

We want to have a high probability of success, and I believe that in America, Americans of all political parties and all stripes desperately want us to see a comprehensive peace in the Middle East and understand that in the next 3 to 4 months we have an unparalleled opportunity that we have to seize. So I'm quite hopeful about that.

**Press Secretary Lockhart.** Thank you.

### ***Move to Chappaqua***

**Q.** [*Inaudible*]—help Mrs. Clinton move to New York?

**The President.** I have been helping. We've been working at it. We've been boxing things up and figuring out what to leave here, what to move there. It's been a rather interesting challenge over the holidays. But I've enjoyed it very much.

Thank you.

### ***Israel-Syria Peace Talks***

**Q.** Is \$17 million, \$17 billion the right figure?

**The President.** I don't know yet. What we're working on now up in West Virginia is sort of figuring out what the process for the next few days is going to be. And then we have to start working on that and figuring out what the specific jobs are that we would be asked to help finance, whether we could get any others to help, and over how many years it would have to be done. Then I'll have to go talk to the Congress. And I'm just not in a position yet to say what dollar amount I would ask our Congress for.

### ***Occupational Safety and Health Administration Regulations***

**Q.** Were you aware of these OSHA regulations, sir, about people having to have OSHA regulations when they work at home? Did you hear anything about that?

**The President.** No, not until I read about them.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:40 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

### **Remarks on Departure for Chappaqua, New York, and an Exchange With Reporters**

*January 5, 2000*

#### ***Legislative Agenda***

**The President.** Good afternoon. I just had a very good meeting with Senator Daschle and Congressman Gephardt about our legislative priorities for the coming year and the unparalleled opportunity we now have to take actions that could benefit America for the rest of the new century.

This is truly a remarkable moment. Who would have thought 7 years ago, when we had record budget deficits and high unemployment, that we would begin the new century with record surpluses, the lowest unemployment in 30 years, and next month the longest economic expansion in the history of the United States?

Never before have we enjoyed at once so much prosperity, social progress, and national self-confidence with so little internal crisis or external threat. Never have we had such an opportunity and, therefore, such a responsibility to address our long-term challenges, keeping our prosperity going by maintaining fiscal discipline and making America debt-free for the first time since 1835, the challenge of spreading our prosperity to people in places still left behind, helping parents to succeed at home and at work, preparing for the retirement of the baby boom generation, and most of all, meeting the challenge of giving all our children a world-class education.

President Kennedy once said the time to fix the roof is when the Sun is shining. Well, today the Sun is shining on America, and the roofs that need most fixing in America are the roofs of our Nation's schools. Anyone who visits schools regularly, as I have, will not be surprised to learn that a third of all our schools need extensive repairs or replacement. I've been to schools not only with leaky roofs but with window frames so old that if you try to powerwash the windows, the glass would pop out, with electrical service so inadequate that if you plug a new computer into the wall, the circuit breaker cuts out.

We can't expect our students to meet high academic standards if their schools don't even meet high building standards. We know that antiquated classrooms do get in the way of learning. One study found that students in high quality school buildings did better on achievement tests than those in low quality school buildings, even when both sets of students were from similar economic and social backgrounds.

That's why I'm pleased to announce today that in the budget my administration is preparing, I will call for a new initiative to repair, renovate, and renew our Nation's school buildings. First, my budget will offer a new program, funded at \$1.3 billion in the first year, of grants and interest-free loans to help the Nation's neediest school districts make urgent repairs on their schools. If we continue this over 5 years, we could renovate 41,000 schools.

Second, the budget will include, as it has in the past, a tax credit to help build or modernize 6,000 schools nationwide so we can take our children out of trailers and put them in modern classrooms.

Senator Daschle, Congressman Gephardt, and I agree on the need to repair older classrooms and build new ones. We know it should be a top priority this year, and we intend to make it so. We also agree on other priorities as well—a strong, enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights, sensible gun safety legislation, the "Hate Crimes Prevention Act," strengthening Social Security, modernizing Medicare with a voluntary prescription drug benefit and strengthening it, and raising the minimum wage.

We've seen bipartisan support for all these programs in Congress. We know that outside Washington, none of these are partisan issues. In the first days of the new millennium, there is a new sense of hope and renewal across our country. We can build on that spirit not just to make this a changing of the calendar but to make it a changing of the times. Our New Year's resolution is to reach across party lines to help our children reach for the sky.

Now I'd like to ask Senator Daschle and Congressman Gephardt to say a few words.

[At this point, Senator Thomas A. Daschle and Representative Richard A. Gephardt made brief remarks.]

**Q.** Mr. President—on that point, Mr. President, how convinced are you—

**Eliau Gonzalez**

**Q.** Can I ask you about the decision of the INS to return Elian Gonzalez to his father in Cuba?

**The President.** Well, the INS followed the law and the procedures and made the decision that they made after an exhaustive review of the facts. And I told you when we started this that I would do my best to keep this decision out of politics. We have done that. We have not been involved in it. And they, I'm convinced, followed the law and the facts, did the best they could with the decision.

**Legislative Agenda and 2000 Campaign**

**Q.** Mr. President, are you concerned that there may not be as much support within the Democratic caucus as you'd like for your program? Since every issue that is passed is one less issue that can be used in an election to retake Congress.

**The President.** Well, the short answer to your question is, no, because I think if you look at the progress we have made in the last 3 or 4 years, it has not weakened the Democrats. The people hire us to come to work here every day. We all draw a paycheck paid for by the taxpayers. And we came to Washington because we wanted to do things for America. I think that it does not hurt the cause of the Democratic Party to pass these reforms.

I think there will always be things that we disagree on that we won't be able to resolve; there will always be differences of opinion that will shape the coming election; and that is in the very nature of democracy. So I don't believe that it in any ways weakens the position of my party in the coming elections to do things that are good for America now.

**Q.** With Social Security and Medicare, are you prepared in either your State of the Union or your budget to propose structural reforms or, as you've indicated in the past, because of the political realities, the political danger of these issues, do you have to wait,

get behind closed doors and walk out with Trent Lott and Hastert to announce it?

**The President.** Well, first of all, I think there is a process that has been established that will start in the Senate for dealing with Medicare next year. And I am very hopeful that it will produce an agreement there.

On Social Security, as I have repeatedly pointed out, there is one thing we could do that would take Social Security beyond the life of the baby boom generation, which is simply to dedicate the interest savings in the national debt from the Social Security surplus to the Social Security Trust Fund. If we just did that, a simple bill, we could take Social Security out beyond the life of the baby boom generation.

If we want to go to 75 years instead of 50, then the best way to do that is to continue the work I've tried to do last year. You know, we had a big Social Security meeting. We had over 40 Members of Congress, Democrats and Republicans, over here at Blair House to talk about this, and I am prepared to meet with them and to work with them to try to work through this. And if there is a willingness to do it, I am certainly more than willing to do my part and to meet them halfway on it.

### **Move to Chappaqua**

**Q.** How often are you going to visit your new house?

**Q.** Any advice for commuter couples? You are the most famous commuter couple now. [*Laughter*] It's a fair question.

**The President.** I don't think we've had enough experience to offer advice. But we're about to go up there and start moving stuff into our house. That's what we're going to do when we leave here.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:40 p.m. on the South Grounds at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Cuban youth Elian Gonzalez, rescued off the coast of Florida on November 25, 1999, whose custody case was pending before the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Senator Daschle and Representative Gephardt.

### **Videotape Remarks for Dr. George Washington Carver National Recognition Day**

*January 5, 2000*

It's an honor for me to send my greetings to all of you in Santa Clara. I thank you for what you're doing to help instill the joy of science in our children, to help close the digital divide, and to honor the legacy of George Washington Carver.

Dr. Carver overcame enormous obstacles to become one of our greatest scientists and teachers. He was born to a slave mother on a Missouri farm, orphaned from an early age, survived great illness, and often was the victim of bigotry and hate. It wasn't until his late twenties that he was able to obtain a high school education.

And even as a child, Dr. Carver was known for talking to God through flowers and other plants. It's no wonder that agriculture became his ministry to mankind. At Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute, Carver applied the almost magical possibilities of chemistry to the fields and farms of the South. He created 300 useful products from peanuts and more than 100 from sweet potatoes, spawning numerous industries. He helped save the South's depleted soils. And no person deserves more credit for liberating the South from its reliance on cotton.

Dr. Carver was also a great humanitarian. In everything he did, he was motivated by a deep desire to help poor, struggling farmers lead healthier, happier, more prosperous lives. And as if his scientific contributions were not great enough, he donated his entire life savings to help establish the Carver Research Foundation at Tuskegee.

Dr. Carver once said that he tried to lead his life "in the spirit of a little child seeking only to know the truth and follow it." That is the spirit of discovery that the Healing Institute and the Santa Clara Alliance of Black Educators are helping to nurture in our children today. I am deeply grateful for that.

Congratulations to all the Carver Scholars, and to all of you who are helping our children soar beyond limitations. God bless you all.

NOTE: The President's remarks were videotaped at approximately 12:30 p.m. in the Roosevelt