

country, and we'll respect your faith, we'll respect your differences, and we'll find a way to work together, then I believe the preeminence of the United States will be assured throughout the next century. And I think you have to think about it in long terms like that.

What causes a society to rise and fall? We clearly are proving that we're getting back to our basic values. The crime rate is going down. You saw the—has gone down now for several years in a row for the first time in 25 years. We have inequality among working people going down—and I'm very proud of that—for the first time in 20 years. We have a lot of our other social problems being ameliorated, the teen pregnancy rate dropping substantially for the first time in a good while. Drugs, alcohol, tobacco are still a problem for very young people. Drug use is going down in society as a whole but still going up among young people.

So we're on the cusp here, maybe, of turning a lot of our social problems around. We know what we ought to do. Can we do it in the right way, in a spirit of reconciliation? And can we recognize that in this exciting new world there's no way in the world for us to know the answer to all these questions that are out there before us?

And that's the last point I'd like to make. If we do things in the right way, we'll get enough of the right answers to keep moving our country forward and to keep doing the right thing for the rest of the world. And we won't be right all the time, but that's just because

we're human. So that's the last thought I would like to leave with you.

The beginning of wisdom, I think, is humility and respect for what you may not know. Now, we were talking around the table here about the last speech Cardinal Bernardin gave in which he said that the precious gift of time should not be wasted on acrimony and division. And he said that knowing he just had a little bit of time left. The truth is, all of us just have a little bit of time left. He just knew it, and we don't. And 3 weeks or 30 years, it's a little bit of time in the life of a country, the life of the world.

So I say to you—I ask for your guidance, for your prayers for our country, for the efforts that all of us are making. I ask for your specific involvement, particularly in the two issues I've mentioned, on the welfare and immigration issues. But most important of all, I ask for your help in creating a sense of reconciliation, the right sort of spirit in which we can deal with these issues. As people of faith on this Epiphany, I think we should all ask that that be made evident to us.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:59 a.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. Robert G. Stephanopoulos, Holy Trinity Cathedral, New York, NY, who gave the invocation, and the late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, former Archbishop of Chicago.

Remarks on Receiving the Report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses and an Exchange With Reporters

January 7, 1997

The President. Thank you very much to Dr. Lashof and the members of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Illnesses; Secretary White; Secretary Brown; Secretary Shalala; Deputy Director Tenet. I'd like to say a special word of thanks to Dr. Jack Gibbons for the work that he did on this. I thank Senator Rockefeller, Senator Specter, Congressman Lane Evans for their interest and their pursuit of this issue, and all the representatives of the military and veterans organizations who are here.

I am pleased to accept this report. I thank Dr. Lashof and the committee for their extremely thorough and dedicated work over 18 months now. I pledge to you and to all the veterans of this country, we will now match your efforts with our action.

Six years ago hundreds of thousands of Americans defended our vital interest in the Persian Gulf. They faced a dangerous enemy, harsh conditions, lengthy isolation from their families. And