



**Address by Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson,
President of Iceland
in
Spanish Fork, Utah
July 24th 1997**

It is with great pleasure that my wife Guðrún Katrín and I greet you all, the people of Spanish Fork, and thank you for the tremendous welcome you have given us today.

We have come a long way to Utah to honour the memory of the Icelanders who 150 years ago crossed the Atlantic Ocean and the American continent to begin a new life in your beautiful State.

Inspired by their beliefs, empowered by the spirit of explorers and pioneers, these farmers and fishermen, hardened by the strong forces of nature in my country, dedicated their lives to building a new future in Utah.

They came from a country settled by the Vikings more than eleven centuries ago, a country where the creation of the Earth is still visibly taking place.

Last fall a volcanic eruption below the largest glacier in Iceland demonstrated the forces of creation in a very dramatic way. For the first time in the modern age we could watch a mountain being formed and rising up through the surface of a glacier, the combined forces of fire and ice. The volcano melted a 600 m layer of solid ice and split the glacier apart, creating floods that covered the black sands with huge blocks of ice, the size of some the biggest buildings in Salt Lake City.

The Icelanders who came to Utah one and a half centuries ago founded a community based on religion and strengthened by their Icelandic heritage. Their children and grandchildren kept the roots alive. This year the Icelanders' day will be celebrated in Utah for the 100th time and it gives Guðrún Katrín and me great pleasure to participate in the festivities to mark this milestone event.

During my time in Utah I will:

- Call for new efforts to strengthen the bonds of cultural history that tie us together.
- Propose new ways to encourage visits and co-operation.
- Suggest how modern technology can be used to give new generations a sense of their roots, provide them with the best from our heritage.

My visit is not only a homage to the Icelanders who settled in Utah, for I have also come to pay my respect to all the people from different parts of the world who have contributed to the foundation and evolution of the modern society that we are witnessing here today.

But I have also come to meet you to suggest how we can celebrate together in the year 2000 the 1000th anniversary of a unique event that ties Iceland and America together.

Our two nations which value pioneers and discoverers so highly should in the year 2000 join hands to celebrate the 1000th anniversary of Leifur Eiríksson's pioneering voyage to a continent which he called Vínland but in later times became known as America.

Leifur Eiríksson, Leifur heppni or Leif the Lucky, as he was called in his time, was born on a farm, Eiríksstaðir, in western Iceland, a place where the mountains and the summer sun create a symphony of colours. His life and endeavours are described in the old Icelandic sagas, written down centuries before the days of Columbus on calfskin manuscripts which are now on display in the University Manuscript Institute in Iceland.

Nothing that happened in the year 1000 is of such value and inspiration for us today as Leifur Eiríksson's journey to America, an event that evokes the daring human spirit, the courage and the determination that has led mankind from the ancient village to the seas, across the ocean to new continents, from earth to the moon and farther into space.

In my Inaugural address as President of Iceland on August 1st last year I called for co-operation between the United States of America, Canada and Iceland to celebrate in the year 2000, at the dawn of the new millennium, the momentous discovery of the American continent by the Vikings exactly 1000 years before.

And it was with great pleasure that I received last month, on our National Day, the 17th of June, a message from President Clinton in which

he declared his willingness to join us in celebrating in the year 2000 the 1000th anniversary of Leifur Eiríksson's discovery of America.

At the cross-roads which the millennium represents, the Viking voyages to America could serve as an inspiration to us not just to look back, but also to look forward. They would give us a platform for examining the importance of discovery, the spirit of pioneers in our civilisation, and the forces that drive us to explore the unknown, to reach for new heights.

The journeys of the settlers to Utah, their tremendous achievements, are also a great homage to the spirit of discovery.

I congratulate you all on your success and hope that by coming here, the first visit to Utah by a President of Iceland, I can with your help strengthen the foundation for our co-operation in the approaching millennium.

May you all enjoy a splendid day and a prosperous future.