

Foreword

Nineteen hundred and ninety-seven was a year of great and growing confidence for our Nation. America moved forward, forging a new vision of how Government can best equip our people for a time of great change. After years of partisan division and decades of deficits, the two political parties worked together to enact a balanced budget that reflected our values and protected our priorities—the first balanced budget in a generation.

This achievement meant much more than numbers on a ledger. Our balanced budget heralded a new era of fiscal discipline. It accelerated a virtuous cycle of rising economic growth and falling interest rates. It did nothing less than save Government from its own excesses, making it again a progressive force—one that lives within its means while making historic investments in our people. The budget contained the biggest increase in aid to higher education since the passage of the GI Bill 50 years ago and will open the doors of college to every person willing to work for it. The budget also made the largest single investment in health care since the creation of Medicaid in 1965 and will help provide health coverage for up to 5 million uninsured children.

As I said in September at American University, after years in which the two parties seemed capable of little more than conflict, we finally found a way for Democrats and Republicans to work together for the national interest. America is working again; and now, at long last, Washington proved that it could, too.

I also sought to find common ground and lead our Nation to higher ground on another challenge we face at the end of the 20th century, the dilemma of race. My *Initiative on Race* sought to promote a dialogue in every community about this issue and develop concrete solutions to enduring problems of prejudice and discrimination. For me, the most powerful reminder of the distance we can travel together as a Nation came on a sunny morning in Little Rock, Arkansas, when we celebrated the achievement of the Little Rock Nine. Four decades earlier, on September 4, 1957, when they tried to enter the doors of Central High, the Little Rock Nine were turned away by jeers, threats, and the implacable resistance of institutional racism. But on this day, 40 years later, when those same individuals walked up the steps of that imposing brick building, a President of the United States was there to welcome them and hold the door open. We have many steps to climb as we approach the new century. But as the Little Rock Nine reminded us, our Nation moves forward and upward when we move together, as one America.

William Clinton