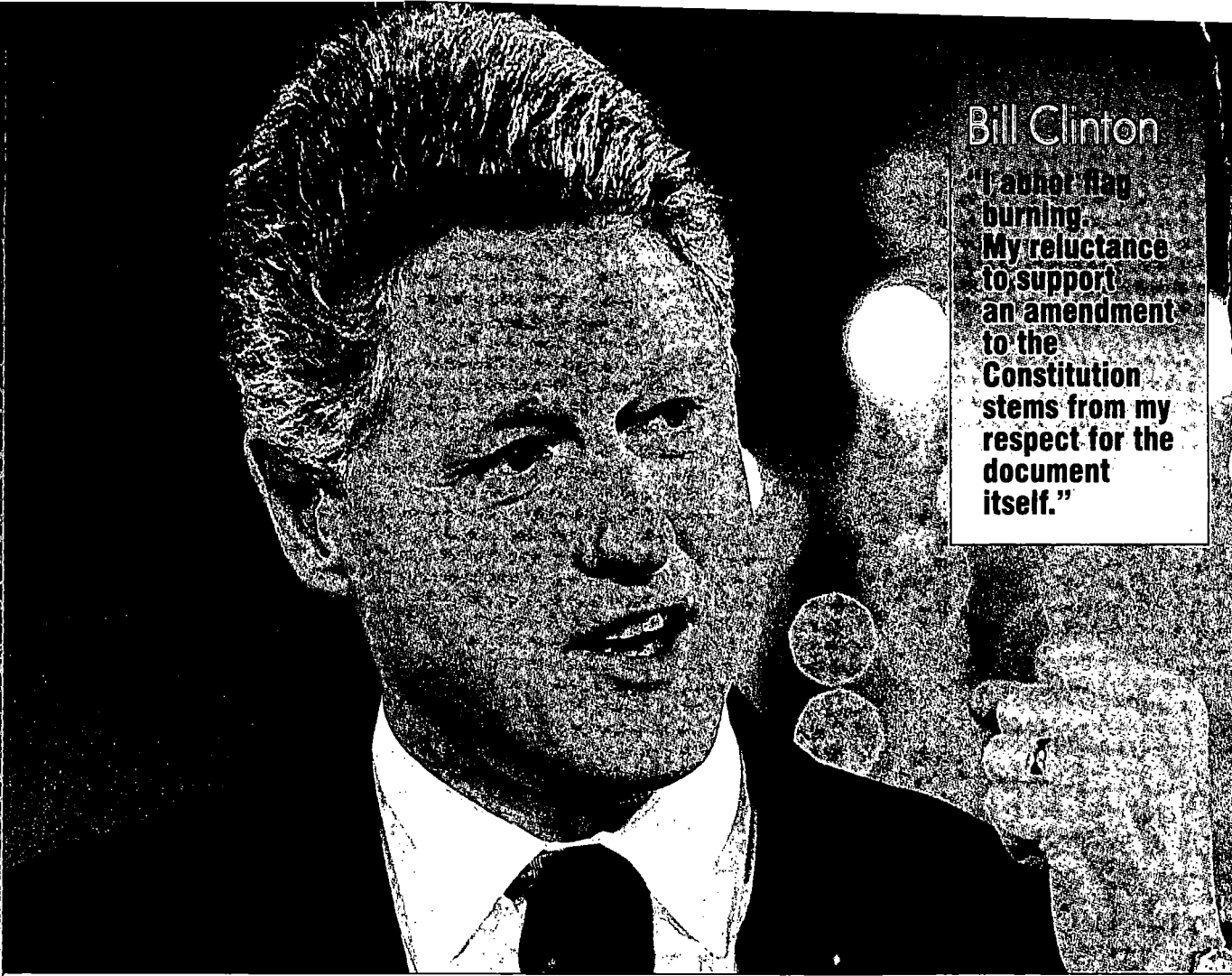




Bill Clinton

"I abhor flag burning. My reluctance to support an amendment to the Constitution stems from my respect for the document itself."

The Men Who Would Be PRESIDENT

Next month, Americans will go to the polls to elect the next president. Here's what the two leading candidates have to say about the issues.

TAKEN together, they are the issues that might well elect the nation's next president—national security, veterans' affairs, welfare reform, citizenship, flag desecration and illegal immigration. Fittingly, THE AMERICAN LEGION MAGAZINE questioned the presidential front-runners, incumbent Bill Clinton and Republican challenger Robert J. Dole, on these and other election-year issues.

The two candidates hail from very different backgrounds. Bill Clinton was new to the national spotlight when he made his stunning dash to the White House in 1992; he garnered 43 percent of the vote in a three-way presidential race with George Bush and Ross Perot. Before that, Clinton served two separate stints as governor of Arkansas (1979-1981 and 1983-1992).

Kansas' Bob Dole, on the other hand, is a long-time Beltway insider. A wounded and decorated combat veteran of World War II, Dole, who was elected to the Senate in 1969, served as majority leader from 1994 until his resignation this past July. He was also the Republican Party's nominee for vice president in 1976.

A few highlights of the candidates' opposing perspectives on several key matters:

- On the controversial issue of U.S. military involvement with the United Nations, Clinton renewed his commitment to "multilateral peace operations," while Dole ruled out United Nations command of American forces.

- On veterans' health issues, Clinton said he had kept his promises and cited his record to prove it. But both candidates

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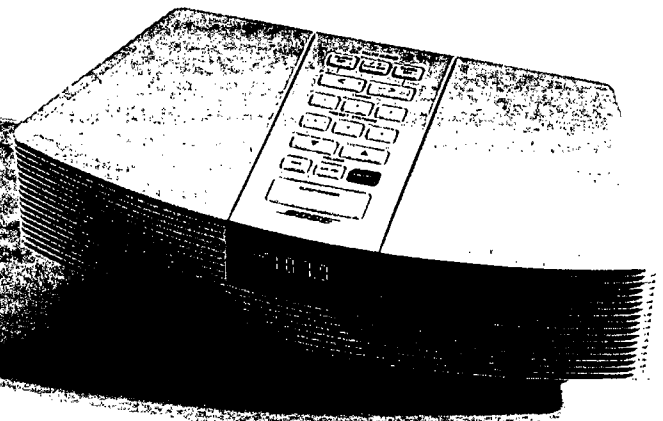
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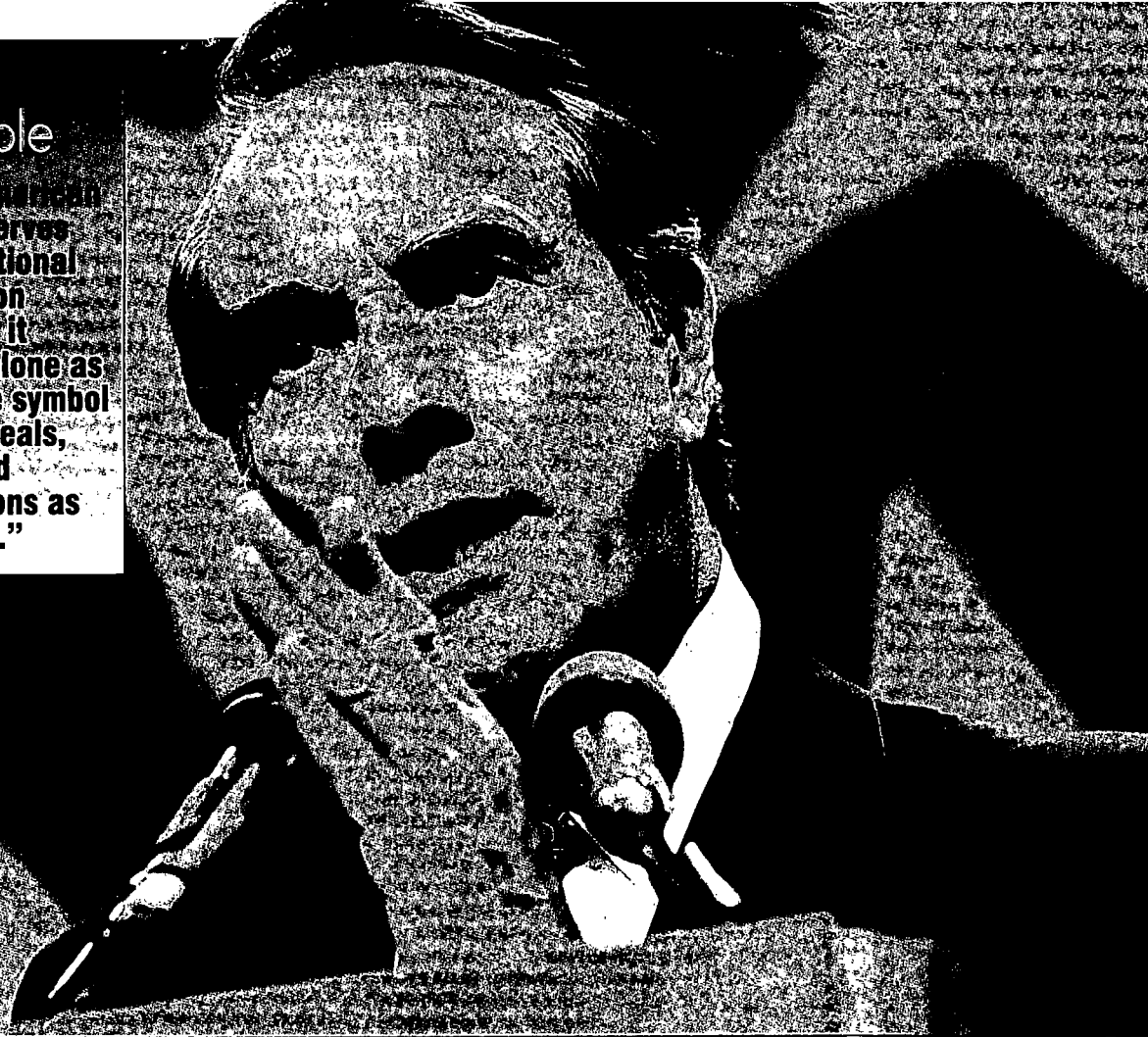
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Bob Dole

"The American flag deserves constitutional protection because it stands alone as a unique symbol of our ideals, hope and aspirations as a nation."



said further reforms are needed to improve services.

- In a noteworthy disclosure, Clinton said his administration is in the process of producing a new chemical-weapons detector and protective suits.

- On illegal immigration, both promised a further crack-down on the problem, with Clinton saying his record was the best of any administration in 30 years. Dole declared his opposition to welfare for illegal aliens.

- While Clinton touted his economic record and described America as a "better place" than it was four years ago, Dole contends the U.S. is in the midst of a "slow decline" that he will reverse.

These were just a few of the differences between the candidates that surfaced during their respective interviews.

AMERICAN LEGION MAGAZINE: How do you plan to maintain the national security of the United States?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Enhancing U.S. security requires developing and maintaining a strong defense capability.

Our strategy includes having forces to deter aggression in major regional conflicts by projecting and sustaining U.S. power in more than one region, if necessary; providing a credible overseas presence; countering weapons of mass destruction by stemming proliferation, limiting the spread of weapons-

related materials and strengthening security for them; contributing to multilateral peace operations; and fighting drug trafficking and supporting counterterrorism efforts.

ROBERT J. DOLE: America requires the most capable, most advanced and best-trained military in the world. Readiness requires an enduring commitment to American military strength and modernization.

The proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction has placed the United States at risk. The American people must be defended against limited ballistic missile attack or nuclear intimidation from rogue states and terrorists. That is why I introduced the Defend America Act, to require the deployment of a national missile defense system by the year 2003. When we do send our troops to foreign lands, they should be placed under U.S., not U.N., command. American lives should be risked only for American interests.

Q. What should be done about veterans suffering from Gulf War Syndrome, and what must be done in the future to protect our troops from similar afflictions?

CLINTON: Besides pressing for unprecedented legislation to compensate these veterans, I directed the Departments of Veterans' Affairs (VA), Defense (DoD) and Health and Human Services to collaborate on



Election '96

research, clinical issues and disability compensation.

We formed the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses to review the matter and make recommendations. That effort is one reason DoD was able to confirm that, shortly after the war, U.S. troops destroyed an Iraqi ammunition bunker that contained chemical weapons. While we have no evidence that Americans were exposed to those weapons, it shows we are continuing to put together the pieces of the puzzle.

We have set up environmental-hazards research centers at three veterans' hospitals. VA and DoD investigators have started major epidemiological studies. We have surveyed the health of 30,000 veterans and have undertaken an array of more than 70 other research initiatives.

Some of our VA hospitals are participating in a health examination program for spouses and children to help us better understand the prevalence of illnesses in Persian Gulf veterans' families. Both the VA and the DoD have established toll-free hotlines.

During Desert Storm we learned some crucial lessons about our chemical-weapons detectors and protective suits. We have selected for production a new detector that will be more reliable and will virtually eliminate false alarms. We are also in the process of procuring lightweight, highly protective suits for all the services.

DOLE: I will continue to strongly support programs to assist veterans suffering from Gulf War Syndrome. VA and DoD need to take this issue seriously, and Persian Gulf veterans' claims must be considered.

Q. What can you do to encourage the creation of good, high-paying jobs and their availability to veterans?

CLINTON: As the military has downsized after the Cold War, the Department of Labor's veterans employment service and Transition Assistance Program have helped millions of veterans and separating service members and their spouses find jobs.

I know the critical importance of education in today's economy and have consistently supported the Montgomery GI Bill. My administration has also maintained a firm commitment to veterans' preference in federal hiring. In fact, while overall federal hiring declined under my administration, we have increased the percentage of veterans hired—from 17 percent of all full-time federal hires in 1991 to 31 percent in 1995.

A strong economy and these concerted efforts have helped reduce the veterans' unemployment rate during my administration from 7.2 percent in January 1993 to 3.9 percent in May 1996.

DOLE: I believe in economic opportunity for all Americans by adopting policies that promote jobs and economic growth. This means balancing the budget by cutting wasteful government spending, lowering taxes on working families to encourage savings and investment in job-creating activities, and curtailing burdensome federal regulations that



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cost the U.S. economy an estimated \$500 billion annually, or \$6,000 per family. Balancing the budget and cutting taxes are two sides of the same coin—restoring money and power to the real engine of the American economy—the American people.

One of the most important legal rights of veterans is veterans' preference in federal government hiring. The enforcement of these employment rights in federal contracting and veterans re-employment has been weak and inconsistent.

I will provide strong leadership in support of veterans employment in federal agencies. I will enforce the prohibition on discrimination against veterans. I will place veterans on the White House staff and in high policy-making positions.

Q. How can you assist The American Legion in maintaining high-quality VA health care?

CLINTON: My fiscal year 1997 budget contains a proposal to allow VA medical facilities to retain a portion of the



Bill Clinton

determining eligibility for VA health care is not conducive to the delivery of good medicine."

THE THIRD PARTIES

POLLS show that a majority of voters support a third-party alternative to the Democrats and Republicans. Ross Perot's Reform Party is the most visible of them and is given credit for making a balanced budget into a national issue. However, most American voters will be able to select from presidential candidates representing other political parties as well. The U.S. Taxpayers Party, the Libertarian Party and the Green Party will be on 30 or more state ballots.

These parties exist because of the perception that the two major parties are not accountable to the American people. As in the presidential election of 1992, it is likely that the winner of this year's contest will receive a plurality, not a majority, of the vote.

What follows is a summary of where these parties stand on some of the crucial issues:

The Reform Party: Favors "fair trade," new restrictions on lobbyists, term limits for Congress, balanced-budget amendment, replacement of Electoral College with direct vote, major changes in Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, creation of a "fair" tax system and voter approval of federal tax increases.

The Libertarian Party

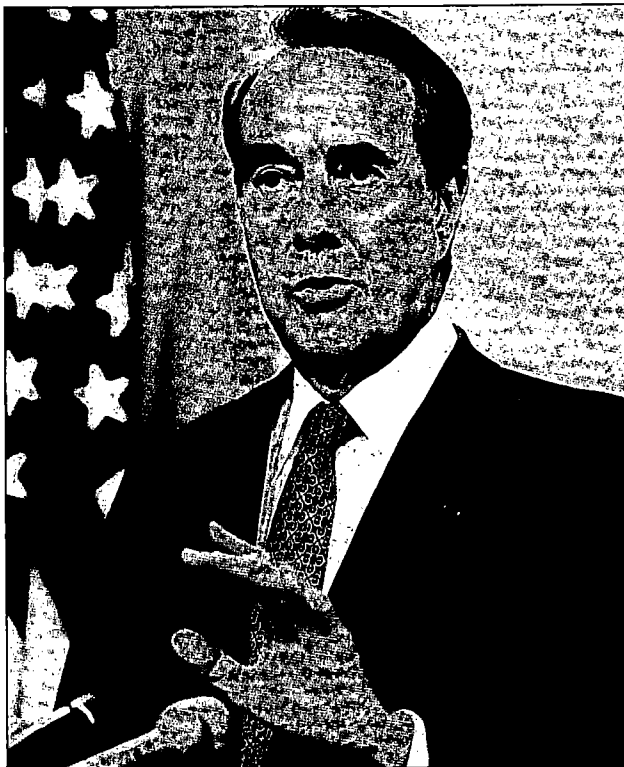
(presidential candidate is financial author Harry Browne): Favors legalization of drugs, no federal involvement in the abortion issue, unlimited legal immigration, no gun control laws, end to foreign aid, term limits for Congress, withdrawal of U.S. troops from foreign countries, construction of a missile-defense system. Also wants to sell federal assets to pay off government debt.

The U.S. Taxpayers Party (founded by conservative activist Howard Phillips): End legal abortion, withdraw from the United Nations and all international monetary and financial institutions, crack down on foreign countries smuggling drugs to America, stop "oppressive" taxation, abolish congressional pensions, support gun rights, abolish the Federal Reserve, and cut the federal government "down to constitutional size."

The Green Party (Ralph Nader is its presidential nominee, but says he doesn't share all of the Green Party's positions on the issues): Favors decriminalization of illegal drugs, 75 percent cut in the defense budget, animal rights, abortion rights and gay rights, gun registration, abolition of the CIA, free birth control devices and more power for the United Nations. □

money VA collects from health insurers. And I have directed VA and the Health Care Financing Administration to work together on developing a demonstration project that will allow VA facilities to receive Medicare reimbursement for care provided to upper-income, non-service connected Medicare-eligible veterans.

I recognize that the confusing system for determining eligibility for VA health care services is not conducive to the delivery of good medicine and is in dire need of reform. I



Bob Dole

bottom review of the VA to improve services while meeting our obligation to veterans."

have submitted a comprehensive eligibility reform measure to Congress.

DOLE: I believe we need a top-to-bottom review of the VA to improve services while meeting our obligation to veterans. I fully agree that administrative decentralization of VA facilities would greatly improve the services provided to veterans. We need to start placing greater emphasis on ambulatory, and inpatient and outpatient, care.

Q. What will you do to ensure that veterans are not denied the benefits they earned serving their country?

CLINTON: I have lived up to my promises to improve veterans' benefits and health services in the budget increases I have requested; in improved services for women veterans, homeless veterans, former prisoners of war and veterans exposed to environmental hazards; in a strengthened and restructured veterans' health care system; and in the unprecedented access veterans and their organizations have to the administration.

I have fought to ensure that veterans and military retirees receive their full cost-of-living adjustments. My administra-

Please turn to page 48

Hanging Tough In A HOSTILE WORLD

The next president will be judged on how well he uses the "Interwar Period" to prepare for the strife the future holds.



By Bruce Gudmundsson



WHEN, IN January of 1997, the president takes the oath of office, there will be much discussion of the times in which he serves. In print, and on television, radio, and the internet, pundits will make much of the task ahead, and cheerfully provide both diagnosis and cure for America's ills. Those who wish to appear especially wise will mention the challenges of the "Post-Cold War Era," carefully stressing each syllable to give

undeserved gravity to an otherwise clumsy phrase.

The advice these commentators give will vary in quality. Decades from now, historians studying the late 1990s will spill much ink debating which bit of freely offered wisdom the president should have heeded and which he should have ignored. The one thing these future students of our present times will agree on, however, will be that we used a curious term to describe our present decade. Writing after the end of America's next war, these scholars will place the presidential term that begins in 1997, not in the "Post-Cold War Era," but in something they will call the "Interwar Period."

The immediate challenges of this "Interwar Period" will be many. The inevitable reduction in defense spending will force the president and his advisors to determine what in the budget is expendable fat and what is indispensable muscle. The saber rattling of

petty tyrants, whether they lead medium-sized countries or organizations without borders, will require appropriate response. Terrorism, which has become a way of life in many parts of the world, will have to be dealt with in a way that both puts existing terrorists out of business and preserves the very liberties that terrorists attempt to turn against us. Local conflicts in the undeveloped world, though they pose no direct threat to Americans or America's interests, will often force the president to choose between jumping in a potential quagmire and asking the most powerful nation in the world to stand by while children starve and adults massacre each other by the tens of thousands.

Difficult as they are, these dilemmas pale in comparison to the greatest challenge that lies ahead for the commander-in-chief to be inaugurated next January, the challenge of preparing for the next war. The difficulties involved with

Bruce Gudmundsson, Quantico, Va., specializes in writing about military issues. A Marine Corps Reservist, he is the editor of the Tactical Notebook.

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ELECTION '96

Continued from page 17

tion has reached out to veterans across the country to tell them about opportunities to refinance homes bought under the GI Bill. I have extended disability benefits to Vietnam veterans with certain cancers and illnesses that may have been caused by exposure to Agent Orange. And I fought for legislation that extends compensation for the first time to chronically disabled veterans with undiagnosed illnesses.

My administration has made significant progress in reducing the serious backlog in benefits claims.

DOLE: Given the current benefit restraints, we need to operate the VA in a more cost-effective manner. We can do a better job, but we must never attempt to balance the budget on the backs of our veterans, especially service-connected veterans.

Q. Will you support a constitutional amendment to protect the U.S. Flag

from acts of physical desecration?

CLINTON: I abhor flag burning. But I do not believe that the problem can be solved with a constitutional amendment. My reluctance to support an amendment to the Constitution stems from my respect for the document itself. We have never amended the First Amendment, which would happen if we ratified a flag-burning amendment.

DOLE: I support a constitutional amendment that would overturn the 1989 Supreme Court decision allowing flag burning—a decision with which the overwhelming majority of Americans disagree—and restore the protection previously given the flag.

I believe the American flag deserves constitutional protection because it stands alone as a unique symbol of our ideals, hopes and aspirations as a nation. As I have stated in my fight to protect the flag, "There is no other symbol that so captures the American spirit and experience."

Q. Why hasn't more been done to stop illegal immigration?

CLINTON: We have increased the number of Border Patrol agents at the southwest border by 40 percent since 1993. Our asylum reform reduced the number of asylum claims by 57 percent its first year. My administration removed a record 51,600 criminal and other illegal aliens in 1995. I have also worked to increase funding to the Immigration and Naturalization Service by 72 percent since 1993. We have used operations such as "Gatekeeper" and "Hold-the-Line" to coordinate new agents, time-saving equipment and state-of-the-art technology to reclaim the border in cities like San Diego and El Paso. Taken together, these actions have accomplished more in three years than all of the administrations in the last 30 years combined.

I support efforts to make families who sponsor immigrants take financial responsibility for them. I have also set a goal of increasing deportation by 25 percent this year and by 50 percent the next.

DOLE: Nearly 300,000 illegal aliens enter the United States each year—a flood of undocumented immigrants that saps precious government dollars and undermines our security. I do not believe that those who have entered our country illegally are entitled to government welfare services.

Please turn to page 50

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ELECTION '96

Continued from page 48

We must strengthen the Border Patrol and streamline the deportation process for illegals.

Q. How can we better encourage responsible citizenship among young people?

CLINTON: My AmeriCorps program gives young Americans a chance to earn their tuition while working in their communities.

I have also offered federal matching funds, up to \$500 toward what a community raises, to reward high school students who perform significant service for their communities, creating a National Service Scholar in every school.

DOLE: The values that have made America the great country it is cannot be stated in fancy words. Instead, they are expressed in the daily lives of the American people. Honesty, integrity, generosity, hard work, common

sense—these are the values that have given our nation the power and faith to overcome any and all challenges.

Education in America must do more than teach children knowledge and skills. Our schools must also teach our children the virtues that have made America a beacon of freedom for the entire world. Our schools must teach our children good citizenship.

Q. Mr. Clinton, why do you think you deserve a second term?

CLINTON: During my first term, we have seen the creation of 10 million new jobs, and the lowest combined rates of unemployment and inflation in nearly three decades. We have cut the federal deficit in half and are committed to balancing the budget in seven years.

I have worked hard to ensure that our children grow up in an environment that is both safe and supportive, bringing the crime rate down in each of the past four years. We've made it easier for parents to take time away from work during family emergencies. I've pushed for V-chip legislation to help parents regulate children's television habits and pushed the television industry to implement a ratings system. We've taken steps to connect every classroom in the country to the Internet by the year 2000, and we've made higher education more attainable with affordable student loan programs.

Under my administration this country has stood with those seeking peace, freedom and democracy all over the world: in Northern Ireland, the Middle East and Bosnia. In addition, I have pushed for the START II treaty, which would reduce our nuclear stockpiles by 25 percent.

My administration has reduced the federal workforce by 237,000 to its smallest size in three decades and we are eliminating 16,000 pages of superfluous federal regulations.

The United States is a better place today than it was four years ago; and I firmly believe that, as president, I can help make it an even better place four years from now.

Q. Mr. Dole, why should Americans vote for you?

DOLE: It is part of our national creed that our lives will be better tomorrow than they are today; that our children will know opportunities beyond any we know ourselves. But to master our future, we must once again embrace those timeless, tested values: love of

God, country and family; commitment to honesty, decency and personal responsibility; and self-reliance tempered by a sense of community.

If we are to restore America's greatness, our people must affirm those values and our government must reflect them. We need families who will nurture them, judges who will uphold them, schools that will teach them and an economy that will reward them.

It is my deepest belief that the coming generation deserves an America like the nation I have known. And it is my deepest fear that the current administration is squandering an inheritance it does not value, undermining values it does not even understand.

Why do I want to be president? Because I will not permit the slow decline of a nation I love so much; because I am convinced that America's finest hour is not in our past, but in our future. □

COMRADES IN DISTRESS

Readers who can help these veterans are urged to write a witness letter, including the CID number. Send the letters to CID, The American Legion Magazine, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis IN 46206.

Notices are published only at the requests of American Legion Service Officers representing claimants using Search for Witness Forms available from Legion Department Service Officers.

4th Platoon-57 Recoiless Rifle - 2nd Squad - ICO, 35th Inf Rgt, 25th Inf Div Edwin J. Szewc seeks witnesses to verify that he hit an enemy target 8 out of 8 at 1 mile with a 57mm recoiless rifle for a Silver Star from the Army. Contact CID 1341

Joint Communication Act. Cntr. Clarence Doyle Danley seeks witnesses to verify that he suffered from a severe skin disorder and was treated for over a year for same at base dispensary. Contact CID 1342

IN SEARCH OF...

This column is for readers searching for groups of veterans for purposes other than forming a reunion (use VETS' column) or to find witnesses to verify VA health claims (use COMRADES IN DISTRESS column). No notices seeking information about relatives or friends will be published. Notices are published free, on a space-available basis. If a notice does not appear within six months of submission, please resubmit.

All members of the Aviation Cadet Swing Band once located at Greenville AFB, Miss. between Sept. 1952 and March 1953 for autobiography. Contact: Frank J. Iamarino, 3190 Glenridge Dr., Palm Harbor, FL 34685-1723.

Any back or up to the last issue cruise book of the USS Vulcan which decommissioned Sept. 1991. Contact: Susan Toothaker, P.O. Box 324, Brunswick, ME 04011.

Any former aircrew or maintainers who worked with the F-111 Aardvark or the F-4 Phantom willing to share personal reminiscences and opinions for a book. Also, photographs loaned will be promptly returned. Contact: Peter E. Davies, 28 Claremont Road, Bishopston, Bristol BS7 8DH, England, UK.

Anyone who was involved with naval operations in the Mediterranean theater during WWII willing to share memories with a history teacher for a book. Contact: Barbara B. Tomblin, 16 North Gate Road, Mendham, NJ 07945.

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It's a natural fact. If you are a male over 40 and don't already suffer from a prostate gland disorder, the odds are 2 to 1 that you will before you are 59. By the age of 65, most American men have enlarged prostates. As the years pass, mild discomforts can become disabling. Today, prostate surgery is the second most commonly performed surgery for non-cancerous BPH in men over age 65! Some surgical complications can result.

Prescription drugs may halt the swelling, but many prescription drugs may also have side effects. Many doctors feel that disorders of BPH can be treated or prevented by giving the prostate gland the nutrition it lacks.

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underlying problems associated with disorders of BPH – safely and effectively. These results have been published in the *British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology* and the *American Journal of Gerontology*. They reveal that several vitamins, minerals and natural herbs can dramatically shrink the prostate and improve urinary performance in older men.

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GUEST EDITORIAL FOR NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF UNIFORMED SERVICES JOURNAL

Last year, as we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, our nation paid homage to the World War II generation. From the windswept beaches of Normandy to the craggy rocks of Corregidor, meeting some of the Americans who fought in that struggle has been one of the greatest privileges I have had as President. We will never forget those who suffered and sacrificed so that future generations of Americans might be free.

America owes all our military men and women -- active duty, retired, veteran, Reserve, National Guard -- a tremendous debt. But honoring your deeds is not enough. Our peace, liberty, and prosperity are the legacy of your service. We must protect the benefits you have earned and preserve the ideals you work so hard to defend: the American dream at home and American leadership around the world.

To meet that responsibility, we must continue to strengthen our nation's Armed Forces -- and we are. As I pledged from the beginning of our Administration, ours is the best-equipped, best-trained, best-prepared military in the world. Our military readiness has never been higher. We are the only nation with the logistics, mobility, and intelligence and communications capabilities to conduct large-scale, effective military operations anywhere in the world.

Whether standing down aggression in the Persian Gulf, restoring democracy in Haiti, safeguarding peace in Bosnia, or saving lives in Rwanda, our servicemen and women have proven their capability time and time again over the last three years. To maintain that high state of readiness and to keep our military strong, our funding and support must not falter.

In December 1994, I increased the Defense budget by \$25 billion over the next six years. We added nearly \$4 billion to the budget in the last two years to meet unexpected contingencies. And instead of trimming \$46 billion from defense budgets over the next six years to reflect better inflation estimates, we retained \$31 billion of that total in the defense budget so the services can buy even more capability in the future than previous budgets would have allowed.

We have also carefully structured our modernization strategy so our forces can be equipped with the next generation of military technology. The V-22 Osprey, the F-22 fighter, and the F/A-18 E/F fighter begin to enter production at the turn of the century. Since 1993, we have requested over \$6 billion to develop and procure state-of-the-art theater missile defenses (TMDs) designed to shoot down short-range missiles armed with conventional, chemical, biological or nuclear warheads. We are also committed to the development and deployment of even more advanced area-defense TMDs. We are pledged to develop by the year 2000 a National Missile Defense (NMD) system that could be deployed as soon as 2003, should a long-range missile threat to America's shores emerge.

In order to recruit, train, and retain the high quality men and women who make our military the best in the world, we also must provide a high quality of life. We know that our people are our most precious resource. We will be there for them, as they have always been there for America.

Last year, we set aside funds to ensure that military personnel receive the highest pay raise allowed by law through the end of the century. We are committed to maintain and improve the quality of life for service members and their families around the globe -- including better housing, community support, youth programs and child care.

When we call on our troops to protect America's interests, we know we call on their families as well. We are reaching out to the families of the men and women who are helping to preserve the peace in Bosnia and elsewhere, keeping them informed and in touch with their loved ones, and helping with the things that matter the most -- like day care, health care, and paying the bills.

We also recognize another simple truth: The troops of tomorrow will only be as strong as our commitment to our veterans today. As I told the members of the Disabled American Veterans association at their 75th annual convention this July, when our men and women leave the service, we must not leave them. From education to employment, from buying a home to getting quality medical care, our veterans deserve our nation's unwavering support.

We must uphold the commitment to give veterans preference for federal jobs -- and we are. Even as we shrink the federal workforce to its lowest level since the Kennedy Administration, the percentage of permanent jobs in this government going to America's veterans has grown in the last three years. The federal government continues to lead the nation in the percentage of veterans and disabled veterans in its workforce. And we have taken steps to ensure that our citizen soldiers -- the Guard and the Reserves -- are not penalized on the job because of their service to the nation.

We must rally the resources for veterans benefits -- and we are. Even as we cut government spending, I have asked for a \$1 billion increase in funding for the VA. More than half is for medical care and other discretionary programs. Also in the request are funds for a new hospital and nursing home in Brevard County, Florida, and a replacement veterans hospital at Travis Air Force Base in California.

We are determined to keep the VA health care system strong into the 21st century. That demands a dramatic restructuring to make our hospitals more patient-centered and to improve the quality of care. Last year, I sent to Congress legislation that will allow us to simplify the complex eligibility rules and improve access to care at VA hospitals. I am pleased that Congress is beginning to act, and I hope they will get a bill to me this year.

We have submitted legislation for a pilot project to allow Medicare-eligible veterans to obtain treatment at a VA facility and have the costs reimbursed by Medicare. We are also working hard to develop a Department of Defense Medicare subvention demonstration, and hope to have a preliminary Memorandum of Agreement signed by DoD and the Department of Health and Human Services by the middle of August. In designing these demonstrations, we are seeking to

balance the real needs of America's veterans with the integrity of the Medicare system. I know this is an issue of tremendous concern to our military retirees, and I am determined to see real progress.

My Administration is firmly committed to active communication with our veterans. We have reached out to veterans service organizations, appointing veterans as delegates to the White House Conference on Aging and the Presidential delegation to Vietnam. We established the very first Interagency Veterans Policy Group to coordinate and spur progress on issues of concern to veterans and military organizations.

One such issue -- for more than two decades -- has been the suffering of our nation's Vietnam veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange. In May, I announced that Vietnam veterans with prostate cancer and acute and sub-acute peripheral neuropathy are entitled to disability payments based upon their exposure to Agent Orange. In July, I sent to Congress legislation to meet the needs of Vietnam veterans' children afflicted with spina bifida -- the first time the offspring of American soldiers will receive benefits for combat-related health problems.

We have also responded aggressively to Persian Gulf illnesses. I fought for landmark legislation to pay compensation to chronically disabled Persian Gulf veterans with undiagnosed illnesses, and I have charged a Presidential Advisory Committee with making sure we spare no effort in the search for causes and the provision of care.

We will continue to strive to meet the special concerns of women, the disabled, and the homeless, and the precious debt we owe to veterans' families. Caring for those who served our country so heroically is not a policy option or a partisan program. It is a national tradition and a national responsibility.

Our administration is working hard to meet that responsibility every day. Time and again, America's military men and women have answered the call to duty -- not just in moments of crisis and war, but throughout our nation's history. We are grateful for all they have done for us, and we know what we owe to them. We must -- and we will -- fulfill that promise with strength and devotion of our own.

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President Clinton's Record for America's Veterans

General Statement

As a candidate for President in 1992, I promised to work to improve veterans' benefits and health services; as President-elect, I took the first important step toward keeping this promise by asking Jesse Brown to come to Little Rock where I announced this great veterans' advocate as my Secretary of Veterans' Affairs. As President, I believe that I have lived up to my promise -- in the budget increases I have requested, in improved services for women veterans, homeless veterans, former prisoners of war and veterans exposed to environmental hazards, in outreach and notification of benefits changes, in a restructured veterans' health care system, and in the unprecedented access veterans and their organizations now have to their White House. My record on behalf of veterans and their families reflects my belief that we have a fundamental national obligation to those who have worn the uniform. This record is important to me; it is important to America; and it is vital to our defense and security.

Veterans Compensation

Compensation is the heart of veterans' benefits and services. No program is more integral to our national commitment to care for veterans, particularly for those who have service-connected disabilities. My Administration, guided by the leadership and expertise of the former Executive Director of your Washington office, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jesse Brown, has expanded compensation benefits to former prisoners of war and to veterans exposed to herbicides and radiation. We fought for landmark legislation which compensates veterans of the Persian Gulf War who suffer from chronic disabilities due to undiagnosed illnesses. And we opposed serious and ill-conceived challenges to the integrity of the compensation program, including a Congressional proposal to eliminate compensation for certain incompetent veterans.

Besides seeking annual increases in VA benefits programs, we have successfully reduced a serious backlog of benefits claims. For years, growing backlogs and delays have been a part of the VA benefits system, but we have worked to turn the situation around. In fiscal year (FY) 1997, the Veterans Benefits Administration will process original compensation claims 33 days faster than in FY 96 and the pending caseload will be reduced from 348,000 at the end of FY 96 to 277,000 cases at the end of FY 97 -- a 25% reduction. I have also requested funding for 50 new position at the Board of Veterans Appeals to improve timeliness in processing appeals. I will continue these efforts until our processing and appeals are at their absolute minimum.

Veterans Health Care Reform

My Administration is carrying out a dramatic, comprehensive overhaul of the VA health-care system. We have three goals in this: improving the quality of care, increasing the level of care we can provide within available resources, and changing the VA culture to make our program patient-centered and more responsive to veterans' needs. To reach these goals, we have created integrated service networks and are consolidating duplicative medical and administrative services to ensure that scarce resources are focused on patient care. My FY 97 budget also contains a proposal to allow VA medical facilities to retain a portion of the money VA collects from third parties.

In 1994, I proposed in my health-care reform plan that Medicare be authorized to reimburse veteran health care facilities for services provided to Medicare-eligible veterans. I still believe that it is the right thing to do and my Administration has been designing a VA demonstration project for this purpose. I am convinced we ought to move ahead on this, and have asked VA and the Health Care Financing Administration to prepare legislation to make it happen.

The confusing system for determining eligibility for VA health-care services badly needs an overhaul. It just isn't conducive to the delivery of good medicine. That is why I have submitted a comprehensive eligibility reform measure to the Congress and have urged its members to act on this legislation and get it to my desk this year.

Agent Orange

This year, following review of the National Academy of Sciences report on the health effects of exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides, I announced that Vietnam veterans with prostate cancer and peripheral neuropathy are entitled to disability payments based on their exposure to Agent Orange. My Administration will also seek to provide an appropriate remedy for children of Vietnam veterans who suffer from spina bifida. Similarly, in 1993 I extended disability benefits to Vietnam veterans with several other cancers and illnesses potentially caused by Agent Orange exposure.

Veterans Employment

The veterans' unemployment rate has been cut by almost a third during the first three years of my Administration. We have helped more than 1.5 million veterans into jobs through the Department of Labor's veteran employment service. Nearly 500,000 separating service members and their spouses receive job search training under the Transition Assistance Program.

In the federal government, there remains a firm commitment to veterans preference in hiring. In fact, in the last three years, the percentage of jobs going to veterans has increased. Among new, full-time federal hires, the proportion of veterans increased from 17 percent in 1991 to 31 percent in 1995.

Persian Gulf War Illnesses

On all fronts, my Administration's responses to the illnesses being reported by Persian Gulf veterans has been one of urgency. Besides pressing for unprecedented legislation to compensate Persian Gulf veterans with undiagnosed conditions, I directed the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Defense and Health and Human Services to collaborate on research, clinical issues and disability compensation in response to the health consequences of Persian Gulf service. To assist these efforts, the Persian Gulf Veterans Coordinating Board was established. I also established the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans Illnesses to review and make recommendations on research, treatment and outreach.

As part of an intensive federal research effort dedicated to the investigation of the health effects of service in the Persian Gulf and their causes, we have set up environmental hazards research centers at three veterans hospitals. VA and Defense investigators have begun major epidemiological studies comparing the health status of veterans who served in the Gulf with veterans who served elsewhere.

We are also conducting a health survey of 30,000 veterans and undertaking more than 70 other research initiatives, reviews and clinical investigations. And both VA and the Department of Defense have established toll-free hotlines to provide information to concerned Persian Gulf veterans regarding their health and available benefits and services.

My Administration's policy will not waiver: as long as Persian Gulf veterans or veterans of any generation or war are sick or disabled, we will maintain an aggressive search for answers on why they are sick, and offer compassionate treatment and care.

COLAS for Military Retirees

I will continue to advocate and fight for full annual cost-of-living adjustments for military retirees and for veterans who drew disability compensation and VA pension benefits.

In signing the Defense Authorization Act, I moved the effective date of the COLA for military retirees from October 1, 1995 to April 1, 1995, conforming it to the federal civilian retiree schedule. Furthermore, in my FY 97 budget I proposed to move the effective date of the military retiree COLA to January and to sustain it there throughout my long-term budget plan, to ensure that military retirees will continue to receive timely COLAS.

Targeted Assistance to Homeless Veterans

As President, I have fought for increased funding to assist communities in developing local, coordinated solutions to break the cycle of homelessness. The Administration more than doubled VA funding of homeless programs in three years to the current level of \$76 million. As part of a new Homeless Provides Grant Program, VA awarded more than \$11.8 million to 59 public and private nonprofit groups to develop new programs to assist homeless veterans.

We have worked to ensure that the estimated one third of our nation's homeless who are veterans have their needs met. The Interagency Council on the Homeless established a Homeless Veterans Task Force to improve services and programs for veterans across agencies. And the Department of Housing and Urban Development established a position of Veterans Coordinator to help veterans services providers gain access to HUD homeless programs, and conducted aggressive outreach to expand the scope of information on this program.

GI Bill

The GI Bill has been a critical investment for America's citizens. Its value to individual veterans and its impact on education, industry and the social and economic fiber of the nation cannot be measured. My Administration will continue to support and work to strengthen the current program -- the Montgomery GI Bill. Last year I opposed, and I will continue to oppose, Congressional proposals to increase the program's enrollment fee. Through automation and other management initiatives, we are improving the quality and timeliness of VA's education claims processing activities.

POW/MIAs

Achieving the fullest possible accounting for Americans who remain unaccounted for as a result of the Vietnam War is a matter of high priority in my Administration. I have asked Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Hershel Gober to lead four high-level delegations to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia to press for a resolution top the MIA issue and we are pleased that significant progress has been realized.

Overall cooperation from Vietnam has steadily increased since the lifting of the economic embargo in 1994, but I will continue to seek increased cooperation in several important areas: greater assistance from the Vietnamese government through the unilateral location and turnover of relevant documents; the identification of Vietnamese witnesses possessing information that may lead to the resolution of cases involving unaccounted-for Americans; and the repatriation of all American remains currently held by Vietnamese nationals.

American Legion Magazine Question Responses

July 8, 1996

1. How do you plan to maintain the national security of the United States (i.e. national missile defense, overseas troops levels, involvement with the United Nations?)

Enhancing American security requires, first and foremost, developing and maintaining a strong defense capability of forces ready to fight. We are developing integrated approaches to deal with threats from the development of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. Our security also requires a vigorous arms control effort and a strong intelligence capability. We have implemented a strategy for multilateral peace operations, and we have clarified rigorous guidelines for when and how to use military force in this era. An important element of our security preparedness also depends on durable relationships with allies and other friendly nations to ensure cooperation across a broad range of issues.

U.S. military forces are critical to the success of our national security strategy. To protect and advance our interest, our forces must work to:

- Deter aggression in major regional conflicts by projecting and sustaining US power in more than one region, if necessary.
- Provide a credible overseas presence.
- Counter weapons of mass destruction. We are devoting greater efforts to stemming the proliferation of these weapons, limiting the spread of weapons-related materials and technology and strengthening accounting and security procedures for global stocks of fissile materials.
- Contribute to multilateral peace operations.
- Fight drug trafficking and support counterterrorism efforts.

2. What has been done about veterans suffering from Gulf War Syndrome and what must be done in the future to protect our troops?

In March 1995, I announced my intention to leave no stone unturned in my Administration's efforts to determine the causes of the illnesses being experienced by veterans of the Gulf War, and to provide them with effective medical care. Besides pressing for unprecedented legislation to compensate these veterans, I directed the Departments of Veterans' Affairs, Defense, and Health and Human Services to collaborate on research, clinical issues, and disability compensation. As a result, we formed the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses to review and make recommendations on research, medical examinations and treatment, and outreach. That effort is one reason the Department of Defense was able to confirm that shortly after the war, US troops destroyed an Iraqi ammunition bunker that contained chemical weapons. While we have no evidence that Americans were exposed to those weapons, it shows we are continuing to put together the pieces of the puzzle.

We have also set up environmental hazards research centers at three veterans' hospitals. VA and Defense Department investigators have started major epidemiological studies comparing veterans who served in the Gulf and veterans who served elsewhere. We've also surveyed the health of 30,000 veterans and undertaken an array of more than 70 other research initiatives, reviews and clinical investigations. Some of our VA hospitals are participating in a unique health examination program for spouses and children to help us better understand the prevalence of illnesses in Persian Gulf veterans' families. Both the VA and the Department of Defense have established toll-free hotlines to make sure that veterans can get the information they need.

My Administration will not waver: as long as Persian Gulf veterans, or veterans of any generation or war, are sick or disabled, we will continue to search aggressively for answers and respond compassionately to their concerns.

In order to protect our troops in the future, we will continue to monitor the technical capabilities of rogue nations to acquire chemical or biological weapons. We will use all means available to us to identify a potential adversary's ability to use these weapons against our soldiers. During Desert Storm we learned some crucial lessons about our detectors and protective suits. We have since selected for production a new detector that will be more reliable and will virtually eliminate false alarms. We are also in the process of procuring lightweight, highly protective suits for all the services. My Administration will continue to support the research, development and acquisition of items that will provide the maximum protection to our soldiers.

3. How can you assist the American Legion in maintaining high quality VA health care?

In order to ensure that VA health care remains strong into the 21st century, my Administration is carrying out the most positive, comprehensive overhaul ever. These changes will to improve the quality of care, make the services more efficient, make care more accessible, and change the VA culture to make the program more responsive to veterans' needs. To reach these goals, we have created integrated service networks and are consolidating duplicative medical and administrative services to ensure that scarce resources are focused on patient care.

As part of this effort, my fiscal year 1997 budget contains a proposal to allow VA medical facilities to retain a portion of the money VA collects from health insurers. And I have directed VA and the Health Care Financing Administration to work together on developing a demonstration project that will allow VA facilities to receive Medicare reimbursement for care provided to upper income, non-service connected Medicare-eligible veterans.

I vetoed the Republican budget that would have made excessive cuts in Medicare, raised premiums on 8.8 million veterans, and could have eliminated the Medicaid guarantee of meaningful health benefits on which over 600,000 veterans now rely.

I recognize that the confusing system for determining eligibility for VA health care services is not conducive to the delivery of good medicine and is in dire need of reform. I have submitted a comprehensive eligibility reform measure to Congress, and I urge members to act on this legislation and get it to my desk for signature this year.

4. What will you do to ensure that veterans are not denied the benefits they earned serving their country (i.e. cost of living increases, pensions, disability compensation)?

As a candidate for President in 1992, I promised to work to improve veterans' benefits and health services. As President-elect, I took the first important step toward keeping this promise by asking Jesse Brown to be my Secretary of Veterans' Affairs. And as President, I believe I have lived up to my promises to veterans -- in the budget increases I have requested; in improved services for women veterans, homeless veterans, former prisoners of war and veterans exposed to environmental hazards; in a strengthened and restructured veterans' health care system; and in the unprecedented access veterans and their organizations have to the Administration.

I have fought to ensure that veterans compensation and military retiree pay receive their full Cost of Living Adjustments. My Administration has reached out to veterans across the country to tell them about opportunities to refinance homes bought under the GI bill. I have extended disability benefits to Vietnam Veterans with certain cancers and illnesses that may have been caused by exposure to Agent Orange. And I fought for legislation that extends compensation for the first time to chronically disabled veterans with undiagnosed illnesses.

Besides seeking annual increases in VA benefits programs, my Administration has made significant progress in reducing the serious backlog in benefits claims. In fiscal year 1997, the Veterans Benefits Administration will process original compensation claims 33 days faster than in the 1996 fiscal year, and the pending caseload will be reduced from 348,000 to 277,000 cases -- a 25 percent reduction. I have also requested funding for 50 new positions at the Board of Veterans Appeals to improve timeliness in processing appeals. I will continue these efforts until our processing and appeals times are at their absolute minimum.

I will continue to defend veterans' health services and benefits and fight the wrong-headed notion that the longstanding debt we owe our veterans can be abandoned. My policies will continue to reflect my belief that we must always honor the debt we owe to those who have worn a U.S. military uniform. It is important to me, it is important to America, and it is vital to our defense and security.

5. Will you support a Constitutional Amendment to protect the U.S. flag from acts of physical desecration?

I abhor flag burning, and my record on the subject proves it. As governor of Arkansas I initiated a statewide "Flag Respect" program and as President I have worked diligently with Congress to craft legislation that would survive Supreme Court Review. But I do not believe that the problem can be solved with a Constitutional amendment. My reluctance to support an amendment to the Constitution stems from my respect for the document itself. In 200 years we have only amended the Constitution 27 times. We have never amended the First Amendment, which would happen if we ratified a flag burning amendment.

The only amendment I have supported as President is one that would protect the rights of victims of violent crimes. And I support this because it is the only way to put that protection on a par with the constitutional rights provided to defendants.

Virtually all Americans honor and respect our flag. We should not dignify the unpatriotic acts of the handful who don't by letting them taunt us into amending the First Amendment for the first time in our history.

6. What can you do to encourage the creation of good, high-paying jobs and their availability to veterans?

Veterans, along with the rest of the nation, have benefited from my Administration's economic policies. Our 1993 economic plan has helped lower interest rates and spur on the first investment-led expansion in 30 years. During the last three-and-a-half years, we have seen the creation of 10 million new jobs; 3.7 million new homeowners; three years of record increases in the number of small businesses and the combined inflation, unemployment and mortgage rate is at its lowest level in nearly 30 years. So we are doing well, but we must not rest until every American is sharing in our economy's prosperity.

As the military has downsized after the Cold War, my Administration has worked hard to help men and women separating early from the military move into civilian jobs. The Department of Labor's veterans employment service and Transition Assistance programs has helped millions of veterans and separating service members and their spouses find jobs.

I know the critical importance of education in today's economy and have consistently supported the Montgomery GI Bill. To protect the Montgomery GI Bill benefit, I opposed Congressional efforts last year to raise the program's enrollment fee by 33 percent. I will continue to oppose any future efforts to make the Montgomery GI Bill benefit less accessible to America's veterans.

My Administration has also maintained a firm commitment to veterans preference in federal hiring. In fact, while overall federal hiring declined under my Administration, we have increased the percentage of veterans hired -- from 17 percent of all full-time federal hires in 1991, to 31 percent in 1995.

A strong economy and these concerted efforts have helped reduce the veterans' unemployment rate by almost half during my Administration, from 7.2 percent in January 1993 to only 3.9 in May 1996.

7. You promised to end welfare as we know it. How well have you done?

Today, through waivers my Administration has granted, work and responsibility are becoming a way of life for 75 percent of all welfare recipients. But we still have work to do to break the cycle of dependency.

We need a welfare system that encourages independence, work and personal responsibility, but does not punish people, especially children, just because they are poor. That is why I have urged Congress to pass welfare reform that is tough on work, not on children. It is also why my Administration has granted welfare reform waivers to 40 states, clearing away federal rules and regulations to give states the flexibility to implement effective welfare reforms on their own.

We must encourage work, and make it more accessible, through growing our economy and giving parents and children the education and training they need. But we must also demand responsibility, which is why I issued an executive order requiring teen mothers receiving welfare to live at home, stay in school, and sign personal responsibility contracts that detail how they plan to get ahead. I have worked with business, religious and community leaders to help stop teen pregnancy, and have asked that the Department of Health and Human Services issue new regulations that require mothers to identify and help locate fathers before receiving benefits.

These reforms, combined with our economic policies, have led to an almost 10 percent drop in the welfare rolls since 1993. More than one million fewer people are having to rely on food stamps -- saving more than \$1.3 billion since August 1994. Overall, the poverty rate is down, the teen pregnancy rate is down, work and training activities among welfare recipients are up and child support collections have reached a record high.

8. Why hasn't more been done to stop illegal immigration?

We have done a great deal to combat illegal immigration. We have increased the number of Border Patrol agents at the southwest border by 40 percent since 1993. Our asylum reform reduced the number of asylum claims by 57 percent its first year. My Administration removed a record 51,600 criminal and other illegal aliens in 1995. I have also worked to increase funding to the Immigration and Naturalization Service by 72 percent since 1993. We have used operations such as Gatekeeper and Hold-the-Line to coordinate new agents, time-saving equipment and state-of-the-art technology to reclaim the border in cities like San Diego and El Paso. Taken together, these actions have accomplished more in three years than all of the Administrations in the last thirty years combined.

While we have made great strides in curbing illegal immigration, our work is far from complete. I support efforts to make families who sponsor immigrants take financial responsibility for them, and to implement non-discriminatory means of verifying employment authorization. I have also set a goal of increasing deportation by 25 percent this year and by 50 percent the next.

We must not forget, however, that we are a nation of immigrants. We must retain our commitment to help those who play by the rules gain U.S. citizenship. My unprecedented initiative, Citizenship USA is adding to INS staff and streamlining application procedures to expedite the naturalization of deserving individuals.

9. What can be done to encourage citizenship among young people?

Our goal must be to enable all our people to make the most of their lives -- with stronger families, more education opportunity, economic security, safer streets, a cleaner environment in a safer world. To reach that goal, our first focus must be on our children, to give them a stake in America's progress and to show them that by working together, we can meet America's challenges.

In order to help make better citizens of our young people, I've dedicated myself to worthwhile programs like AmeriCorps. This program gives young Americans a chance to earn their tuition while working in their communities. They volunteer for groups like Habitat for Humanity, the YMCA, United Way, the National Council of Churches, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, the American Red Cross, or one of hundreds of other organizations. The program is federally funded, but locally controlled, so that communities can oversee the improvements made in their neighborhoods. AmeriCorps also shows what can be accomplished when both parties work together to make a good idea even better.

I have also proposed that our high schools, our colleges and universities help instill a sense of public service and citizenship in our children. I have challenged colleges to use work study funding to help promote service. I have challenged every high school to make service a part of its basic ethic. And I have offered federal matching funds, up to \$500 towards what a community raises, to reward high school students who perform significant service for their communities, creating a National Service Scholar in every school.

While I believe that the federal government must take an active role in accomplishing these goals, the era of big government is over. To meet our common challenges, our new, smaller government must work in an old-fashioned way, together with all of our citizens, in the workplace, and in religious, charitable and civic associations. Most importantly, we must take personal responsibility to make our families strong, providing a solid base and a sure example for our children to follow.

The greatest gift our forebears gave us was the privilege of citizenship. Through providing greater education opportunity, access to the democratic process, incentives toward public service and a lifetime of good examples, I believe we can pass that gift on to our children, the next keepers of America's values.

10. Why do you think you deserve a second term?

My Administration has shown that we have the ability to lead America into the 21st century and the vision to create an America where each of us can make the most of our God-given abilities. Our record and agenda show that we can continue to create jobs and opportunities, expanding trade and balancing the budget to lower interest rates and spur investment in the private sector. We can equip every American with the tools to seize these opportunities by investing in education and training, and by providing security for people changing jobs. And we can, and must, ensure that we grow together by reforming welfare, rewarding work, and providing tax relief for education, parenting and retirement savings.

During my first term, we have seen the creation of 10 million new jobs, and the lowest combined rates of unemployment and inflation in nearly three decades. We have cut the federal deficit in half, and are committed to balancing the budget in seven years. While cuts have been necessary to achieve this reduction, we have not undermined our fundamental obligations to our parents or to our children.

My Administration has not lost sight of the values and principles that have provided America with its strength for two centuries. I have worked hard to ensure that our children grow up in an environment that is both safe and supportive, bringing the crime rate down in each of the past four years. We've made it easier for parents to take time away from work during family emergencies. I've pushed for V-chip legislation to help parents regulate children's television habits and pushed the television industry to implement a ratings system. We've taken steps to connect every classroom in the country to the Internet by the year 2000 and we've made higher education more attainable with affordable student loan programs.

My record overseas is as strong as my record at home. Under my Administration this country has stood with those seeking peace, freedom, and democracy all over the world: in Northern Ireland, the Middle East, and Bosnia. In addition, I have pushed for the START II treaty, which would reduce our nuclear stockpiles by 25 percent.

I have also worked to reduce government. Under the careful supervision of Vice-President Gore, my Administration has reduced the federal workforce by 237,000 to its smallest size in three decades. And we are eliminating 16,000 pages of superfluous federal regulations, giving more power to states and communities.

The United States is a better place today than it was four years ago, and I firmly believe that, as President, I can help make it an even better place four years from now.