

Foreword

The period from July through December 1995 was an exceptional time. On fundamental issues—the role of Government, our role in the world, and how we can build a strong American community—our people came together after intense debate to forge new approaches that applied our enduring values to the challenges of new times.

During this period, the American people engaged in a great national debate about how best to balance the budget. I proposed and fought for a plan to balance the budget in a way that reflected our values, by strengthening Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment. The congressional majority put forward a plan that I believed did not honor our fundamental values; I vetoed that plan. By year's end, after the congressional majority twice shut down the Government, it was clear that the American people had rallied to our view. We need a smaller Government, but one strong enough to give people the tools to make the most of their own lives.

America also decisively reasserted its role as the world's indispensable nation. On my remarkable trip to Northern Ireland and Ireland—and to Jerusalem, for the funeral of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin—Americans were once again reminded of our unique obligation to lead and to be a force for peace where possible. And in Bosnia, America led the way to bring to an end the bloodiest conflict in Europe since World War II. By committing our troops to help maintain the peace in Bosnia, we recommitted ourselves to being the world's strongest force for peace, freedom, and prosperity.

Perhaps most important, this was a time when we worked to find common ground and bridge the intense divisions of race, religion, and geography that threaten to pull us apart. In a series of speeches, I called on Americans to find common ground. At Georgetown University, I urged a new tone of civility based on the common values that bind us together. In speeches on affirmative action at the National Archives in Washington and in Austin, Texas, I called on all Americans to clean their house of the racism that is still too real among us. And I spoke about the proper role of religion in our lives and communities, arguing that our schools need not be prayer-free zones.

The closing months of 1995 set the course for how our Nation can move confidently toward the 21st century. By holding true to our values—opportunity for all, responsibility from all, and building a strong American community—our Nation passed through this moment of decision stronger than ever before.

William Clinton