

You know, I come from a State that has a lot of national forest land and that has a lot of logging. And I have really worked hard to make that one go. So one of the things that I hope to do when I get out of here is get a better sense of how people perceive what our administration is doing and how—you know, if there are problems between my office and the White House and what's actually happening out here on the ground, I want to get a sense of what they are and move through them.

But you know, if I had been trying to wage war on the West, I don't think the West would have done as well as it has in the last 10½ years. The economy out here is booming because I followed good economic policies. And I really have tried to be sensitive to all the incredibly conflicting interests. And you pointed it out—I may ask people on both sides—you know, most of the environmental groups don't think I've been—[inaudible]—

Mr. Gransbery. That's true.

The President. —enough. I mean, I think it's a mistake to take an extremist position on one side or the other. If you look at Montana, for example, you have got a huge stake in preserving the environment and permitting people to grow wheat and raise cattle and do whatever else they're trying to do. And what we've got to do is to try to work it out.

What I generally try to do is try to push as many of these decisions as I can down to representative local groups so that people don't feel that alienated bureaucrats in Washington are shoving them around. I don't want them to feel that way.

NOTE: The interview began at approximately 6:45 p.m. in the President's limousine en route to Montana State University. The press release issued by the Office of the Press Secretary did not include the complete opening portion of the interview. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks to the Community in Billings May 31, 1995

Thank you very much. Thank you for that wonderful, wonderful welcome. It is great to be back in Montana and great to have that kind of reception. I know it's hot, and I was thinking you might just feel the need to stand up and down now and then to keep cool. [Laughter]

I want to thank the Billings High School Band. Didn't they do a good job on "Hail to the Chief"? Thank you, Chancellor Sexton, for making me feel at home. Thank you, Governor Racicot, for coming out here and meeting me at the airport and coming over to be with us here. You know, I was a Governor for 12 years, and I served with 150 other Governors. Most of my friends in Arkansas thought that I just couldn't get another job. [Laughter] But in a lot of ways, it was the best job I ever had. At least you could know people, and they knew you, and—because I come from a State that's a little bigger than Montana but not much, more populous but smaller. And I always loved being Governor. Three people I served with are also here today, and I'd like to introduce them: the Governor of Colorado, Roy Romer; the former

Governor of Wyoming, Mike Sullivan; and your former Governor, Ted Schwinden. They're all over here with me. I hate to tell Governor Racicot this, but when we started, Governor Romer and Governor Schwinden and I didn't have any gray hair, and Governor Sullivan had lots of hair. [Laughter]

Congressman Williams, thank you for your wonderful introduction and for your incredible enthusiasm and for occasionally playing golf with me. [Laughter] I'd also like to say a special word of appreciation to Senator Baucus, who is not here but who has given me a lot of good advice over time, and I've been better off when I've taken it than when I've ignored it. [Laughter]

I also want to tell you, I'm glad to be here at this campus. You know, the last time I was here, I appeared at the other college, so this is sort of equal time. And I thank you for giving me a chance to give you equal time.

I feel very much at home here. I was saying before, before I became President, for 12 years I was Governor of Arkansas. And I knew every-

body and everybody knew me, and they called me by my first name. And even my enemies smiled when they saw me. And if people were mad at me, they told me to my face, but they didn't have to hear it indirectly from somebody else; we all really knew what was going on.

And one of the most frustrating things about being President is, with 260 million people in this country and so many intermediaries between you and the White House and the people out where they live, it's hard to know sometimes—I mean, look, half the time when I see the evening news, I wouldn't be for me, either. [Laughter] So I'm glad to be back at a place where we can be directly involved and know the truth, right?

I'd also like to thank my friends from the American Indian tribes from Montana for coming today. Thank you very much. I'm glad to see you.

I see another person from Montana back in Washington from time to time that some of you know and all of you must admire very greatly, Senator Mike Mansfield. You know, he's 90-some-odd now, and he still gets out and walks every day, and he's still just as blunt and straightforward as he ever was. About a year and a half ago, we had a ceremony in the Rose Garden at the White House, naming former Vice President Mondale to be the Ambassador to Japan. And Mike Mansfield showed up because they had served together in the Senate. I saw him back there, and I thought, well, I'll just mention that Mike's here, and he's probably gone out and had his walk for the day, and he'll like that. So I said, "And I see Senator and former Ambassador to Japan Mike Mansfield in the back, and I'll bet he's already walked his 5 miles today," And there was total quiet before they started applauding, and he said, "Seven." [Laughter]

When I was a young man in college in Washington, I worked for my Senator, Senator Fulbright, who served with Mike Mansfield and who just died at the age of 90, just before his 90th birthday. And when I showed up in Washington, he was 87. And the day before he had lunch with me, he'd had lunch with Mike Mansfield. And Mike Mansfield said, "Now, Bill, how old are you again?" And he said, "I'm 87." And Senator Mansfield said, "Oh, to be 87 again." [Laughter] I say that to tell you he's still in real good shape, and you can still be very proud of him.

Ted Schwinden and I were laughing as I was coming in here today. Ten years ago this summer, my family and I came here to Montana and spent the night in the Governor's Mansion and got up the next morning about 4:30 and piled into a helicopter to explore the wildlife of the Missouri River area where you have the wildlife refuge. Then we got on a rail line and went from Cutback all the way to Whitefish, except we weren't in a railcar, we were in one of those Blazers that has the attachments to the rails. Now, I thought I had been in remote circumstances and rough conditions—[laughter]—but we went over a gorge that was about 300 feet high in a Blazer on a narrow set of railroad tracks, and I wasn't nearly as courageous as I thought I was. But I still remember how beautiful it was all the way down in that gorge and how well I could see it. We went to Glacier National Park. We stayed on a little lake in a lodge I think that's now closed. It was one of the great experiences that our family has had together, ever, in our whole life, and I'm always grateful for that.

Tomorrow I'm going to have a townhall meeting here, and we're going to bring in all kinds of people with things they want to say about what they think the National Government should be doing. And a bunch of them are going to say things they think we ought to stop doing. And I'm just going to listen and then try to respond.

Tonight what I'd like to do is to tell you a little bit about why I ran for President and what I've tried to do, where we are now, and some things that are going on in Washington that I think very much affect you and your future. And I want you to think about it and then just tell your elected representatives what you think about it. I wish it were possible for this kind of atmosphere to be recreated all across America and for people to see and feel the kind of informal communication and openness that I feel here.

I ran for this job because, frankly, I was worried about the direction of our country. And in 1992, we were in a recession. We'd had the lowest job growth rate since the Depression. We'd had almost 15 years then—actually more—of stagnant incomes for most Americans. I can now tell you that for the last 15 years, 60 percent of the American people are working longer every week for the same or lower incomes they were making 15 years ago. And we kept piling

up a big national debt and at the same time reducing our investments in the things that make us richer and stronger, like education and technology and things that grow the economy and finding a way to preserve the environment and still permit economic opportunity to flourish.

And I went to Washington with some pretty simple goals. I wanted to get our economic house in order so we could grow the middle class and shrink the under class. I wanted to see us face problems that had been long ignored, like the deficit problem and the crime problem in many of our high crime areas. I wanted to find a way to promote environmental protection and economic growth. I wanted to give the American people a system of education and human investment that would permit people to make the most of their own lives, whether they were moving from welfare to work or we were just giving everybody a better chance to go on to college or providing apprenticeship programs for young people who didn't go to 4-year schools but did want to have good jobs. And I wanted to shrink and reorganize the Federal Government so we could give more decisions back to State and local governments and private citizens but so that we could do what we have to do in Washington well and give you greater confidence in doing it. That's why I went there.

In the last 2 years, we have made, I think, some remarkable progress in changing the circumstances in Washington, less progress in changing the circumstances in people's lives in America because when a country gets going in one direction for 10 or 20 years, it's hard to turn it on a dime. But let me just give you a little bit of a progress report.

To use the 7-year figure now favored by the Republican majority in Congress, the budgets we adopted in 1993 and '94 reduced the deficit by \$1 trillion over 7 years, 3 years in a row, for the first time since Harry Truman was President. So much so—I want you to understand, we've still got a big deficit problem, but the Federal budget would be in balance today—today—but for the interest we have to pay on the debt that was run up in the 12 years before I moved to Washington. So we've made a good beginning on the deficit.

We expanded trade in ways that really help agriculture, and we fought for fair trade. We've been able to sell things from the West that

I never thought we'd sell in Japan, like apples and other kinds of fruit. We got a deal with Canada on wheat at least for a year and set up a joint commission to try to get wheat farmers here in the northern part of our country a fair deal in growing and selling their wheat. We have taken some very strong action, as you know, in Japan with regard to their trade practices on automobiles and auto parts. But we've also been able to sign over 80 trade agreements with various countries, including Japan, in the last 2 years. And as a result of that, the economy is healthier.

We've had over 6.3 million new jobs. The unemployment rate in virtually every State in the country is substantially lower than it was 2 years ago. And we're in the second year in a row when the economies of all 50 States are growing. It's been a long time since that happened, and I'm proud of that.

We were also able to cut Federal programs, many of them, eliminate a lot of them, and focus more money on things that I thought would matter. We increased funding for Head Start. We increased funding to make sure everybody could get immunized, all parents could immunize their children under the age of 2 by the year 2000. We put more money into child nutrition, and we put lots more money into various education programs, especially programs to increase access to higher education.

We reformed the student loan program to lower the cost of student loans, make the repayment easier, but collect more of the loans. It's an unbelievable story, what has been done there. It may not be popular to say at a student audience, but I went through college and law school on student loans, and it really burned me up that we were spending nearly \$3 billion a year of taxpayers' money covering for the loans of people who took out student loans and wouldn't repay them. I don't think that's right. And we cut that by two-thirds in 2 years. So we had more investment in education but also more accountability. We made progress there.

We shrunk the size of the Government. Forget about the budget that's being debated in Washington now. If not one more thing were done, the size of the Federal Government would shrink by 270,000 people over 5 years, to its smallest size since John Kennedy came here to Billings, Montana, in 1963—if nothing else were done.

We also did something I'm very proud of, and there's some people in the audience that are the beneficiaries of it. We created a national service program to promote community service and give people education credits. If they would work in their community, they could earn money to go to college. And I know we've got some national service people from Montana here, and I thank you for your service. Up there they are.

There were a lot of difficult and controversial issues that the Congress had to face in the last session. One of them was the crime bill, which split the country over the issue of gun control, I think largely because of the rhetoric as opposed to the reality. I supported and signed the crime bill that put another 100,000 police out in our country. It put police, I think, in some 40 communities here in Montana—already have received funds to hire more police officers here—perhaps more. It increased the application of capital punishment to about 60 new offenses. It provided for more funds for States that have to build prisons. It provided some funds for prevention programs to give young people in trouble something to say yes to as well as something to say no to. You know, if every kid in the inner cities in this country belonged to the 4-H, we wouldn't have much of a crime problem, but they don't have that option here, and a lot of you know that.

And it had the infamous assault weapons ban, which some people I hear have characterized as "my war on guns." Now, I want to say something about that. Senator Howell Heflin from Alabama, a great friend of mine, 73 years old, got up in the Senate, and he gave—this is almost verbatim, the brief speech he gave on this. He said, "I have never been for gun control, but," he said, "I read this list of 19 assault weapons, and," he said, "I have never seen an Alabama hunter with one of these guns." [Laughter] He said, "But I read the other list in this bill everybody talks about. There are 650 weapons in this bill that now can't be regulated by the Government, that are protected from Government regulation, and every weapon I have ever seen in the hands of an Alabama hunter is on that list. So I'm going to vote for this, because I think the bill does more good than harm."

Now, I say that to make this point. Whether you're for or against that, we have made a big mistake in this country, with all the tough issues

we've got, to let an issue like that become more symbol than substance. So we've got a tough problem in a lot of cities in this country. I've gone to hospitals and met with emergency room personnel who tell me that in some of our urban areas, the mortality rate from gunshot wounds is 3 times as high today as it was 15 years ago because people are more likely to have more bullets in their bodies when they're hauled in.

Now, that may be very foreign to you here. But the Congress and the President sometimes have to make legislation that applies to the whole country and that deals with the problems of America, and we try to do it in the fairest way we can. That doesn't say that we never make a mistake. I think we did the right thing there, because I got tired of hearing police officers tell me that they were scared to put on their badge and go outside and go to work every day. And I got tired of reading about little kids who were honor students in their inner-city schools being shot at bus stops because they got caught in crossfires. And I decided that we should take a chance to try to make a difference. This is a terrible, terrible problem. I say that to make this point in general—[applause]—thank you.

I say that what we need in this country desperately today is more meetings like this. And I wish we could stay all night, and you could just ask questions, and I'd answer them, and I'd ask you questions, you'd answer them. That's what I'm going to try to do tomorrow night. I'm going to go out tomorrow and meet with some farmers, and we're going to do that and talk about the farm bill, because I think that's a big part of it.

But we have got to stop looking for simple answers to complicated problems, and we have got to stop demonizing each other as Americans. And just let me give you an example. Let's look at what we're facing now; all these things affect you. Should we—let's just look at all the issues we're facing.

We've got to pass a budget now, and we have to continue to bring the deficit down, and we ought to be able to tell you that we're going to balance the budget. That's true. Why? Because in a global economy, if you run a big debt all the time and you have to keep borrowing money from other people, they have too much control over your economic well-being, and because if you have to keep spending tax money paying off yesterday's deficit and today's

deficit, you don't have the money you need to invest in education. And sooner or later, all the money you take in in taxes, you're paying out in interest. So that's a good thing to do. But the reason it is a good thing to do is, it will contribute to raising the living standards and increasing the security of the people of our country. Therefore, it ought to be done in a way that raises the living standards and increases the security of the people of our country, which is why I say we should not cut education to do it, we should find a way to do it and increase our investment in education.

We all know that we have to slow the rate of growth of the Government's medical programs, Medicare and Medicaid. They've been growing at about 9, 10 percent a year, when inflation's about 3 percent a year and health care inflation generally was 4.5 percent last year. We know we've got to slow the rate of growth of that. But we don't want to do it in a way that closes a bunch of rural hospitals that are the only access to health care people in places like rural Arkansas and rural Montana have. Does that mean we can walk away from the problem? No, it just means we need to have our head on straight when we're dealing with it. We need to do what's practical and understand how it will work.

We all know that the Government can overreach in its regulatory authority. Does that mean there should be no national standards on clean water or clean air or safe drinking water, after what happened to those poor folks in Milwaukee? I don't think so. So we've got to find a way to make the bureaucracy more flexible.

The Environmental Protection Agency, under our administration, is going to cut paperwork burdens by 25 percent in one year next year. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration is going to dramatically slash regulations on businesses that will work with them to be in compliance with safety rules. The Small Business Administration has cut their budget and increased their loan volume by 40 percent. There is a right way and a wrong way to do this. And the only way we can do it in the right way is if we stop looking for simple answers to complicated problems and talk common sense to one another, if we stop treating each other like enemies and start treating each other like we're all friends, we're all Americans, we're all part of a big American family.

I believe that if we'll keep our eye on the prize—what is the prize? We have to increase the incomes and the security of the American people. We have to protect what is good about our country and what works and change what doesn't and get ourselves into the next century with the American dream alive and well for our children.

I'll just give you one last example: You look at this farm bill. Most Democrats and Republicans in the Congress are from urban or suburban areas. Most of them want to do the right thing. Most of them think we spend too much money on farm programs. Well, the farmers in the audience know we have already substantially cut farm subsidies in the last 5 or 6 years, substantially. I've fought like crazy to get the Europeans to make a deal on agriculture so we could cut agricultural subsidies some more. I don't know a farmer in my home State that wouldn't give up every lick of Government support if every other country would give up all theirs and we just had a fair chance to compete in a global marketplace.

So, do we need to deal with this agricultural issue? Yes, we do. But if you just blow off all these supports and everybody else keeps doing it, what's going to happen? One of two things: We either lose markets, or we'll lose all the family farmers, and big corporations will be running all the farms in the country, or a little bit of both.

So let's do this in a sensible way, and let's listen to one another. You'd be amazed how many of these hot-button issues we have in Washington are basically more rural-urban issues, more regional issues than they are partisan issues. And I'm telling you, a lot of these things have a commonsense, sensible resolution if we will simply work on it.

Now, this is a great country. And if you look at where we are, going into the next century, I'm telling you, I have had the privilege of representing you all over the world. And no American who understood the facts of the 21st century would trade places with anybody in any other country, because of what we have here.

But what we have to realize is, the thing that gives us all this juice for this global economy in this information age—where people in Montana can hook in on the Internet and find out things that are in a library in Australia and do all kinds of things that I can't even figure out how to do but my child, because she grew

up in the computer age, understands—the reason we are in this kind of position is because of everything we have in this country, because of the natural resources and the phenomenal beauty and the massive space, because of the ethnic diversity, because of the strength in the cities as well as in the rural areas, because of all these entrepreneurs, these high-tech people, in these burgeoning suburban areas. But the thing that makes it work is that we've got all this stuff in one place, one country, but we are all so different.

So we have to have some common values, some common allegiance to the law of the land, and some way of working out our differences. But instead of thinking our differences ought to make us put our head in the hole and try to tell everybody else to go home and leave us alone, or just vote against anybody that we think disagrees with us or comes from some different place, we should learn to resolve these differences in a humane and decent way, because it is the differences in America that are our meal ticket as a whole country to the 21st century and the American dream.

I'll tell you something: One of the reasons I wanted to come here to have this townhall meeting, apart from the fact that I have such wonderful memories about this State and I'm grateful to you for voting for me last time, but the other reason is that out here in Billings, Montana, a while back when a group of skinheads threw a bottle and a brick into homes of two Jewish families displaying menorahs, you didn't throw up your hands and sit around and just take sides. You said that this was a community issue. Your police chief—your former police chief—said hate crimes are not a police problem, they're a community problem. And I guess that's what I want to tell you about the political divisions in this country today. They're not just a political problem, they're a community problem.

The publisher of the Billings Gazette, Wayne Shile, published a full-page drawing of a menorah. And I want to tell you something: In the orthodox Jewish communities in New York City, they knew about Billings, Montana, and they felt more like Americans because you did that. Ten thousand families pasted these drawings in their windows. That's what we need to do in other areas as well.

I spoke at the Air Force Academy commencement today down in Colorado Springs. There

were 11 foreign students graduating from the Air Force Academy. All of our service academies take a limited number of students every year from other countries. And it's a great thing for our country. They go back home; they do very well; it builds a lot of good will. The number one student this year was from Singapore. And when he stood up to be recognized, all those red-blooded American kids that he scored higher than clapped for him and were proud of him. That is the American way. They did not feel threatened by that.

I stood there and shook hands with nearly a thousand of those graduates, the finest looking young men and women you can possibly imagine, from every State in this country, from all kind of backgrounds, all different racial and ethnic groups. They were all Americans. And they learned to live with each other and to work out their differences there.

And I'm telling you, if I could wave a magic wand and do one thing for this country, just one thing—it would be more important than who the President is, how the Congress votes on a particular bill—it would be to try to get us out of this way we are communicating with one another so that every time we have a difference, we turn it into a wedge and a divide and we try to beat each other to death with it. That's not right. It's not the American way.

Look, we got a lot of complicated problems. And we are a very different, divergent country. But it's our meal ticket to the future. It's what makes us the most relevant place in the world in the 21st century.

Why do all these people want to come here? Why do they ask us for help everywhere? Because they think, with all of our problems, we've got our act together. And we ought to have it together.

So I say to you, my fellow Americans, whatever your party, whatever your views on any particular issue, this country is slowly turning, and we are moving toward the 21st century. And what we don't want to do is take a position on a complicated issue that starts throwing the babies out with the bath water.

What makes us great is our people, our land, our vision, our system of opportunity. And we have the opportunity now to tackle some long-delayed problems, like the budget deficit, and some long-ignored needs, like competing with other countries in our investment deficit so that we invest in our people's education; we invest

in the technology and the research and the things that will generate high-wage jobs; so that we show prudence in the budget, but we still figure out how we're going to keep a viable agricultural sector, for example, into the 21st century; and so that we face up to the fact that a whole lot of people's anxieties are because of all these changes that we haven't adjusted to. We can't keep the American dream alive if 15 years from now 60 percent of the people are still working harder for less money.

So let's talk about what's really eating us. Let's deal with each other as neighbors. And let's make ourselves a promise that as we go through these next 6 or 7 months, that we won't take the easy way out. We will bring the budget into balance, while investing in our future. We will make the Government less bureaucratic, but we will protect our environment. We will find a way to give local control to people, but we will still do the right thing.

When it's all said and done, we'll still have heated disagreements—nobody will know if they're right, and nobody will be right about everything—but at least we can recreate a process, an environment, a spirit of community that will permit us to go on. We cannot get from here to where we need to go if everything we do is dictated by the most emotional, highly charged 15-second sound bites we can think of to send our opponents up the flagpole. We cannot get there.

And let me just close with a story, a true story, that will show you my bias in all this. In 1989 I was the Governor, and I was trying to decide whether I should run for a fifth term. And everybody in my State believed in term limits, but they sort of liked me. And they couldn't figure out what to do about it, and neither could I, frankly, because I had this big education program I wanted to get through the legislature before I left office.

And I went out to the State fair one day, and I visited all the, you know, the livestock barns and saw all that, and then I came into this hall where I always had a Governor's Day every day. And anybody in the State could come up and talk to me and say whatever they wanted, which was hazardous sometimes for me. [Laughter]

And along toward the end of the day, this old boy came in in overalls. He was somewhere in his mid-seventies. And he put his hands in his overalls, and he said, "Bill, you going to run again?" I said, "I don't know. If I do, will you vote for me?" He said, "Yeah, I guess so. I always have." And I said, well—I'd been Governor 10 years by then—I said, "Aren't you sick of me after all this time?" He said, "No, but everybody else I know is." [Laughter] He said, "I'm going to vote for you because of the way you nag us all the time. All you talk about is education and the economy and forcing everybody to work together and making things better." And he said, "You're just a nag." But he said, "Frankly, I think it's finally beginning to work." And my State had an unemployment rate above the national average in every year I was Governor until the year I ran for President, when we led the country in job growth.

It takes a long time to turn and to face things. But this country is still around here after 200 years because we found a way to disagree in a way that permitted us to work together and move forward. And we can win the struggle for the American dream in the 21st century if we will find that way now.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7 p.m. in the Alterowitz Gymnasium. In his remarks, he referred to Ronald Sexton, chancellor, Montana State University, Billings.

Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion With Farmers and Agricultural Leaders in Broadview, Montana

June 1, 1995

The President. Thank you very much. I want to mostly just listen to you, but I thought that it might be helpful for me to talk for a minute

or two about the kinds of decisions that are coming before our country in the next year, on the farm bill and other things.