

practicable.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,  
October 27, 1993.

NOTE: H.R. 2519, approved October 27, was assigned Public Law No. 103–121. This statement was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 28.

## Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters *October 28, 1993*

### *California Fires and the Economy*

*The President.* Good morning. Along with all Americans, my heart goes out to the people across southern California who have lost their homes, their possessions, and who have witnessed private property and the natural environment devastated by these terrible fires. More than 400 homes have already been consumed. And evacuations are now occurring, involving thousands of our fellow citizens.

This morning, I want to announce several specific actions that I am taking to respond to this tragedy in California. First, I have designated Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Diego, and Ventura Counties as major disaster areas. This makes them available for customary Federal assistance to individuals and to State and local governments.

Second, I spoke last night with our FEMA Director, James Lee Witt, and he is proceeding to California this morning, along with the Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt, who met with Mr. McLarty this morning.

Third, I have spoken with Governor Pete Wilson and will be consulting soon with Senators Feinstein and Boxer, to receive their recommendations on how we can be more helpful to the State.

Finally, I have instructed the Chief of Staff, Mr. McLarty, to coordinate the full delivery of all appropriate Federal resources and assistance to California. We've already dispatched 20 Forest Service air tankers there and many additional Federal firefighters to the scene. I have asked Secretary Babbitt and Secretary Espy to coordinate with James Lee Witt so that we can have a full Federal response to the problems in California.

Many hundreds of people on the ground are engaged in valiant efforts to fight these fires now. Neighbors are helping neighbors. We will

offer what we can to help fight the fires, to meet the needs of the victims, to stand with the people who are already doing so much.

Now, before I answer questions, I'd like to say just another word on another subject. For the past 9 months, the primary focus of this administration has been on improving the economy in ways that average Americans can actually tell were affecting their lives in a positive way. We've taken some very serious actions to reduce the deficit, to help increase the fairness of the Tax Code, to provide incentives to invest in important areas of our national economy, to try to give working families with modest incomes and children at home a better break.

Now, we're beginning to see real results, higher growth rates, lower deficits, things that over the long run will represent real progress for the American people. When our administration took office, the deficit for this year was projected to be well in excess of \$300 billion. The Treasury Department and the Office of Management and Budget have confirmed today that in the end, it turned out to be substantially lower. We finished this year with a deficit of \$255 billion, over \$50 billion below where it was projected to be. After years of bad policies and bad estimates, when lower deficits actually went far higher, it's pleasing to me to see that a deficit came in lower than it was projected because of efforts directed to lower interest rates which had significant direct and indirect benefits to this economy.

Lower deficits and lower interest rates have sparked the beginning of a significant economic recovery. Today, we are seeing a third quarter economic growth rate reported of 2.8 percent. I might say that it would have been substantially higher but for the floods in the Middle West and the drought in the Southeast.

Although we know our economy is still not

working well enough for most Americans, these numbers make clear that the historic drop in interest rates, following the announcement of our economic plan and its ultimate passage, is sparking a sustainable recovery that is increasing investments in our future, investments in housing, in businesses, and in durable goods.

There is a lot more to do. We are, after all, as I have said now for nearly 2 years, dealing with trends that are 20 years in the making, trends of stagnant incomes, trends of exploding health care costs, trends of difficult investment decisions too long postponed in America. But we are beginning to see real progress. We are moving in the right direction, and we have to stay on this course.

I am very grateful to the people in the Congress who have supported the economic plan that has produced these low interest rates, that has led to most of the deficit reduction below the projected targets, and I think that this is clearly a good sign that we're moving in the right direction.

I also want to say that it clearly means that we have much more to do. That's why I think it's important that before the Congress goes home, we adopt NAFTA. It's important that we take this health care issue on seriously and see it through to the end. And there are a lot of other issues that we'll be dealing with at the end of this year, and especially next year, to keep this economic recovery going. But this is good news.

Q. Mr. President, on the economy, we've seen a number of false starts over the past 1½, 2 years. Are you convinced that recovery is assured now, or are you still considering some sort of stimulus package to hold in abeyance if necessary?

*The President.* What I believe is that we are seeing the beginning of a recovery that—you can't say it's assured, because we're in a global economy, but it is clearly sustaining itself, based on American policies and without much help from overseas because of the very slow growth to no growth in Europe and because of the economic problems in Japan.

Another reason I feel very strongly about NAFTA is that Latin America is the second fastest growing part of the world. They're actually increasing their incomes. They have a willingness and an ability, these countries do, to buy more American products. And in order to keep this recovery going and actually have it

manifest itself in more jobs and higher incomes, we are going to have to have the ability to sell our products around the world.

But yes, I think we're seeing the beginning of a very stable, long-term recovery. But keep in mind, there are many things we have to do. We are dealing in part with trends that have been 20 years in the making. And you just don't turn those around overnight.

Q. Will you travel to California?

*The President.* I haven't made a decision on that yet. I had a very heart-rending talk this morning with the Governor, and I tried to find the two Senators, also. I'll be talking with them, but they may be both, I think, making preparations to go on out immediately.

I did call James Lee Witt, and last night we had a long talk. And I told him I thought it was important for him to be on the ground there today, to call and to give me a report and see how we were doing.

For anybody who has ever been in that part of the State, it's very troubling. One of our administration members apparently may lose his home, has had his family evacuated in Orange County. So it's a huge fire out there, and we're going to do whatever it takes to help the people.

Q. Mr. President, can FEMA handle this after the terrible year that the administration has had with the floods? Do you have the resources to help California?

*The President.* Well, they did a very fine job with the floods. And I expect to get a—let me get a report from James Lee Witt when he gets out there on the scene, and we'll let you know.

This is something that we have tried to mobilize and alert the Agriculture Department and the Interior Department, not only because we have some Federal land out there that is affected but because we do have trained firefighters in those Agencies that might be able to help. So we're trying to put all that together now, and I should be able—by the middle of the afternoon, I'll know more about this.

Q. Mr. President, you've also said before that—just to follow up—that California is the weakest part of our economy. Isn't it likely that this will further drag down not only California but the rest of the country? What extra help can you give them now?

*The President.* Let's try to help them get the fire out first, and we'll focus on that.

David [David Lauter, Los Angeles Times].

*Q.* Mr. President, the last time there was a major natural disaster in California, the earthquake in the bay area, there was a lot of complaint within the State about bureaucratic red-tape, bungling, what have you. I know you've tried to make improvements in FEMA during the flood period, but what sort of assurances can you offer the State that this time the job will be done right?

*The President.* All I can tell you is, I believe that the people who suffered in that historic flood in the Midwest believe that we did cut through the redtape, that we were on top of the situation from the beginning, and that we worked through it as best as possible. And if we do as well in California as we did there, I think the people will be satisfied.

What I want to know, in response to your question and Andrea's [Andrea Mitchell, NBC News], is what is different about this? Are there going to be different challenges? Will there be different problems? But I have every confidence that James Lee Witt will do the same job in California he did in the Middle West and, along with Mike Espy and Bruce Babbitt, we'll be on top of it. And we'll do whatever it takes to make the most of a very difficult situation.

#### *Haiti*

*Q.* I have a question on Haiti, Mr. President. Do you accept as fact that President Aristide won't be back in power tomorrow? And do you favor tightening sanctions?

*The President.* We're looking at a number of other options, and I'm also looking forward to

President Aristide's speech to the United Nations, which I think he has probably concluded now. I know he was to give it this morning, but I haven't gotten a report on it. The Vice President talked with him yesterday, and we have worked very closely on this. We spent about 40 minutes on it this morning in the normal national security briefing period. We are looking at what our options are.

I think that, just from the morning press reports, if Mr. François and the others in Haiti believe that all they have to do is to wait out Aristide and everything will somehow be all right and that the international community will put up with the reestablishment of a Duvalier-like regime there, in plain violation of the overwhelming majority of the people of Haiti, I think they're just wrong.

Again, I will say, the people down there that are thwarting democracy's return have got to decide whether they want to hold on tight to a shrinking future or take a legitimate and proportionate share of an expanding future. It is their decision. But I think they are making a grave mistake, and we are looking at what our other options are.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:12 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House, prior to his departure for Baltimore, MD. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Col. Joseph Michel François, chief of the Haitian police.

## Remarks to the Medical Community at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland

*October 28, 1993*

Thank you very much. You have just seen the most stunning example of one of Clinton's laws of politics, which is whenever possible be introduced by someone you've given a good position to.

I want to thank Hillary—[*applause*—]—think about that. [*Laughter*] I want to thank Hillary for the absolutely wonderful work that she and the health care group have done. This has been an unprecedented effort, really, involving thousands of Americans from all walks of life. I

don't know how many doctors from around America have told me it's the first time any kind of health care reform has started by asking people who are actually providing health care what they thought about it. I want to thank all the groups that were involved in it, the Nurses Association, countless groups. This group just met with 1,500 separate groups in trying to put this plan together.

And I want to say a special word of thanks to President Richardson and Dr. Block and to