope that He so freely offers to us all. And today, as on that first Christmas morning, He still reveals himself to the loving, the wise, and the simple of heart.

As we gather with family and friends again this year to celebrate Christmas, let us welcome God wholeheartedly into our daily lives. Let us learn to recognize Him not only in the faces of our loved ones, but also in the faces of those who, like Jesus, are familiar with poverty, hardship, and rejection. And let us be inspired by His example to serve one another with generous hearts and open hands. In this way we will approach the dawn of a new century and a new millennium confident in God's abundant grace and strengthened by His timeless promise of salvation.

Hillary joins me in praying that the peace and joy of this holiday season will remain with you throughout the coming year. Merry Christmas, and God bless you.

Bill Clinton

Message on the Observance of Kwanzaa 1996

December 11, 1996

Warm greetings to everyone celebrating Kwanzaa.

The hearts of millions of men and women across America and around the world rejoice as together we enter into the spirit of this uplifting holiday. The seven principles of Kwanzaa—unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith—teach us that when we come together to strengthen our families and communities and honor the lessons of the past, we can face the future with joy and optimism. Through prayer, song, and the exchange of gifts, Kwanzaa helps us celebrate the human experience and appreciate our many blessings.