

Year 2000 / MILLENNIUM

Year 2000 Celebration in the State of the Union Address

On February 4, 1997, the President said, "Our economy is measured in numbers and statistics, and it's very important. But the enduring worth of our nation lies in our shared values and our soaring spirit." You challenged "our artists, musicians, and writers, our museums, libraries and theaters, to join with all Americans to make the year 2000 a national celebration of the American spirit in every community - a celebration of our common culture in the century that has passed, and in the new one to come in the new millennium, so that we can remain the world's beacon of liberty and creativity, long after the fireworks have faded."

The President's State of the Union statement sets the themes of "celebrating our common culture" and "remaining the world's beacon of liberty and creativity" for a national millennium celebration.

A Once in a Thousand Years Opportunity

This administration's second term extends into the milestone year of 2001. At the convergence of a new millennium and the next century, America will reflect on its past and imagine the future. The inevitable turn of the calendar offers a moment in history when humankind reassesses our progress and thinks about the legacy we leave to the next generations, while at the same time envisaging the time to come. As this administration leads our nation into the next era, we have a unique opportunity to educate and to lead a celebration that engages all Americans. Beginning in 1997, through the year 2000, the White House can provide special leadership of a national Millennium Initiative for the American people to appreciate our common heritage and rejoice in our creativity.

The overarching goals of the White House Millennium Initiative should include:

- ▶ Stimulating, through White House leadership, a sense of optimism and renewal and the faith that Americans can build a better future;
- ▶ Setting some concrete, attainable objectives to marshal our collective will and resources, such as preserving our cultural heritage for the next generation, renewing our great tradition of philanthropy, or getting better educational content on the Internet.
- ▶ Recognizing the creativity and inventiveness of Americans and our gifts to the world.
- ▶ Valuing the diversity of our peoples and forging greater unity as Americans as we enter the 21st Century.

By late July 1997, the White House will develop a plan for its Millennium leadership, addressing themes, goals, structure, events and the ways we will involve citizens, the private sector, nonprofit organizations, and other levels of government. This memorandum summarizes the thinking that has been devoted to the Millennium, the factors that need to be considered and a planning process that will result in decisions for our directions over the next three and a half years.

Historical Precedents

Historical precedents - such as the Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, or the opening of the Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress in 1897, or the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair - demonstrate

that anniversaries and ambitious projects can both affect the popular imagination and leave lasting marks on the nation's cultural landscape. The Chicago Exposition, for example, commissioned new works by America's leading artists and architects and convened an international congress of scholars which influenced design and intellectual exploration for decades.

The year 2000 also marks the 200th anniversary of the White House as the President's home. John and Abigail Adams first occupied the White House in 1800, the first peaceful transition of government in the United States after an election. In 1900 President McKinley was President and the official turn-of-century celebration was focussed on the White House, its history and expansion.

Other national commemorations offer lessons to learn. The 1976 American Revolution Bicentennial, the 1987 - 1991 Bicentennial of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and the 1992 Columbus Quincentenary all provided occasions for national and local events, and for educational and media projects. Each was led by a commission formed years in advance which drew on both a Congressional appropriation and private funds. The 1976 Bicentennial commission had an elaborate endorsement procedure, whereby events and projects got designated as 'official' and were allowed to use the official logo.

Developing a White House Millennium Plan

By late July, we hope to develop a White House plan for the Millennium Initiative addressing the following elements:

Themes - What overall theme and purposes are conveyed to the public? If we articulate clear themes, and illustrate them with our events, appearances and speeches, then White House leadership could unleash the creativity of other leaders at the state and community levels, stimulating thousands of activities across the country. Some suggested themes are: harnessing American optimism for the age of renewal; promoting American creativity and innovation - recognizing our cultural and scientific accomplishments; and celebrating a world at peace and the spread of democratic values.

Objectives - What do we want to accomplish for the Millennium, through 2000 and beyond? What lasting results, monuments, and public attitudes do we hope to leave as a result of our leadership and national commemoration? Should we define and announce four to six projects that will become our lasting legacy for the 21st century?

Possible objectives include:

- Engaging citizens at the community level in some shared projects and activities such as collecting and preserving their family stories; creating new civic spaces such as town greens and community centers; and producing plays and pageants based on local history or shared concerns; participating in science/technology fairs;
- Identifying the White House with high-level scholarship and art; showcasing new work commissioned for the new era;
- Preserving the White House and the President's Park area, and improving it for future First Families and administrations;
- Increasing philanthropy and reinforcing the ethic of giving as a great American tradition, perhaps setting a measurable goal;
- Convening a world leaders' teleconference on January 1, 2000 to express the world's hope for

peace;

- Inviting leaders of religious communities to discuss faith at this time of reflection and change.

Other Elements - Planning a structure for the Millennium initiative will include organizing groups in the White House and federal agencies as well as consulting with outside experts. Other elements to be studied are using the White House as a venue, the participation of the President and the First Lady, and partnerships with outside sources.