

It reflected the wisdom and foresight of American leaders who saw that our national interests at the end of the 20th century were best served by transferring the canal to Panama, that this act could help improve relations between the United States and its neighbors. Since that time, the United States has worked to strengthen democracy, prosperity, and cooperation in our hemisphere, and thereby, benefit our citizens at home. At the age of a new century, the canal, long a symbol of American power and prestige, now also symbolizes the unity and common purpose of the democratic nations of the Americas.

Today's ceremony underscores our confidence in the Government of Panama and the Panama-

nian people's ability to manage this vital artery of commerce. It also signals our continuing commitment to the security of the canal, as enshrined in our treaty obligations, and our determination to work with Panama and the many other countries that use the canal to ensure that it remains open to the world's shipping and commerce.

I commend the government of President Moscoso for its leadership and spirit of cooperation. The United States will continue to work closely with Panama to safeguard the canal and promote the well-being of our citizens and people around the world.

Statement on the Report of the Office of Management and Budget on the Federal Government's Readiness for the Year 2000

December 14, 1999

With the end of the year in sight, I am pleased to announce that OMB's final quarterly report shows that the Federal Government is ready for the year 2000. As of today, 99.9 percent of the Government's mission-critical computer systems are Y2K compliant. They have been fixed, tested, and certified as ready for operation on January 1, 2000. We have met the challenge of making sure that the Federal Government can continue to serve the American people as we enter the next century.

Three years ago when we started our intensive work on Y2K, only one-fifth of the mission-critical systems was ready. Many said that the Federal Government was not up to the job, that the deadline would not be met, and that the price tag would be exorbitant, as much as \$50 billion.

Today, the facts are clear: We have done our job; we have met the deadline; and we have done well below cost projections. I want to thank the thousands of dedicated men and women of the Federal Government who spent long hours, late nights, and many weekends get-

ting us ready for the new year. Many of these same people will be mobilized and working throughout the New Year's weekend. Thanks to them, we have every reason to approach the changeover with confidence about the operations of the Federal Government.

However, no amount of preparation can prevent glitches. For this reason, there are backup plans, so that the critical functions of the Federal Government can continue.

For many others, including smaller businesses and local governments, there is still work to do between now and the end of the year. I urge them to make every effort possible to fix as many computer systems as they can and to develop contingency plans if they are needed.

As we turn our thoughts to a new year, Americans have every right to be proud of the work of their Government and its employees. They will continue to work vigilantly through the holidays and into the new year so that America may celebrate the arrival of a new millennium.