

Foreword

In 1996, our Nation strived to make the American dream a reality for all who would work for it, to continue as the world's strongest force for peace, freedom, and democracy, and to build a stronger country.

In my State of the Union Address, I discussed the age of possibility in which we live and issued seven challenges to the country: strengthen families, improve education, enhance economic security, preserve our natural environment, fight against crime and drugs, maintain our world leadership, and reinvent Government. I said we would meet these challenges by working in partnership with all of our citizens, through State and local governments, in the workplace, in religious, charitable, and civic associations. The era of big government is over, yet we cannot go back to the time when our citizens were left to fend for themselves. We must give all our people the tools to make the most of their own lives.

During the first half of the year, I worked to enable the American people to meet these challenges—by helping those communities that wanted to instill discipline in young people through community curfews, school uniforms, and truancy enforcement; by handing the television remote control back to parents through the v-chip and a television ratings system; and by calling upon the tobacco industry to stop the massive marketing campaigns that appeal to children. In all the actions I took, my paramount goal was to help families meet their responsibilities, and succeed both at home and at work.

During this period, I also worked beyond our borders to advance our Nation's interests in security and prosperity. At a special summit in Moscow, President Yeltsin and I took important steps to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons. With our partners in Japan and South Korea, we strengthened our military alliances and our common efforts to increase economic growth for the future. In the wake of a series of terrorist attacks in the Middle East, I traveled to Egypt for a landmark "Summit of the Peacemakers" that the United States co-hosted, bringing together an unprecedented number of regional leaders who are committed to building peace with security. We also saw, once again, that our global leadership can impose great sacrifice. Americans felt tremendous sorrow after the tragic death of my friend, Commerce Secretary Ron Brown. That loss strengthened our determination to continue his mission so that economic reconstruction goes forward in the Balkans and peace takes hold.

In a series of commencement addresses, I set forth the challenges that I believed our country faced as it approached the new century, culminating in the national goal, announced at Princeton University, of making the 13th and 14th years of education—the first two years of college—as universal as high school is today. To meet that goal, I proposed a Hope Scholarship tax credit to help every American get the education he or she needs.

This was a time when America began to regain its self-confidence, coming together around shared national goals, and realizing that when we work together, we can act—and act effectively—to meet our challenges and protect our values.

William Clinton