

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:52 a.m. by telephone from the Oval Office at the White House to the association meeting in Tampa, FL. Lee Goldfarb was president of the association.

Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree *December 7, 1994*

Thank you, John Betchkal, Mrs. Betchkal, Reverend Leon. I want to thank especially our wonderful entertainers tonight: Willard Scott, who would make anybody believe in Santa Claus; Trisha Yearwood, it's wonderful to see you again; Richard Leech, you are terrific. If I had a voice like you, I would have stayed out of politics. [*Laughter*] And I want to say a special word of thanks and congratulations to the magnificent Aretha Franklin who was recently honored at the Kennedy Center Honors. We are glad to see all of you here tonight. Thank you. We congratulate the Cathedral Choir of Men and Boys for the wonderful job that they did.

Let me say that Hillary and Chelsea and I are delighted to be back here for our second Pageant of Peace. I don't know how many of you were here last year, but it was a lot colder. And I still feel in the Christmas spirit and more comfortable doing so. I'm glad to be here tonight, and I appreciate this wonderful weather.

This year, we have a lot to be grateful for. This is the first Christmas since the beginning of the cold war when our parents can tuck all of their children into bed on Christmas Eve knowing that there are no Russian missiles with nuclear warheads pointed at them.

In holy Bethlehem and throughout the Middle East, ancient enemies are taking giant steps toward peace and reconciliation. Peace is making progress in Northern Ireland, in South Africa, in Haiti, and Eastern and Central Europe, where people are making courageous steps to escape the shackles that have bound them.

Here at home, I appreciate what Willard Scott said about prosperity coming back. And we do have the strongest economy we've had in many years, but let us never forget that many of our people are living in poverty and others are working hard in insecurity, and that as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, let us not forget His lesson that one day we will be asked whether we lived out His love

in ways that treated all of our brothers and sisters as we would have treated Him, even the least of them. He taught us all to seek peace and to treat all people with love.

In this holiday season as we gather our families and often go back to the places where we grew up, this is a time to rededicate ourselves to the things which matter most, to our responsibilities, to our families, our communities, and our country.

With all of our challenges in this holiday season, we can take great comfort in knowing that when we come together and seek God's help, we can meet any challenge. At this holiday season also, my fellow Americans, let us extend our special gratitude and prayers for the men and women of our Armed Forces who protect the peace and stand sentry for our freedom. Many of them are very, very far from their families and friends; they must be close to our hearts.

Finally let me say, this wonderful evergreen Christmas tree, the "Tannenbaum" about which Aretha Franklin sang, is a symbol of the enduring values of our lives. As we light it, let it rekindle in our hearts faith and hope and love for one another.

And now I wish God's blessings on you all at this special season, and I'd like to ask Hillary and Chelsea to join me as we light the Christmas tree.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:53 p.m. on the Ellipse. In his remarks, he referred to John J. Betchkal, chairman, Pageant of Peace, and his wife, Kathleen; Rev. Luis Leon, pastor, St. John's Episcopal Church; and entertainers Willard Scott, Trisha Yearwood, Richard Leech, and Aretha Franklin.