

We can meet all the other challenges if we can go forward as one America.

You know, barely more than 300 days from now, we will cross that bridge into the new millennium. This is a moment, as the First Lady has said, “to honor the past and imagine the future.”

I’d like to take just a minute to honor her. For leading our Millennium Project, for all she’s done for our children, for all she has done in her historic role to serve our Nation and our best ideals at home and abroad, I honor her. [Applause]

Last year, I called on Congress and every citizen to mark the millennium by saving America’s treasures. Hillary has traveled all across the country to inspire recognition and support for saving places like Thomas Edison’s invention factory or Harriet Tubman’s home. Now we have to preserve our treasures in every community. And tonight, before I close, I want to invite every town, every city, every community to become a nationally recognized “millennium community” by launching projects that save our history, promote our arts and humanities, prepare our children for the 21st century.

Already, the response has been remarkable. And I want to say a special word of thanks to our private sector partners and to Members in Congress of both parties for their support. Just one example: Because of you, the Star-Spangled Banner will be preserved for the ages. In ways large and small, as we look to the millennium we are keeping alive what George Washington called “the sacred fire of liberty.”

Six years ago, I came to office in a time of doubt for America, with our economy troubled, our deficit high, our people divided. Some even wondered whether our best days were behind us. But across this country, in a thousand neighborhoods, I have seen, even amidst the pain and uncertainty of recession, the real heart and character of America. I knew then that we Americans could renew this country.

Tonight, as I deliver the last State of the Union Address of the 20th century, no one anywhere in the world can doubt the enduring resolve and boundless capacity of the American people to work toward that “more perfect Union” of our Founders’ dream.

We’re now at the end of a century when generation after generation of Americans answered the call to greatness, overcoming depression, lifting up the disposed, bringing down barriers to racial prejudice, building the largest middle class in history, winning two World Wars and the long twilight struggle of the cold war. We must all be profoundly grateful for the magnificent achievement of our forebears in this century. Yet perhaps, in the daily press of events, in the clash of controversy, we don’t see our own time for what it truly is, a new dawn for America.

A hundred years from tonight, another American President will stand in this place and report on the state of the Union. He—or she—he or she will look back on a 21st century shaped in so many ways by the decisions we make here and now. So let it be said of us then that we were thinking not only of our time but of their time, that we reached as high as our ideals, that we put aside our divisions and found a new hour of healing and hopefulness, that we joined together to serve and strengthen the land we love.

My fellow Americans, this is our moment. Let us lift our eyes as one Nation, and from the mountaintop of this American Century, look ahead to the next one, asking God’s blessing on our endeavors and on our beloved country.

Thank you, and good evening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:10 p.m. in the House Chamber of the Capitol. In his remarks, he referred to Jean Hastert, wife of Speaker J. Dennis Hastert; Evelyn M. (Lyn) Gibson, widow of Detective John M. Gibson, and Wenling Chestnut, widow of Officer Jacob J. Chestnut, whose husbands died as a result of gunshot wounds suffered during an attack at the Capitol on July 24, 1998; terrorist Usama bin Ladin, who allegedly sponsored bombing attacks on the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on August 7, 1998; President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Capt. Jeffrey B. Taliaferro, USAF, Chief, Wing Weapons, 28th Operations Support Squadron, 28th Bomb Wing; and Sammy Sosa, National League Most Valuable Player in 1998.