

Now it is my privilege to present the person who has done more than anyone else in America to help us appreciate and properly celebrate the dawn of the new millennium. Ladies and gentlemen, the First Lady of the United States.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:51 a.m. at 12th St. and Constitution Ave., NW. In his remarks,

he referred to Mayor Anthony A. Williams of Washington, DC; Robert Pinsky, poet laureate; Rev. Nathan D. Baxter, dean, Washington National Cathedral, who delivered the invocation; and Terence McAuliffe, millennium celebration fundraiser. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

## Remarks at the “Millennium Around the World” Celebration *December 31, 1999*

Good afternoon. I must say, after listening to them, I don’t know that there’s anything I have to add. I want to thank all of you for being here. I thank the First Lady for her conception of this millennium celebration and for all those who helped to make it possible. I thank Secretary Albright for her work for world peace. Governor Gutierrez and the people of Guam, we thank you for sponsoring this event. And we welcome Congressman and Mrs. Underwood, Mrs. Gutierrez and members of your family, Governor. Guam is where America’s day begins, you know, and today it’s where our millennium begins. I’d also like to thank the Environmental Protection Agency and its Administrator, Carol Browner; the GSA and its Administrator, Dave Barram, who is here with his family; and all others who helped to make this day possible. I’d like to ask you to express our appreciation to the World Children’s Choir and the United States Army Brass Quintet. We thank them.

We wanted to spend a part of this day with diplomatic representatives from around the world and with children from around the world to signal the importance of strengthening our global community in the new millennium.

On this day 200 years ago, in 1799, our second President welcomed the 19th century. It then took 6 weeks by boat to get news from Europe. On this day 100 years ago, when President William McKinley marked the start of the 20th century, it took 6 seconds to send a text by telegraph. Today, satellites and the Internet carry our voices and images instantaneously all around the world. Never before have we known as much about each other. Never before have we depended so much on each other. Never before have we had such an opportunity to

move toward what the generations have prayed for, peace on Earth and a better life for all. We must both imagine a brighter future and dedicate ourselves to building it, and I ask you all here today to reaffirm the clear understanding that we must do it together.

Two thousand years ago, the calendar that turns at midnight began with the birth of a child on straw in a stable, with a single, shining star in the sky. It attracted no notice at the time. Today, as we meet in this international center, though all the world is now a part of this millennial calendar change, we must recognize that for more than half the world, because they are not Christians, the number 2000 has less significance: for Muslims, this is the year 1420; for Hindus, it is 1921; for Buddhists, it is 2543; Mayans honor the year 5119; and the Hebrew calendar marks this year as 5760.

So what we celebrate here today is not so much a common calendar of history or faith but a common future for all people of good will, a future of peace and harmony, a future rooted in the forces of freedom and enterprise and globalization and science and technology that have powered so much of the 20th century, but a future which now—now—may reflect timeless lessons as well, the lessons of all religious faiths: Love your neighbor as yourself; do unto others as you would have done to you; do not turn aside the stranger; see the spark of divine inspiration in every person. As long as we have had philosophers and prophets on this Earth, this lesson has been taught. Yet, it still seems the hardest for us to learn.

The past 100 years have seen the victory of freedom over totalitarianism. For that, we can

all be grateful. They have seen us coming together more and more so that it is possible to have a stage with this beautiful, brilliant array of children, and for that, we can all be grateful.

But still all around us, we see the failure to use our freedom wisely, as too many people still give in to primitive hatreds, and we still face the oldest problem of human society: the fear of those who are different from us. History shows that people do tend to be afraid of those who don't look the same or practice religion the same way or come from different tribes or have different lifestyles. Those fears, when ignited and organized by unscrupulous leaders, have led to terrible violence in the modern world. Even in the most open societies, including our own, children who learn to look down and dehumanize those who are different and perhaps to blame them for their own problems continue to grow up to commit awful hate crimes.

Still, we must begin a new century with great hope. Think of this: 100 years ago not a single country in the world recognized the right of all its citizens to choose their leaders and shape their destinies. Now, for the first time in history, more than half the world's people live under governments of their own choosing. Sixty years ago many people thought that nothing could stop dictators from imposing their will on the world through violence. But since then, democratic countries have risen, not just once but time and time again, to defeat fascism, to help nations free themselves from totalitarianism, to help stop racial apartheid and ethnic cleansing, to uphold and advance human rights. In freedom's century, we have learned that open societies are more just, more resilient, more enduring.

Even today, we see our newest discoveries bringing us closer to goals humanity has shared for centuries, to eradicate disease, educate all our children, clean our environment, provide economic support for families, and lift up nations. The forces of science, technology, and globalization have shattered the boundaries of possibility, and in the new century, our achievements will be bounded mostly by the limits on our own imagination, understanding, and wisdom.

There are, to be sure, tremendous challenges ahead. The old problems are there: leaders all too willing to exploit human difference to preserve their own power; places where freedom

still is silenced and basic rights denied; outdated, unnecessary industrial practices endangering our global environment; abject poverty, with more than a billion people living on less than a dollar a day. And then there are the new problems: the organized forces of crime, narcotrafficking, terror; governments too weak to handle the sweeping forces of globalization and their impact on their people; ordinary people across the world who have yet to see the benefits of democracy and free enterprise but have borne the burden of the economic and social changes some can delay but none can avoid.

Still I say again, we must be hopeful. It is a good thing that we are more and more free and more and more interdependent. It is possible to have prosperity while preserving the environment, and it is possible to share prosperity more broadly with those who have been too long denied. It is possible to thwart the organized forces of destruction. In short, it is possible to listen to the children in this room, who come from over 100 nations of the world, and give them a chance to live their dreams.

When we see threats to peace and dignity abroad, we can choose not to speak; we can choose not to act. But no longer can we choose not to know. That is why there was such a similarity in the vision these children from all over the globe shared with us today.

The explosion in information and the technology for getting it to people everywhere at the same time has enabled us to build a common sense of community, that is already taking shape in ways large and small. When there's a flood in Venezuela that kills thousands and thousands of innocent people, when we see the plight of young war victims in Sierra Leone who have lost their limbs, when we see hundreds of thousands of people displaced by ethnic cleansing from their homeland in Kosovo, we can choose to do nothing, but we can't pretend we don't know, and we can no longer shield our conscience or our interest from their impact. So now we care about one another in ways we never did before. On our ever smaller planet, one way or another, sooner or later, what happens anywhere may be felt everywhere.

So I'd like to make a few new year's predictions. In the new century we may not be able to eliminate hateful intolerance, but we will see the rise of healthy intolerance of bigotry, oppression, and abject poverty in our own communities and across the world.

We may not be able to eliminate all the harsh consequences of globalization. But still, we will trade more and travel more and communicate more and learn to do it in ways that advance the lives of ordinary people and lift the quality of the environment.

We may not be able to eliminate all the inadequacies of government and our global institutions, but we will see more and more governments able to protect their people from the harshest side effects of globalization and able to prepare their children—all their children, boys and girls—for the 21st century world; and we will see more—much, much more—cooperations among nations to meet common challenges and seize common opportunities.

In short, the children you see on this stage, in the new century, will become more and more part of the same community, not by giving up their national, tribal, racial, ethnic, and religious differences but by honoring them and by affirming our common humanity and our shared destiny. It is happening already. I say again, you see it in our response to an earthquake in Turkey or a hurricane in the Caribbean.

Earlier this year, the last time so many nations were represented in this room, it was on the 50th anniversary of NATO when the Allies gathered there to stand against ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. Today, from southeastern Europe to the Middle East to South Africa to Northern Ireland to East Timor, the century is ending with a clear message that there is no place in the 21st century for power rooted in hatred and dehumanization. People everywhere want peace and harmony and the chance to live with their dreams not at their neighbor's expense but, instead, with their neighbor's help.

We owe it to the children here to begin this new millennium ready to take on our problems together, an unrelenting battle against poverty, sharing the promise of the new economy, leaving no one behind, deepening our democracies, preserving our shared earthly home. Today we celebrate more than the changing of the calendar. We celebrate the opportunity we have to make this a true changing of the times, a gateway to greater peace and freedom, for prosperity and harmony. If we listen to our children, they will tell us the future we should build.

Last week I received a letter from a sixth-grade class in northeastern Connecticut, who knew I would be speaking to you here today. Here's what they said: "Never forget, God didn't

put us here to fight, but to live in harmony. If we can help our children, our future leaders to find their way to love for all mankind and to teach them there is no future in racism, then we can find that the success and glory of world peace will grow and blossom into a never-dying flower."

I said at the opening of my remarks that 2000 years ago those of us who are Christians believe the new era began with a bright light in the sky. You should all know that when darkness falls tonight for the very last time in this millennium, the brightest light in the sky will be the constellation Orion. From December to April, it is the only star system visible from every inhabited point on Earth. Scientists tell us that the light from one of those stars began its journey almost exactly 1000 years ago.

In the time it took the light from Orion to reach Earth, Leif Erikson sailed; Gutenberg printed; Galileo dared; Shakespeare wrote; Elizabeth ruled; Mozart composed; Jefferson drafted; Bolivar liberated; Lincoln preserved; Einstein dreamed; Ataturk built; Roosevelt led; Gandhi preached; Mother Teresa healed; Mandela triumphed. A pretty good space of traveling light.

Now that light shines upon all of us. For all the billions of people who came before, it has been left to this generation to lead the world into a new millennium, to use our freedom wisely, to walk away from war and hatred toward love and peace. When people look back on this day a hundred years from now, may they say that is exactly what we did, that in the 21st century our children went further, reached higher, dreamed bigger, and accomplished more because love and peace proved more powerful than hatred and war.

One of America's most popular authors of children's books is Theodor Geisel, who wrote under the name of Dr. Seuss. One of the very last books he wrote was called, "Oh, The Places You'll Go." I want to end today with words he wrote in that book, looking ahead at the world our children should inherit. Listen to this and help to make it so. "And will you succeed? Yes, you will, indeed, ninety-eight and three-quarters percent guaranteed. Kid, you'll move mountains. So be your name Buxbaum or Bixby or Bray or Mordecai Ali Van Allen O'Shea, you're off to great places. Today is your day. Your mountain is waiting, so get on your way."

Good luck to the children here, and God-speed in the new millennium.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:20 p.m. in the Atrium at the Ronald W. Reagan International

Trade Center. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Carl T.C. Gutierrez of Guam and his wife, Geraldine; and Delegate Robert A. Underwood of Guam, and his wife, Lorraine. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

## Statement on the Death of Elliot Richardson

*December 31, 1999*

Hillary and I were saddened to learn that Elliot Richardson died today in Boston. Elliot Richardson was a man of uncommon integrity, who put the Nation's interests first even when

the personal cost was very high. He was an unparalleled public servant, a lawyer, a diplomat, a soldier, and a prosecutor. America was honored by his service, and we will miss him.

## Remarks at a Dinner for the Millennium Celebration Creators

*December 31, 1999*

Thank you so much. Good evening. It's a real honor for Hillary and Chelsea and me to welcome all of you to the White House. Tonight I rise to offer three toasts. The first is to all of you. It is an honor to turn this page in history with you because so many of you, each in your own way, have contributed so indelibly to the narrative of this American century.

The second toast I offer is to my wife, for it was she who inspired us all to welcome the new millennium by honoring our past and imagining our future. Over the past 2 years leading up to this wonderful night, no one has done more to infuse this milestone with national purpose. And I am very grateful to her and to all those who have helped.

The third toast is, in a way, the most daunting, because I'm supposed to say something profound to a thousand years of history in 2 or 3 minutes. In the State of the Union I get a whole hour—[laughter]—to talk about a single year, and usually I run over. [Laughter] Tonight we rise to the mountaintop of a new millennium. Behind us we see a great expanse of American experience and before us vast frontiers of possibility still to be explored.

I think we would all agree that we are most fortunate to be alive at this moment in history. We end this century and the millennium with

soaring optimism. Never before has our Nation enjoyed, at once, so much prosperity, social progress, and national self-confidence, with so little internal crisis or external threat. Never before have we had such a blessed opportunity and, therefore, such a profound responsibility to build the more perfect Union of our Founders' dreams.

When our children's children look back on this century, they will see that this hopeful and promising time was earned by the bravery and hard work of men and women who, in the words of our great poet laureate Robert Pinsky, did not merely celebrate our oldest ideals like trophies under glass but kept them bright with use. They will see this moment was earned through the hard-won fight for freedom, from the beachheads of Normandy to the buses of Montgomery to the villages of Kosovo. At home and abroad, it has been our great privilege to advance the light of human liberty.

They will see this moment was earned through the drive for discovery. At the outset of the century, not even the most farsighted of our forebears could have predicted all the miracles of science that have emerged from our labs: antibiotics and vaccines, silicon chips and