

Conference of Mayors  
Washington, DC  
January 29, 1999

PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

**U.S. Conference of Mayors Winter Meeting**  
**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton**  
**Capital Hilton Hotel - Washington, D.C.**  
**January 29, 1999**

MRS. CLINTON: (Applause.) Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you so much. Thank you, Deedee (ph), for that kind introduction. Thank you for your leadership and the work that you have done on behalf of issues that are critical to young people and the future of our cities.

I am very pleased to join all of you. I know that you had a meeting earlier today at the White House with my husband. I know that not just because I knew what was on his schedule, but I could hear you. (Laughter.) The enthusiasm and the energy that was on display in that meeting just permeated the entire White House complex. And I think that's a good sign for the feelings that we have about what is happening in our cities, their promise, their growth. And it is very exciting for me to meet with the people who are leading the effort on behalf of the cities of our country. I also will certainly take to heart Deedee's (ph) offhanded suggestion that I join you again. I understand after Mayor Morales' description of what you're going to be doing in New Orleans, that you're going to be deluged with requests for people to be part of that meeting, and to enjoy some of that good New Orleans hospitality. You know, the time in which we meet here in 1999 is really an opportunity for us to take stock of where we are as a nation, the progress that we've made to celebrate it, to be grateful for it, but to look forward as well to the kinds of cities, the kind of country we want to have in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The work you do every single day on behalf of your cities is such that I know you're thinking about not just the present, although that is very demanding of your time, but what your contribution will be in your service to ensuring that our cities—your city—has the kind of future it deserves to have for the people who live there.

There are many who have worked with you who have really paved the way. But you are serving at a unique moment in history, and your presence here in our capital is a strong reminder that America needs its cities, and our cities need a strong partnership with the federal government. That is what my husband and his administration have tried to do, and I'm grateful for the support that you have given to those efforts.

Many officials from the administration have already addressed you and have spent time with you. But this partnership that has been forged between the administration and the cities of our country is one that must last far into the next century. It has produced tangible benefits for the people you serve, and we know it has produced benefits for the quality of our life together.

Many, many people have worked very hard with the president to create this partnership. But there are two that I want to recognize, and you know them well

because of the work that you have done with them. And that is Mickey Ibarra and Lynne Cutler (ph). I thank them very much for their work. (Applause.) I was also pleased to be announced into the room by Mayor Webb, who said to me "You know, I'd love to stay but I've got

important business. My Broncos are in the Super Bowl," and he had to leave to catch a plane, and I bid him Godspeed, because after all, first things first. And so he is on his way. I also am very grateful to all of you for the U.S. Conference of Mayors Award to spotlight outstanding city arts programs for at-risk youth. I understand that you had a gala last night and I understand that Mayor Riley (ph) was recognized, as well he should be for his leadership.

But I have been in many of your cities visiting many programs that have used the arts for many purposes. Certainly we now understand—perhaps better than we did even 10 years ago—how the arts can be an engine for economic development and opportunity. And we certainly understand better today how the arts can have an extraordinary impact on the future of young people, particularly those who are at-risk.

It is up to all of us to ensure that our schools and our cities provide opportunities for children from all backgrounds to both appreciate the arts but also to have their talents tapped into, so that they can make a contribution. We recently recognized a number of city programs around the country at a celebration in the White House, and story after story was told about how the work that was being done in these arts programs that many of you have supported and sponsored was making a difference between lives of hopefulness and lives of despair.

Young people learn differently. Not everyone learns the same way, and many young people have talents that would otherwise go untapped if they were not exposed to an arts program in the school, in an after-school program and in a summer program. And so I want to thank you for making the arts once again central to the life of our cities and the life of our young people in those cities.

After all, what is a city but people? And throughout our history, we have seen cities come and go, we have seen them reach great heights, we have seen them fall back and be lost forever. But what we know is that hardworking citizens, citizens who have a vision of the future, have created the great cities of our nation and the world.

And within those cities, it is vibrant neighborhoods that really create the life that we look to when we think of a city. And you understand better than many of us in our country today the enormous challenges that cities face as we approach the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But you can also take great credit—and I hope you will—for what you have achieved in the last several years.

I saw some of you wearing a button about our cities being safer. They are safer, and that is one of the tangible results of the partnership between a president who understood what needed to be done to give you the tools and resources you required to meet the most basic need of any city—making sure our citizens were safe from crime and violence. I want to thank you, because when we see those statistics come out, as we have now for five years in a row, that crime and violence is going down nationwide, we know that it is because of the hard work in the cities and neighborhoods of America taking the tools that this president provided, that is really making the difference. So I want to congratulate you and thank you.

I also want to thank you for putting education back in the very middle of our nation's agenda. You are making extraordinary progress in turning some of the toughest big city systems around, and you're making progress in continuing to work to ensure that medium-sized and smaller cities

have the schools they need to prepare our children for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The president's initiative to put 100,000 new teachers in the classrooms really mirrors the initiative to put 100,000 police on our streets.

And they come from the same impetus—that we understood very clearly when Bill ran for president that our police were both outmanned and outgunned, that we had to have more police, we had to have tougher gun laws, we had to have a Brady Law, we had to once again right the imbalance that existed between criminals and law enforcement.

Well, in our classrooms, we have too many children in too many classrooms overwhelming our teachers. It is very difficult when you have, as we do in many city systems—and not just our giant cities, but medium-sized and even smaller cities—children coming into the classroom for whom English is not only not their first language, but who are part of classes where you have 10, 12, 50, 100 different languages and dialects represented.

We know that we can only deal with this problem at the classroom and school level, and part of what the president's initiative is intended to do is to give you again the tools and the resources to make a difference in your school systems. We have to close the education gap if we expect our cities and our nation to thrive into the next century, and that means ensuring that all children have access to a quality education. And that's impossible to imagine achieving if there are so many children in the early grades that they cannot get the attention they need to get their feet solidly on the ground when it comes to learning English, reading well, being able to move forward in the education system.

You've also done a tremendous job in revitalizing our urban centers with economic opportunity, and unemployment is the lowest it's been. And we have certainly made good on the promise that was put forward to the cities that we would work hand-in-hand with you to make sure welfare reform was achievable.

And we've got a lot of good success stories to point to. But I know and you know that there's still a lot of hard work to do. When it comes to welfare reform, we have to remain vigilant. We have to be creative and flexible in determining what works best. And because of the extraordinary economic opportunity that's been created in the last six years, we have taken care of large numbers of people who could be moved into work and we've had some very gratifying results. I was recently talking with one of the CEOs who's part of the president's welfare to work effort, and he told me how surprised he was at how successful they've been in moving people into jobs who were coming off of welfare. But you know and I know that there is a group of people for whom the easy part is over; there's a lot of tough work ahead to meet the multiple needs of people—both medical needs, health needs, psychological needs, education and training needs—that we're still going to have to try to find better ways of addressing.

You also know that despite the extraordinarily good news about unemployment, there are pockets of unemployment that are still far too high in our cities, people who have not yet been brought into the mainstream of the economy, and we have to do all we can to make that a reality as well. And in the president's budget there are some very creative ways of addressing that remaining problem of how we make sure that prosperity is spread to every American in every part of our land in every city, no matter what its size. (Applause.) We also have unfinished

business when it comes to health care. And often the cities are on the front lines of determining what to do about this. Your partners in the counties are also often left with trying to figure out how we will cover people who have no insurance. And there is a lot of work that we're still going to need to do. But certainly making it possible for all of our children to have insurance coverage through the president's initiative, the children's health insurance program, so-called CHIP, is very critical to the health of the cities and their budgets and the counties as well. Because we know that there is a lot of uninsured, uncompensated care that is going to end up somewhere, or else we will begin turning people away. Now, county hospitals, city hospitals have been the last resort for many people who have nowhere else to go. In the president's budget, we're also going to try to put in some funding that will help create more of a network among public health centers, city and county facilities, charitable institutions so that we can have a true health-care safety net. But you will have to be part of making sure that the proposals that are put forth are practical and workable, and we will need your guidance on that.

If we look at this whole range of issues, whether it is crime and violence going down so our neighborhoods and our parks are finally thankfully getting safer, or whether it is education and the challenge we face with our children, unemployment and economic opportunity in every poor neighborhood, in every Indian community - - everywhere Americans need that extra enterprise and assistance—whether it is continuing the work on welfare reform, whether it is also focusing on health care so we are sure that we have a financially stable system that truly provides quality health care to all Americans, this is the kind of family agenda that is worthy of the American people that the president outlined in his state of the union. It is an agenda that is worth fighting for and will bear results on behalf of our people.

But you know better than most that if we just pass programs, even as challenging as it may be to pass some of the programs that are part of the president's family agenda and his agenda for the cities and livable communities, that still really falls on your shoulders to make sure that whatever is passed in Washington is implemented effectively at the local level. You are the ones that truly make those programs work, that bring communities together, that create systems of consensus-building that will enable us to put into action what we all dream of, which is to continue building on the progress that we have seen made in the last six years.

I think we have a special opportunity to focus our communities on the kinds of places we want them to be in the years to come, because we do stand at this unique moment. We're at the end of the century, we're at the beginning of a new millennium. Now, if we do nothing about that, it will come and go without any of our interference or even acknowledgment. The century will end, the new millennium will begin.

But I think it gives us a tremendous opportunity to take stock of who we are, where we are, and where we want to be. People around the country are beginning to really get excited about this end-of-century, end-of-millennium time period. Certainly there are reasons why we would have this occurrence commemorated, whether we did it on a community basis or not. There are going to be millennium products, we've got the Y2K issue we have to deal with. Some people are already planning their New Year's Eve parties and the like. But part of what we hope that the White House Millennium Council can work with you to achieve is to really take this time and do more with it, to really focus on the kind of people we want to be and the kind of cities we want

to have. What do we treasure in our communities? What do we want to preserve for future generations? What values do we want to bring forward into the next century? How can we define ourselves as citizens of cities, states, of nations, of world? I think people are expecting something to happen, so why not harness this millennium moment and the spirit that it engenders for the common good? That was really the question that the president and I asked ourselves more than a year ago, because we saw this as a great opportunity. So we began working on it in the White House, and we put together the White House Millennium Council. And we adopted the theme "Honor the Past, Imagine the Future." And the president has invited states and communities—non-profit, Indian communities, corporations, public agencies—all citizens to participate in efforts that strengthen our democracy, improve our communities, and enable us to give lasting gifts to the future.

We have found that one of the best ways to imagine the future is to preserve what we value of the past, the artifacts and historical sites, the documents that really tell the story maybe of your city, of your state and certainly of our country.

Last year the president proposed and Congress approved a \$30 million Millennium Fund to save America's treasures. And that is an effort that maybe you've read about. I've been in some of your cities and in many smaller communities in the last year talking about it and trying to bring attention to some of the treasures that are literally in every corner of our country. I've had a wonderful time doing that. And everywhere I've been, I've met people who understand how critical it is to use this time to save what we value so that we do have values to bring into the future.

Our partners in this effort are the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Park Foundation. Each of them have different responsibilities and different obligations under their various missions, but both are committed to helping all of us, working with the White House and working with you, to really bring attention to the treasures that we have that are worth saving.

And I was delighted because we had told the Congress that if they would appropriate a federal share that we could use in this effort we would match it. And I kind of took a big gulp when I said that. But at the end of this year, we'd already raised more than \$30 million in private funds to go with the public funds that the Congress had appropriated, because there is a great outpouring from individuals, from corporations, from foundations and other institutions that recognize the significance of this moment to help save America's treasures. What I have found in the places I have visited that a lot of these treasures don't just offer some kind of dry history lesson, but really give us a glimpse into our future as well. Visiting Thomas Edison's laboratory in New Jersey, for example, you could see the spirit of ingenuity that has fueled progress in America for centuries. Stepping inside Harriet Tubman's home in Auburn, New York, I could understand better the legacy of courage that she brought to the journey she made time and time again to bring slaves to freedom. As I toured the Breed Street Shoal (ph) and the wonderful Los Angeles Theater in Los Angeles, I could once again sense the civic pride that has served generations of immigrants and an earlier community in Los Angeles in an area that is now revitalizing and for which the arts will be a prominent part in that revitalization.

These are not only individual memories—they are part of our national story. So I'm pleased that

once again this year, the president's budget will request another \$30 million to save America's treasures. And he's also recommending that funds be appropriated to ensure that the photographs and the paintings and the documents in our federal collection are available to all citizens on the Internet. This gives us a wonderful opportunity to reach out to schools and public libraries everywhere you live, to enable people who might not have the opportunity to travel to the Archives and the Smithsonian to see over the miracle of the Internet what is here and what marks our history. You know better than I that each community has unique resources—treasures if you will -- that should be restored and preserved. Whether it's a town hall in a city square or even a city park or a monument, there is something there that you can use to help teach the people in your community about their past and ask them questions about the kind of future they want to be part of building.

I'm also pleased to take this opportunity to unveil a new millennium initiative, called Millennium Community. This is a program to bring official recognition to cities, towns, communities and Indian tribes that are planning millennium projects that honor the past and imagine the future. I'm glad that we've worked to develop this program hand-in-hand with you, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and also with the National Association of Counties, the National League of Cities, the National Association of Towns and Townships, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Their leaders are here with us today, and I want to thank them. In his state of the union, the president said "I want to invite every town, every city, every community to become a nationally recognized Millennium Community by launching projects that save our history, promote our arts and humanities and prepare our children for the 21<sup>st</sup> century." Now every community has a different way of approaching this. We've already learned from working with some of you. Some may want to launch a local effort to save a treasure, to raise the funds necessary to do so. Others may want to join the Mars Millennium Project, which is challenging schoolchildren around the nation in conjunction with NASA to design a community that they would want to live on on the planet Mars in the year 2030.

Some might want to join the Millennium Trails project, which we hope will build 2,000 new trails that will help us explore our environment and mark our heritage along the way. Richmond, California, for example, will celebrate its new "Rosie the Riveter Park," to pay tribute to the women who worked in the World War II shipyards. The people of Casper, Wyoming, will restore some of the important trails that run through that town, such as the old cattle trails that stretch from Texas to Montana. Minneapolis is planning to celebrate its heritage with snowshoe races and dog-sled rides through downtown. And Denver, Colorado is committed to preserving historic sites and districts. In Little Rock, the students there will be learning about the millennium through a new curriculum in the city's public schools. And Canton, Ohio, will revitalize a six-block downtown area, the centerpiece of its millennium celebration. People in Seattle, Washington, are adding over 20,000 trees to that city's landscape. And Alaska is promoting cultural events that encourage Native Americans to draw on the wisdom of elders and the idealism of the young. We have some of those examples in this Millennium Communities handbook, which I hope that you will take with you, share with the people in your city and your staff, and look for ways that you might find suitable to pursue some millennium activities in each of your communities.

We're also seeing a lot of interest in cities that are sister cities of those around the globe who want to strengthen their ties to their sister cities by promoting international cultural and educational exchanges. Chicago, for instance, is inviting foreign artists to visit the city and paint murals throughout its neighborhoods.

Today I'm also announcing two new tools that I hope will help you develop your own millennium plans. The first is the handbook, which I hope—we've tried very hard to make it so—is a practical guide for civic leaders, groups, and individuals. Another tool is the new web site which Bell South, partnering with the U.S. Conference of Mayors, is creating. The web site for Millennium Communities will allow designated communities to share ideas and projects. And we hope that you will want to be so designated, that you will want to be part of this great national effort as we stand on the brink of this new century. You know, I've been reading a lot about what people were doing at the turn of the last century and even the last millennium. And certainly if you try to think back 1,000 years, there were many differences, of course; but there were some similarities that we might also overlook. People even at that time were imagining the future. They were creating new art forms, they were building cities, they were forming reading groups—those who could read. They were designing new systems of cultivation, they were spreading religion from every corner of the globe. They were remapping the world as they were discovering it.

And they were—importantly—saying “No!” to the doomsayers. You know, there's always a split when there is an important point in time. And we will see it again here in our country and around the world. There are people who face the future with fear, even with apocalyptic vision.

That was true 1,000 years ago, as some monks would travel around Europe telling people the end was near and that they should come together and cower in fear. But the other human impulse is the one that really held sway, and that is the feeling of hopefulness and opportunity and challenge in confronting the future. Well, we know that there are those among us in our country who are stockpiling water and canned goods and worrying about Y2K, a problem that we do have to take seriously, but which I expect to be resolved with the hard work of many of you.

But what I think is the more likely feeling that you will find in your communities, as I have found it around the country, is this sense of opportunity and hopefulness. And there is much we can do to build on that.

People are much more likely to come together across racial or ethnic or linguistic lines if they feel hopeful about the results that would flow from their taking what they see as a risk to try to be vulnerable and work with others unlike themselves. People who are hopeful will want to clean up monuments or create new parks, because they see a future where that will define the quality of life for themselves and their children. People who are hopeful are really those Americans who are true to our tradition of hopefulness. With all of the difficulties and challenges our country has confronted, we always fall back on a sense of hopefulness. And that is what I hope will happen again in this coming year. Because we do, as we look back on the last six years of progress, have a lot to celebrate. We have a lot of work ahead of us to continue building on safer cities and reformed schools and welfare workers working and all that we can see at the ground level that is occurring. So let's not just celebrate with parties and

champagne—as much fun as that will be—let's add to the celebration some contemplation, some commemoration and really look for ways that we can bring our communities and our country together.

If we imagine the kind of cities we want for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we know we're on the right track to achieving them, and we know that the road is a very challenging one. But we have hope, because we have seen what hope and hard work can produce. When every citizen has the opportunity to live a productive, fulfilling life, and when our communities can live together in peace, without the sound of gunfire, with people feeling free to walk through a park on a beautiful summer evening; when children are learning the skills they will need to compete in the global economy, and when there is public space that invites us in and a feeling that we are contributing to the common good of our future together, then we will know we have given gifts to the future that will stand the test of time.

So let me invite each of you to use this opportunity to become a Millennium Community, to work with us in creating this moment in time that we hope will stand for the symbol of what we as a nation want to create for our future. I thank you for what you have already done and I look forward to working with you for what we can do together. Thank you very much. (Applause.)