

## *Foreword*

As 1999 opened, and we marked the last year of the 20th century, Americans took stock of our blessings. And they were many. We had the longest peacetime expansion in our Nation's history, nearly 18 million new jobs, low inflation, peace at home, and strength abroad.

We looked ahead to the next century and sought to meet its new challenges. We announced grants that will bring 30,000 new teachers into our Nation's classrooms to prepare the leaders of tomorrow. We proposed the Medicare Modernization plan to secure Medicare for the next two decades and offer our citizens affordable prescription drug coverage. And I asked the Congress to commit 60 percent of our budget surplus to Social Security for the next 15 years to put it on a sound footing for our generation and for those who follow us.

Overseas, America stood firm with those who stand for peace—and against the forces of aggression and hatred. Our NATO Alliance celebrated its 50th anniversary, admitting three new members—the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. With our NATO allies, we defeated ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and kept the peace in that troubled corner of Europe. Together, we put the integration of the Balkans into Europe high on the international agenda. And our relationship with Russia stood up to challenges as Russia helped make and keep the peace in Kosovo.

We helped Israelis and Palestinians reach new accords at the Wye River Plantation, in Maryland, revitalizing the Middle East peace process. Northern Ireland installed its first institutions of self-government, the result of free and open elections and power-sharing agreements.

Here at home, we celebrated one of the most important achievements of our century, and looked back on our progress, when we honored Rosa Parks with a Congressional Gold Medal for her courageous leadership in the civil rights movement. Looking ahead to the future, I created the President's Initiative for One America to promote racial reconciliation in the century ahead.

We were also faced, again and again, with the tragedies and difficulties of our modern age. As a Nation, we struggled to make sense of the horrific shootings at Columbine High School; and we pressed to pass commonsense gun safety legislation to make such tragedies less likely.

In my State of the Union address, the last of the 20th century, I reminded Americans that, 100 years from now, America will end a 21st century shaped in so many ways by the decisions we make here and now. "Let it be said of us then," I said, "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 the land we love."

*William Clinton*