

## The President's Radio Address

*January 2, 1999*

Good morning. As we celebrate this last New Year of the 20th century, I want to speak to you about the debt we owe to those who make every season a season of peace for America, the men and women of our Armed Forces.

Almost 1.4 million Americans are serving our country on active duty today. Nearly a quarter million of them are overseas, doing what needs to be done as no one else can, whether that means thwarting Iraq's ambition to threaten its neighbors or the world with weapons of mass destruction, or standing watch in Korea on the last fortified frontier of the cold war, or safeguarding the peace in Bosnia, or helping our neighbors in Central America or the Caribbean dig out from natural disasters, or simply giving us the confidence that America will be forever strong, safe, and secure.

We rely on our Armed Forces because this is still a dangerous world. We're proud of them because they are the best in the world. And we remember today what makes them the best, not just the quality of our weapons but the quality of our people in uniform. Their skill, dedication, and professionalism are unstinting, unquestioned, and unmatched.

When we give our service men and women a mission, there is a principle we must keep in mind: We should never ask them to do what they are not equipped to do, and we should always equip them to do what we ask. The more we ask, the greater our responsibility to give our troops the support and training and equipment they need. As Commander in Chief, I have no higher duty than this: to give our troops the tools to take on new missions, while maintaining their readiness to defend our country and defeat any adversary; to make sure they can deploy away from home, knowing their families have the quality of life they deserve; and to make certain their service is not only rewarding but well rewarded, from recruitment to retirement.

I'm confident our military is ready to fulfill this mission today. Our troops continue to exe-

cute complex and dangerous missions far from home with flawless precision, as we've just seen in the Persian Gulf. Our challenge is to retain the ability to do this as we carry out our entire defense strategy.

For this reason, we asked Congress to add \$1.1 billion to this year's budget to keep our readiness razor-sharp and to improve recruitment. And Congress did.

I've also worked with our military leaders to ensure their highest readiness priorities are reflected in our budget request for the year 2000. The budget I will submit to Congress for next year will provide an increase of over \$12 billion for defense readiness and modernization through a combination of new spending and budgetary savings. This is the start of a 6-year effort that will represent the first long-term sustained increase in defense spending in a decade.

We want our Armed Forces to remain ready to deploy rapidly in any crisis, and that is what this effort will assure, by funding joint exercises, flight training, badly needed spare parts, and recruiting for critical positions. We want our forces to remain the best equipped in the world into the next century, and that is what this effort will assure, by paying for the next generation of ships, planes, and weapons systems. It will also enable our military to play its part in meeting emerging threats to our security such as terrorism and proliferation. It will help us to do right by our troops by upgrading and replacing aging equipment, barracks, and family housing. It will include a military pay raise of 4.4 percent, the largest since 1982, a restructuring of paid reward performance, and the reinstatement of military retirement benefits that were taken away over a decade ago.

We must undertake this effort today so that our Nation will remain strong and secure tomorrow. We must do it as well because we have the most sacred obligation to those who accept dangers and hardships on our behalf. They are our sons and daughters, husbands and wives, friends and neighbors, from cities and towns