

My fellow citizens, today we celebrate the mystery of American renewal.

This ceremony is held in the depth of winter. But, by the words we speak and the faces we show the world, we force the spring. A spring reborn in the world's oldest democracy, that brings forth the vision and courage to reinvent America.

When our founders boldly declared America's independence to the world and our purposes to the Almighty, they knew that America, to endure, would have to change.

Not change for change's sake, but change to preserve American's ideals -- life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness. Though we march to the music of our time, our mission is timeless. Each generation of Americans must define what it means to be an American.

On behalf of our nation, I salute my predecessor, President Bush, for his half-century of service to America.

And I thank the millions of men and women whose steadfastness and sacrifice triumphed over depression, fascism and communism.

Today, a generation raised in the shadows of the Cold War assumes new responsibilities in a world warmed by the sunshine of freedom but threatened by still ancient hatreds and new plagues. Raised in unrivaled prosperity, we inherit an economy that is still the world's strongest, but is weakened by business failures, stagnant wages, increasing inequality, and deep divisions.

When George Washington first took the oath. I have just sworn to uphold, news traveled slowly. Now, the sights and sounds of this ceremony are broadcast instantaneously to billions around the world. Communications and commerce are global; technology is almost magical; and ambition for a better life is almost universal. We earn our livelihood in peaceful competition with people all across the Earth. Profound and powerful forces are shaking and remaking our world, and the urgent question of our time is whether we can make change our friend and not our enemy.

This new world has enriched the lives of millions of Americans who are able to compete and win in it. But when people are working harder for less; when others cannot work at all; when the cost of health care devastates families and threatens to bankrupt enterprises, great and small; when fear of crime robs law-abiding citizens of their freedom; and when millions of poor children cannot even imagine the lives we are calling them to lead -- we have not made change our friend.

We know we have to face hard truths and take strong steps. But we have not done so. Instead, we have drifted, and that drifting has eroded our resources, fractured our economy, and shaken our confidence.

Though our challenges are fearsome, so are our strengths. And Americans have ever been a restless, questing, hopeful people. We must bring to our task today the vision and the will of those who came before us.

From our Revolution, Civil War, to the Great Depression, to the Civil Rights Movement, our people have mustered the determination to construct from crises the pillars of our history.

Thomas Jefferson believed that to preserve the very foundations of our nation, we would need dramatic change from time to time. Well, my fellow citizens, this is our time. Let us embrace it. Our democracy must not only be the envy of the world but the engine of our own renewal. There is nothing wrong with America that cannot be fixed by what is right with America.

And so today, we pledge an end to the era of deadlock and drift -- a new season of American renewal has begun.

To renew America, we must be bold.

We must do what no generation has had to do before. We must invest more in our own people, in their jobs, in their future, and at the same time cut our massive debt. We must do so in a world in which we must compete for every opportunity.

It will not be easy; it will require sacrifice. But it can be done, and done fairly, not choosing the sacrifice for its own sake, but for our own sake, but for our own sake. We must provide for our nation the way a family provides for its children.

Our founders saw themselves in the light of posterity. We can do no less. Anyone who has ever watched a child's eyes wander into sleep knows what posterity is. Posterity is the world to come -- the world for whom we hold our ideals, from whom we have borrowed our planet, and to whom we bear sacred responsibility.

We must do what America does best; offer more opportunity to all and demand more responsibility of all.

It is time to break the bad habit of expecting something for nothing, from our government or from each other. Let us all take more responsibility, not only for ourselves and for our families but for our communities and for our country.

To renew America, we must revitalize our democracy.

This beautiful capital, like every capital since the dawn of civilization, is often a place of intrigue and calculation. Powerful people maneuver for position and worry endlessly about who is in and who is out, who is up and who is down, forgetting those whose toil and sweat sends us here and pays our way.

Americans deserve better, and in this city today, there are people who want to do better. Let us resolve to reform our politics, so that power and privilege no longer shout down the voice of the people. Let us put aside personal advantage so that we can feel the pain and see the promise of America.

Let us resolve to make our government a place for what Franklin Roosevelt called "bold, persistent experimentation", a government of our tomorrows, not our yesterdays. Let us give this capital back to the people to whom it belongs.

To renew America, we must meet challenges abroad as well as at home. There is no longer division between what is foreign and domestic. The world economy, environment, the world AIDS crisis, the world arms race -- they affect us all.

Today, as an old order passes, the new world is more free but less stable. Communism's collapse has called forth old animosities and new dangers. Clearly, America must continue to lead the world we did so much to make.

While America rebuilds at home, we will not shrink from the challenges, nor fail to seize the opportunities, of this new world. Together with our friends and allies, we will work to shape change, lest it engulf us.

When our vital interests are challenged, or the will and conscience of the international community defied, we will act -- with peaceful diplomacy whenever possible, with force when necessary. The brave Americans serving our nation today in the Persian Gulf, in Somalia, and wherever else they stand are testament to our resolve.

But our greatest strength is the power of our ideas, which are still new in many lands. Across the world, we see them embraced -- and we rejoice. Our hopes, our hearts, our hands, are with those on every continent who are building democracy and freedom. Their cause is America's cause.

The American people have summoned the change we celebrate today. You have raised your voices in an unmistakable chorus. You have cast your votes in historic numbers. You have changed the face of

Congress, the Presidency, the political process itself. Yes, you, my fellow Americans, have forced the spring. Now, we must do the work that the season demands.

To that work I now turn, with the authority of my office. I ask the Congress to join with me. But no President, no Congress, no government, can undertake this mission alone. My fellow Americans, you, too, must play your part. I challenge a new generation of young Americans to a season of service -- to act on your idealism by helping troubled children, keeping company with those in need, and reconnecting our torn communities. There is so much to be done, enough for millions of others who are young in spirit to give of themselves in service, too.

In serving, we recognize a simple but powerful truth -- we need each other. And we must care for one another. Today, we do more than celebrate America; we rededicate ourselves to the idea of America. An idea born in Revolution and renewed through two centuries of challenge. An idea. An idea tempered by the knowledge that, but for fate, we -- the fortunate and the unfortunate -- might have been each other. An idea ennobled by the faith that our nation can summon from its myriad diversity the deepest measure of measure of unity. An idea infused with the conviction that America's long heroic journey must go forever upward.

And so, my fellow Americans, at the edge of the 21st Century, let us begin with energy and hope, with faith and discipline, and let us work until the work is done. The scripture says, "And let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season, we shall reap, if we faint not."

From this joyful mountaintop of celebration, we hear a call to service in the valley. We have heard the trumpets. We have changed the guard. And now, each in our own way, and with God's help, we must answer the call.

Thank you and God bless you all.

William Jefferson Clinton. First Inaugural address, January 20, 1993.