

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

are encouraged that disabled Americans have more options to live fully and healthily for a longer period of time. We are encouraged that all these folks are proving that retirement can be a beginning as well as an end. We see all kinds of people learning new ideas, taking up new work, doing new community services, traveling and going places they never would have imagined before.

But we know that with aging, inevitably, come the infirmities of age. Nearly half the people over 85, one of the fastest growing segments of our population, need help with everyday, basic tasks—eating, dressing, going to a doctor. We cannot expect that every older American will be able to fend for himself or herself. And the real question is what are our obligations to help every American get the care that is appropriate for each individual case?

Millions require the care that can only be provided in a nursing home. But millions more choose to remain at home with family and friends. Indeed, the elderly are remaining at home in record number. The same is true of people with disabilities. Today, millions and millions of households are caring for elderly relatives or even for neighbors. They represent the best of America, fulfilling a family obligation, often unspoken but deeply resonant in the American character.

Providing long-term care at home is more and more a common choice, but as you have just heard, it is rarely an easy one. Since this kind of care is almost never covered by private insurance or Medicare, out-of-pocket expenses can be staggering. So, too, are the professional costs. Caregivers who hold jobs outside the home—that is, the vast majority—may have to take unpaid leave or work fewer hours to fulfill their responsibilities. In countless ways, caregiving is vital, meaningful work. But as you have heard, it can also be very stressful.

The First Lady has mentioned some of the things we have worked to do to ease the burden of families: improving nursing homes, strengthening Medicare, making Medicaid more flexible. But more will be asked of us in the 21st century, and more must be done.

Today we announce a critical new initiative to give care to the caregivers, to help Americans provide long-term care for aging, ailing,

and disabled loved ones. The size of the senior boom demands it. The needs of our disabled population require it. The length of our lives makes it more important than ever and so does the sacrifice of American families who put the well-being of their relatives above their own.

This is a complicated challenge that requires a range of responses. Therefore, to improve long-term care in America and to give it a priority and support these families, we proposed to do four things:

First, to provide a long-term care tax credit—\$1,000 for people with long-term care needs or for the families that shelter them. It is far better to devote this money to help keep the elderly and the disabled at home than to spend the same amount to pay for them to live away from home. And if it makes it possible for more people to stay home, it may well be cheaper, too. Our parents worked and saved and sacrificed for us in our youth; adult children are now working, saving, and sacrificing for their parents in old age. It is the cycle of life and one we should recognize and reward.

This targeted tax cut of \$1,000, paid for in our balanced budget, would meet the individual needs of individual families, supplementing the care they already provide, empowering them to decide what to do and how to do it best. It would help to offset the direct cost of long-term care, like home health visits and adult day care; as well as the indirect costs, like unpaid leave some caregivers must take. The care they provide is invaluable, but we can show that it is valued by our society.

Second, we should create a family caregiver support program, a new national network to support people caring for older Americans. In decades past, families could do little for ailing relatives but give them shelter and love. But today, because of advances in science, caregivers tend to everything, from dialysis to depression, preparing intravenous meals, and insulin injections. This initiative enables States to create one-stop shops, places caregivers can access the resources of the community, find technical guidance, obtain respite and adult day care services. This is especially important for those families who are thousands of miles

away from their loved ones but who still want to help. These families want to provide the best possible care. We want to do everything in our power to help them.

Third, we must educate Medicare beneficiaries about long-term care options. Medicare does not cover most kinds of long-term care, so it is important that beneficiaries understand their alternatives.

This initiative helps to answer essential questions efficiently: What are my choices; what should I look for in private long-term care insurance policies? By launching a national education campaign, we can help to ensure people get the answers they need when they need them and the quality care they deserve.

Fourth, I am proposing that the Federal Government, as the Nation's largest employer, use its market leverage to set an example, offering private long-term care insurance to Federal employees. By promoting high-quality, affordable care, we can encourage more people and more companies to invest in long-term care coverage. We can help more employees in every part of our economy to prepare for the future.

There's no single solution to the challenges of caregiving. But together, these initiatives represent a powerful first step to force the kind of changes we need in our society. To fulfill our fundamental obligations to older Americans and people with disabilities, we must act together, members of both parties, both branches of Government, putting progress above partisanship. I believe there is an enormous amount of interest in and support for this initiative in the Congress, and I thank the Members who have come here today.

I hope that the Congress will do many things on this front in the coming session; I hope these initiatives will pass. Senator Breaux will soon give us a Medicare Reform Commission report. I hope we will save Medicare for the 21st century. I hope we will use the surplus to save Social Security for the 21st century. All of these things will help to strengthen America as we go forward.

The senior boom is one of the central challenges of the coming century. I can tell you that as, literally, the oldest of the baby boomers, those of us born right after World

War II, one of the central worries of my generation is that, as we age, we will impose unsustainable burdens on our children and undermine their ability to raise our grandchildren. We must use this time now to do everything in our power, not only to lift the quality of life and the security of the aged and disabled today, and the baby boom aged and disabled, but to make sure that we do not impose that intolerable burden on our children.

I have asked the Vice President, who will speak with us, along with Mrs. Gore, in just a moment, to conduct a series of forums around the country on this initiative, to solicit other ideas and reach out to people and to build grassroots support. We want to hear from the people of the country about how we can help to meet the long-term care needs of their loved ones.

Again, let me thank all the people in the administration who worked on this, the Members of Congress who are here, the members of the aging and disability community who are here. And I thank you, Patricia Darlak, for your moving statement. Hillary and I have had our own experiences with long-term care of our parents—in my case, our grandparents. We have seen the Vice President and Mrs. Gore deal with the same challenge. So this is a personal thing that I think we feel very deeply.

I'd like to say a special word of appreciation to the Vice President, because he's had such an interest in our family caregiving program. He is now going to speak to us from California. He's coming up on the satellite, along with Mrs. Gore, and he's got some folks with him who know quite a bit about this.

Good morning, Mr. Vice President. The floor is yours. Good morning, Tipper.

[At this point, Vice President Al Gore and his wife, Tipper, made brief remarks by satellite.]

The President. Thank you very much. I want to thank the Vice President and Tipper, and also all the folks that are out there with them in California, for the example they are setting and the initiatives that are being made in California. I know the Vice President is

about to go to the new Governor's inauguration out there. You ought to take the opportunity to put in a plug for what we're doing there. I'm sure you will. *[Laughter]*

Ladies and gentlemen, let me say, again, how grateful I am for all the people who worked on this proposal, for the advocates for the elderly and the disabled who are here, for the very large representation from Congress. And thank you, again, for the passion and the commitment that you manifested in your statement and for having the courage to come here and tell us about your situation. I hope it will help to change the future of America.

God bless you, and happy New Year. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:36 a.m. in the Grand Foyer on the State Floor at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to caregiver Patricia Darlak, who introduced the President, and her husband, Dennis.

Statement on the Launch of the New European Currency

January 4, 1999

We welcome the launch of the euro, an historic step that 11 nations in Europe have taken toward a more complete Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). The United States has long been an advocate for European integration, and we admire the steady progress that Europe has demonstrated in taking the often difficult budget decisions that make this union possible. A strong and stable Europe, with open markets and robust growth, is good for America and for the world. A successful economic union that contributes to a dynamic Europe is clearly in our long-term interests.

Remarks on the Zero Tolerance for Drugs in Prison Initiative

January 5, 1999

Thank you very much. Let me begin by just expressing my appreciation to all who have spoken and to all who are here for the years and years and years of commitment you have manifested in this endeavor. I thank my

good friend Senator Leahy, and Congressman Rangel. I thank General Reno and General McCaffrey for making it possible for us to continue to emphasize these things and to actually make progress, for being both practical and idealistic.

Thank you, Mayor Griffin, for what you said and for what you're doing, and for bringing your police chief, Chief Hoover, here with you.

I want to say, obviously, a special word of appreciation to Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, who has literally redefined what it means to be a Lieutenant Governor—*[laughter]*—I would hate to succeed her as Lieutenant Governor of Maryland—*[laughter]*—for her indefatigable energy. I thank the others here from Maryland who are involved in her endeavor.

I'd also like to say a special word of welcome to Judge Joel Tauber and all the others who are here from the drug courts throughout America. I'll have more to say about them in a moment, but I am especially grateful for their endeavors.

Six years ago, as has already been said, our country was at peace, but too many of our communities were at war. Illegal drugs were ravaging cities on both coasts and the American heartland in between. Crack and methamphetamine use were at near record levels. Drug dealers controlled whole neighborhoods and thought nothing of opening fire on passing police cars. Many communities lived in terror; many children feared walking down the street.

I actually met, in a school in California—I'll never forget this—with a group of children who were drilled on how to jump out of their desk and hit the floor if they were subject to drive-by shootings. It had a searing impact on me. One of the reasons I ran for President was to give those kids their futures back. And all of you have done a lot to give them their futures back, and I'm very grateful to you.

In every successive year, I have proposed a larger antidrug budget. In 1999—we had a 30-percent increase just between then and 1996, even as we produced the first balanced budget in a generation. Under General McCaffrey's leadership, we have put these resources to good use: unprecedented new