

the benefits of interdependence, you have to assume the responsibilities of it.

And we've all recognized that from the beginning of the United Nations, nobody, no country in the United Nations, has given up its sovereignty, even though some people still allege that's true. But the more interdependent the world grows, the more likely we are, in my judgment, to have more broadly shared prosperity, fewer wars, and a better life for everyone. That does not require us to give up our national sovereignty, but it does require us to act in our real national interests.

Q. Mr. President—

The President. Last question.

Minorities on the White House Staff

Q. Thank you. I have another question on the issue of race, and it's on your record of appointing minorities to top-level jobs in your administration. You've talked throughout your career about the importance of diversity and inclusion, and, setting aside your Cabinet and Federal bench appointees, the top seven West Wing jobs in your administration have all been held by whites. Twenty-six people have had the jobs—

The President. I disagree with that. What are they?

Q. Well, Chief of Staff, National Security, Domestic Policy, Economic Adviser, White House Counsel, Press Secretary, Senior Adviser, Counselor—all those jobs have been held by—not a single person of color has held any of those jobs. And I wonder if you could tell us why?

The President. Well, first of all, you might be interested to know there were a couple of people of color that I tried to get to do those jobs but preferred other jobs in the administration. And they had jobs they liked better. And I have—you didn't point out that a lot of those jobs have been held by women, who also had never held those jobs before I came along. And I think that—all I can tell you is I have never not tried to recruit minorities for any job that was open in the White House. And I have never followed a quota system. I have had more blacks who have served in my Cabinet, more Hispanics who served in my Cabinet, more people from Asia have been appointed to my administra-

tion than any previous administration by far. It's not even close. So there was never a decision made. I now have a Hispanic woman who is my Deputy Chief of Staff.

So I never thought about those seven jobs to the exclusion of others. I've tried to make sure that the senior jobs—my Political Director is an African-American woman. Alexis Herman, before she became Secretary of Labor, was head of Public Liaison. I was unaware that those were the seven most important jobs in my Cabinet and in the White House in the way that you said them.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's 185th news conference began at 2:36 p.m. in the Dean Acheson Auditorium at the State Department. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; President Hafiz al-Asad and Foreign Minister Farouk al-Shara of Syria; Juan Gonzalez, father of Cuban refugee Elian Gonzalez; President Andres Pastrana of Colombia; President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela; former Senator George J. Mitchell, who chaired the multiparty talks in Northern Ireland; President Leonid Kuchma of Ukraine; former Senator Bob Dole; former Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr; and President Boris Yeltsin of Russia.

Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree

December 8, 1999

Thank you. Thank you very much, Peter. Ladies and gentlemen, this is a wonderful ceremony every year, but this year it has been very special. I want to thank Wayne Newton and Renee Fleming, Marty Stuart, Al Roker—he's a good Santa Claus. [*Laughter*] I want to thank the cast from "Chicago" and Ricky Payton and the Urban National Youth Choir and, of course, Colonel Tim Foley and the Marine Corps Band, "The President's Own."

The best perk of the Presidency is the Marine Corps Band, and I want to give them all a hand. They've been wonderful. [*Applause*]

For over 85 years now, our country has gathered around our National Christmas

Tree to celebrate the beginning of this wonderful season of peace and hope. I am honored once again to be part of a tradition I have come to look forward to every year. For me, Christmas always starts now with the Pageant of Peace and the lighting of this beautiful Colorado spruce. And I am especially honored to be here to light the last tree of the 20th century.

In this sacred season, it is time for all of us to renew our commitment to give of ourselves, to reach out to those who are less fortunate, to reach out to those who are different from us, to build the one America of our dreams. In this Pageant of Peace, we celebrate Christmas, also the season of Hanukkah and Kwanzaa and others, all joined by a simple and universal message: that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves.

This holiday season, we Americans have an awful lot to be thankful for: Our Nation is at peace, and all around the world we are privileged to make peace, from Bosnia to Northern Ireland to the Middle East, the land where a homeless child grew up to be the Prince of Peace.

Just today, in this season, I was proud to announce that after a long, long stalemate, the Israelis and the Syrians have agreed to meet again in just a few days to make their peace.

At the dawn of a new millennium, as we enjoy these wonderful performers and the timeless songs of all of our childhoods, let us rededicate ourselves to the true spirit of Christmas. As we light the National Christmas Tree, let us spread the light of peace and good will toward our family, our friends, our neighbors, and all those across the world, especially those who need it most.

Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, and God bless you.

I'd like to ask, now, the young scouts to come up and join me in lighting the Christmas tree. Caitlin Fong and Chris Alvarez—they're going to come up here. And didn't they do a good job? Let's give them another hand. *[Applause]*

Unlike the sissies, like me, they did it without any coats on, either. I thought they were wonderful. All right, you put your hands on the switch now, and I'm going to count from

three down to one and tell you to flip it, okay? Ready? Three, two, one, go.

Good job.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6 p.m. on the Ellipse during the annual Christmas Pageant of Peace. In his remarks, he referred to Peter Nostrand, chairman, Christmas Pageant of Peace; entertainers Wayne Newton, Renee Fleming, and Marty Stuart; television weatherman Al Roker; and Ricky Payton, Sr., director, BET Urban Nation Voices of Youth H.I.P. H.O.P. Choir; and Col. Timothy W. Foley, USMC, Director, "The President's Own" United States Marine Band.

Remarks on Departure for Worcester, Massachusetts, and an Exchange With Reporters

December 9, 1999

Narrowing the Digital Divide

The President. Good morning. I just thought we ought to come out here in the brisk morning sunshine and wake up together. *[Laughter]* I want to thank the representatives here from all parts of the communications industry, from the foundation world, from various civil rights and other civic groups for being here, and coming in and giving me a chance to make this statement, because I had intended to go to Secretary Daley's conference today on bridging the digital divide, and because I'm going to Worcester, I couldn't do that. So they came in this morning, and we had a visit. I want to thank them for being here and for their commitment and for all those who aren't here but who are at the conference.

This conference is about closing the digital divide. And we have worked hard on that for the last several years in very specific contexts. Under the Vice President's leadership, we have worked to make sure that eventually a digital divide will not deprive business of the technology-savvy workers they need and will not hurt our educational systems today.

We started with the first NetDay in California, back in 1994, when only 3 percent of our classrooms were wired and only 14 percent of our schools were. And we've been working ever since. Now we know that, through the public-private partnerships that have been established all over America,