

Week Ending Friday, January 8, 1999

The President's Radio Address

January 2, 1999

Good morning. As we celebrate this last New Year of the 20th century, I want to speak to you about the debt we owe to those who make every season a season of peace for America, the men and women of our Armed Forces.

Almost 1.4 million Americans are serving our country on active duty today. Nearly a quarter million of them are overseas, doing what needs to be done as no one else can, whether that means thwarting Iraq's ambition to threaten its neighbors or the world with weapons of mass destruction or standing watch in Korea on the last fortified frontier of the cold war or safeguarding the peace in Bosnia or helping our neighbors in Central America or the Caribbean dig out from natural disasters or simply giving us the confidence that America will be forever strong, safe, and secure.

We rely on our Armed Forces because this is still a dangerous world. We're proud of them because they are the best in the world. And we remember today what makes them the best—not just the quality of our weapons but the quality of our people in uniform. Their skill, dedication, and professionalism are unstinting, unquestioned, and unmatched.

When we give our service men and women a mission, there is a principle we must keep in mind: We should never ask them to do what they are not equipped to do, and we should always equip them to do what we ask. The more we ask, the greater our responsibility to give our troops the support and training and equipment they need. As Commander in Chief, I have no higher duty than this: to give our troops the tools to take on new missions, while maintaining their readiness to defend our country and defeat any adversary; to make sure they can deploy away from home, knowing their families have the quality

of life they deserve; and to make certain their service is not only rewarding but well rewarded, from recruitment to retirement.

I'm confident our military is ready to fulfill this mission today. Our troops continue to execute complex and dangerous missions far from home with flawless precision, as we've just seen in the Persian Gulf. Our challenge is to retain the ability to do this as we carry out our entire defense strategy.

For this reason, we asked Congress to add \$1.1 billion to this year's budget to keep our readiness razor-sharp and to improve recruitment. And Congress did. I've also worked with our military leaders to ensure their highest readiness priorities are reflected in our budget request for the year 2000.

The budget I will submit to Congress for next year will provide an increase of over \$12 billion for defense readiness and modernization through a combination of new spending and budgetary savings. This is the start of a 6-year effort that will represent the first long-term sustained increase in defense spending in a decade.

We want our Armed Forces to remain ready to deploy rapidly in any crisis, and that is what this effort will assure, by funding joint exercises, flight training, badly needed spare parts, and recruiting for critical positions. We want our forces to remain the best equipped in the world into the next century, and that is what this effort will assure, by paying for the next generation of ships, planes, and weapons systems. It will also enable our military to play its part in meeting emerging threats to our security such as terrorism and proliferation. It will help us to do right by our troops by upgrading and replacing aging equipment, barracks, and family housing. It will include a military pay raise of 4.4 percent, the largest since 1982, a restructuring of paid reward performance, and the reinstatement of military retirement benefits that were taken away over a decade ago.

We must undertake this effort today so that our Nation will remain strong and secure tomorrow. We must do it as well because we have the most sacred obligation to those who accept dangers and hardships on our behalf.

They are our sons and daughters, husbands and wives, friends and neighbors, from cities and towns all over America. We must give them the support they need to keep doing their jobs well and to keep coming home to America, safe and sound.

Thanks for listening, and happy New Year.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 10:55 a.m. on December 30 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on January 2. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 31 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Statement on the Decline in the National Murder Rate

January 2, 1999

The Justice Department study on homicide trends released today shows that America's murder rate has fallen to its lowest level in 30 years, with much of the decline coming from the drop in youth gun homicides. Our cities are now the safest they have been in a generation. With the help of the '94 crime act, cities have replaced gang and gun violence with more police and tougher gun enforcement, and their efforts are paying off in dramatic decreases in homicides. A variety of studies show that crime, and especially homicide, should continue to decline into the new year, and that is good news for Americans in 1999. But we have more to do, and we must stick to our plan. We must finish the job of putting 100,000 more police on our streets, putting tougher laws on our books, and providing better opportunities for our young people.

NOTE: This statement was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 31 but was embargoed for release until 4:30 p.m., January 2.

Remarks Announcing a Long-Term Health Care Initiative

January 4, 1999

The President. Thank you, Patricia, for your fine statement and for the power of your example. And we appreciate you and your husband being here today and the work that you're doing.

We thank Congressman Hoyer for bringing his constituent here today. And we welcome Senator Reid, Senator Breaux, Senator Specter, Senator Dodd, Senator Wyden, Congressmen Brown, Cardin, Moran, and Cummings. And I'd also like to say, Senator Mikulski has a special interest in this issue and wanted to be here today, but could not.

You know, this new year gives us all a sense of making a fresh start, a sense of being able to think anew. It should also give us a sense of rededication. I'm delighted to see here, along with the members of our administration, Secretary Rubin, Secretary Shalala, and Janice Lachance, so many advocates not only for seniors but for the disabled.

We need to be looking ahead at the issue that Patricia Darlak described so clearly and powerfully, to the challenges that the new century will present us, because there will be many, many, many more stories like hers. That is the fundamental reality. Already there are millions of people out there helping to care for an aged or disabled loved one, but there will be many more like her in the 21st century.

Now, that is, for those of us who are part of the baby boom generation, what we would call a high-class problem because we will be "them"—"they"—we will be "they." Is that the right—but the baby boom is about to become a senior boom, and like the baby boom, the senior boom will change the face of America. During the next 30 years, 76 million baby boomers will join the ranks of the retired. The number of elderly Americans will double by 2030; by the middle of the next century, the average American will live to an age of 82. That's 6 years longer than the average life expectancy today.

Now, as I said, those of us who hope to be in that group consider that a high-class problem. We also are very encouraged that people are living stronger, healthier lives. We