

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. on the Little Rock Air Force Base flight line. In his remarks, he referred to Brig. Gen. Jack R. Holbein,

USAF, Commander, 314th Airlift Wing; and Mayor Tommy Swaim of Jacksonville, AR.

Remarks to the Arkansas State Democratic Committee in Little Rock,
Arkansas
July 18, 1998

Thank you very much. It's good to see you. It's wonderful to be home. I always learn something new. When Bill Bristow was giving that speech, I said to myself, "I am sitting here watching before my very eyes the broadening of the base of the Democratic Party." He now has got every math teacher in Arkansas committed forever. [*Laughter*]

Thank you very much, Bill. I thought that was a terrific—didn't he do a great job? Let's give him another hand; I thought that was great, really great. [*Applause*]

I want to thank Blanche Lincoln, Bill Bristow, Judy Smith for being here and for their candidacies; Kurt Dilday, my longtime friend; Mark Pryor. I thank Congressman Vic Snyder for the wonderful job he does in Washington every day. And in his absence—I know he had to be away at a funeral today—I want to thank Marion Berry, too. He has done a wonderful job, especially for farmers.

I thank Jimmie Lou and Gus Wingfield and Charlie Daniels and all the people who have kept the light going in the Democratic Party and State office; Judge Corbin. I'm so pleased to see many people running for office. You know, I had mixed feelings about this term limit issue when it came along, but I felt a little better when Mary Anne Salmon decided to run for the legislature, and I'm glad to see her back there.

I want to say to all of you, too, I read that article in the paper today, and I want to comment a little more about it, ask you whether my Presidency had been good or bad for the State. And the one example on the negative side they had was what happened in a recent transportation bill where even the Transportation Secretary from Arkansas could not implement the plain recommendation of the study because our neighbor from Mississippi jerked away funding for I-69. No one pointed out in

the Arkansas Democrat article that that would not have happened if we had a Democratic Congress—that would not have occurred. I say that because, what the heck, I never get to be partisan, and it's nice to be home—[*laughter*—] and also because it's true. [*Laughter*]

Let me say to all of you, I am profoundly grateful for everything you've done for me and for our family. Hillary just got back from a remarkably successful tour, the first of our millennium tours where we're trying to save the treasures of the United States as we approach the year 2000. She went—first of all, we began by trying to save the Star-Spangled Banner. And then she took a remarkable tour through a lot of our country's heritage: Thomas Edison's home, Harriet Tubman's home, George Washington's military headquarters, and then to Seneca Falls, New York, where the women's movement began 150 years ago, where the declaration of sentiments by 68 women and 32 men who had these radical ideas, like women ought to be able to vote—[*laughter*—]—run for office, own the clothes on their back. We've come a long way. And she asked me to tell you hello.

And I just want all of you to know, too, that I think quite often of that day in October, nearly 7 years ago now, when I stood on the steps of the old State Capitol—many of you were there—and said that I wanted to build a better future for our children. And I want to quote—I wrote this down; usually when I come home I feel free to speak without notes, but I did want to write this down—nearly 7 years ago, this is really the test—"to restore the American dream, to fight for the forgotten middle class, to provide more opportunity, insist on more responsibility, and create a greater sense of community for our great country."

Now, there are some things, it seems to me, that are fairly clear and difficult to debate. And I think it's important, when we evaluate the

coming campaigns of Blanche Lincoln, Vic Snyder, Judy Smith, Bill Bristow, Kurt Dilday, Mark Pryor, and others, to remember what America was like 7 years ago. We had high unemployment, rising crime and welfare rates, increasing social division, no clear vision driving the country at home or abroad preparing us for the 21st century. And Washington was doing what I thought it had done too much of before, and what I still hate to see: They were having increasingly harsh political debates in terms that didn't make a lick of sense to most of us who lived out here in the country.

There were the standard debates about "Well, the Government is the problem"; "the Government is the answer." No one I knew believed either thing. I couldn't figure out anybody who believed it until they got into Washington, DC. Everybody had to be a conservative or a liberal. And if you had a different position, somehow there was something wrong with you because it required the people interpreting you to America to think about it, and the people driving the politics of the Nation's Capital didn't like it.

But we came forward in that campaign in '91 and '92 with a set of new ideas. We had new approaches to the economy, to education, to crime, to welfare, to the environment, to foreign policy, to the whole idea of Government. It seemed to me that the answer was that we ought to look at Government as our partner in building the American future and that the rule of Government ought to be to give the tools to solve their own problems, to build strong communities and families, and to create the conditions in which that could be possible.

No one thought Government could solve all the problems, but to pretend that by getting out of the way, we'd all be better off would be to violate the very insight of the Founding Fathers, who said they formed a Government in the first place because we could not do alone some of the things that were necessary for America to pursue life, liberty, and happiness.

And now, we've had a few years to evaluate the results. So when people ask you, "Has it made a difference?"—let me ask you this: If on Inauguration Day in 1993, someone that had told you that within 5½ years America would have 16 million new jobs and the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years, the lowest crime rate in 25 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 29 years, the first balanced budget and surplus in 29

years, the lowest inflation rate in 32 years, the highest homeownership in history with the smallest Government in 35 years, would you have said, "I will accept that and be glad for the next 5 years for what's going on in America"? [Applause]

And along the way, with the HOPE scholarships, the tax credits for college, the reformed student loan program, 300,000 more work-study positions, we can literally say we've opened the doors to college to anybody who's willing to work for it.

We have the highest childhood immunization rates in history. We've added 5 million children to the ranks of the health insured—we're in the process of doing that. We protected the pensions of millions and millions of Americans and made it easier for people working for small business or for themselves to take out pensions and to get health insurance; 12½ or 13 million people have taken time off from their job without getting fired when a baby was born or a parent was sick because of the family and medical leave bill. We raised the minimum wage and are trying to do it again to try to help people on the lower end of the economic ladder who are working hard. And we gave a big tax cut in 1993, worth about \$1,000 a year today, to working families with incomes under \$30,000.

We have 1,000 colleges in America involved in sending their students into our schools to make sure all of our kids can read well by the time they get out of the third grade. We have 100,000 young people now—just at 100,000—who served in the AmeriCorps program, working all over America, including in Arkansas. And I see kids from Arkansas all over America when I travel around, helping to solve the problems of this country at the grassroots level and earning money for college. Our country is a better, stronger, more united place than it was in 1992. You helped to make it possible, and you ought to be proud of it.

But here's the main point I want to make today, in behalf of Blanche and Bill and all our other candidates up here, in behalf of the record that Vic Snyder has already begun to establish and the efforts that Marion Berry is making. You've been awful good to me, and you made me feel great as a person when I came in. And I appreciate being given some

responsibility for the good things that have happened. And I think there is a connection between what we have done and what has occurred, even though, as always, the American people themselves deserve most of the credit, as is always true in a free society. But the changes we made, the decisions we made had consequences.

The point I want to make to you as Democrats in Arkansas, thinking about your State, these elections, and your country's future, is it's not just important to get the right people; it matters if you're doing the right things. If you say all that matters is that you have the right people, then every election is a new story, and people can say, "Oh well, Bill Clinton gave a speech," or this, that, or the other thing, or "He was a pretty good leader. He could take a lot of heat." You may have seen, by the way, the other day in Florida, Sylvester Stallone gave me the gloves, the boxing gloves he used in "Rocky"—[laughter]—and I said it was a good thing, because I proved I could take a punch for the last 6 years, and I was ready to deliver a few now. I thought it was a good idea. [Laughter]

What I want you to focus on today, because it really matters to the case you're going to make here between now and November, is two things are important: You have to get good people, but you have to do the right things. These things happen because we've done the right things, and there are honest, principled disagreements at home and in Washington about the right things.

We've got the lowest crime rate in 25 years. And they're still trying to stop my efforts to put 100,000 police on the street. I mean, it's unbelievable. We have proved what works in education, and yet, they're still saying no to smaller classes, no to better school buildings, no to so many of our efforts to improve the education of our children.

We have proved we can grow the economy and improve the environment. And they're still trying to weaken our efforts to protect the environment, even though, I might have said, while all this economic good news is occurring; the water is cleaner; the air is cleaner; the food is safer; we have more toxic waste dumps cleaned up in 4 years, our first 4 years, than they did in 12; and we set aside more land in perpetuity than any administrations except Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt. So we've

proved you could do that, but there's still an assault on the environment.

And all this rhetoric about how perfectly terrible Government is—well, when they had control of it, it was bigger than it is now but not as good.

This is real important. If you want to go out and make an argument for why Bill Bristow or any Democrat should be Governor, for what Attorney General Mark Pryor would do working with like-minded Democrats, for why it would make a difference if Judy Smith were in Congress, and for why one Republican from Arkansas is more than enough in the United States Senate, you've got to know what you're talking about. You have to understand that there are really consequences. I'm telling you, it makes a difference.

We're not in this old debate anymore. It's the real world now. People need to see things unfolding as they are, not all this "Are you anti-Government or pro-Government; are you liberal or conservative?" What do you stand for? Or what is your education policy? What is your health care policy? Are you for the health care bill of rights, or not? Do you believe that everybody in an HMO ought to have the right to an emergency room service if they need it, ought to have a right to a specialist if they need it?

You've been seeing all the press we're getting in Washington on that. We're bringing in all of these people; we're talking about the horror stories, all the doctors pleading and pleading and pleading with the insurance companies, do this procedure, that procedure, the other procedure. They take 90 days or 180 days; the time the procedure gets approved, it's too late, and the people die.

We had a woman who spends her life working in a medical office, calling, trying to get authorization for procedures. She broke down and cried at this hearing I had the other day, this meeting, saying, "I'm just so sick and tired of telling people that they can't have the health care my doctor is begging to give them."

We had a hearing in Washington last week. We had two brave Republicans show up with all the Democrats in the House and several in the Senate, saying, "We're for a Patients' Bill of Rights." And one of these Republicans was a doctor. And I said, "You know, we Democrats, now, what we're trying to do, we want to put

progress over partisanship. We welcome anybody to come who agrees with our ideas.” And this brave doctor from Iowa stood up there and said that—he had been introduced as a doctor who in his spare time would go to Central America and help children with cleft palates and fix them so they wouldn’t be disfigured for life. And then he showed a picture of such a child, and the whole room gasps. And he said, “This child is not from Central America. This child is from the United States of America, and this child was denied coverage for fixing his cleft palate on the theory that it was cosmetic surgery.” And then he showed another picture where the kid got fixed anyway and how good-looking the child was, and everybody cheered; we all felt good.

Now, the fact is that the Democrats up there are for a strong Patients’ Bill of Rights, and the leadership of the other party are opposing it. The fact is the Democrats are for giving the States and the Governors and the legislatures and the teachers help for smaller classes, for better school buildings, for more charter schools, for greater investments of all kinds. And by and large, our whole agenda is being opposed by the leaders of the other party.

The fact is, our party is in Washington working hard to prove that we can grow the economy and preserve the environment. After this summer, don’t you believe the climate is warming up? *[Laughter]* Don’t you think Al Gore was right after all? *[Applause]* We now have ways of measuring temperature changes for over 500 years. The 5 hottest years in history, the 1990’s—in over 500 years, the 5 hottest years in history—1997, the hottest year. This is going to be hotter.

I did my radio address today on things we’re trying to do to help farmers. We have this bizarre situation in America now where worldwide bumper crops and financial weakness in Asia and, for many of our farmers, heat or flood or pestilence have created this crazy condition where prices are low because there are big supplies and fewer buyers, and they don’t have much of a crop anyway—North Dakota farm income down 90 percent from last year—90 percent. And so we’re doing what we can to, first of all, purchase a lot more food and give it to countries where people are hungry. Secondly, I presented to Congress a number of other ideas to immediately release hundreds of million of dollars that would raise farm income.

But anyway, we’re having this big discussion up there. Now, we either are going to do these things, or we’re not. But in a larger sense, I want to make the point that the climate is changing. When I was in China recently, I spoke to the American Chamber of Commerce—this is not the Democratic Party—the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai. *[Laughter]* And I got two spontaneous ovations. One was when I talked about climate change and how we had to work with the Chinese to see them grow their economy without using energy in the same way we did; otherwise, we could burn up the atmosphere, and it would be hard for us to breathe, which is already a big problem over there.

Now, I’m telling you, if you look at what’s happening to the climate, if you look at what happened in Florida—you saw all those fires in Florida. Florida had the wettest winter, the driest spring in history. Then June in Florida was hotter than any July and August. And if you’ve ever been to Florida in July and August, that’s saying something—the hottest month ever. Things are changing.

Now, we can put our heads in the sand, or we can say we’re going to figure out how Americans solve this problem. The leaders of the other party, in one of their committees, they have voted to deny me the right to use any funds even to have seminars about this problem and talk to the American people about it.

You know, I never will forget the day some young person who worked for me said, “Denial is not just a river in Egypt.” *[Laughter]* And there are lots of examples like this, in health care, in education, in the environment, in economic policy.

In economic policy—yes, we’ve got a good economy. There are still towns in the Delta that need help. There are still neighborhoods in our cities that need help. There are still Native American reservations out West that need help. We’ve got a whole agenda that says we ought to bring the benefits of this economic moment of golden prosperity to everybody in America and give everybody a chance to be a part of it. And so far it has not been embraced in Congress by the leaders of the other party. So I ask you about all this.

What is this, a nightclub? *[Laughter]* I will now sing “Danny Boy,” and you will applaud at the right time. *[Laughter]* Somebody leaned against the wall there last night. Somebody was

up too late last night over there by the wall, they just leaned against the wall and nodded out. [Laughter]

We're laughing; we're having a good time. But I want you to be serious between now and November. I have tried to put progress over partisanship. All of you know me. You know I work with anybody who wants to work with me. And you get it, what's going on, and I can tell by the way you clapped before at the appropriate moment. [Laughter]

But let me tell you, in the end, what matters is what happens in the lives of the American people. The Democrats will be rewarded if we do the right things, if we have the right consequences, and if we convince people that it's not just a matter of name-calling and labeling but whether you have the right ideas.

I want you to think about it. We've got new leadership in the party. I thank Vaughn McQuary and all the other folks that are coming in here and trying to get this thing up and going. And I like to see your enthusiasm; I'm glad you're here in such large numbers. But if somebody asks you why you're a Democrat, why you support the President, why we've succeeded in the last 5½ years, what we would do if given the Governor's office and the attorney general's office, you need to have answers. And you need to be able to tell people in ways that are not hateful or small or mean spirited. We don't need to respond to them in kind, as they have to us; we need to remember our scriptural lessons. We need instead to lift our visions and lift the vision of the people and talk to them about what we're going to do.

While I was listening to Bill Bristow talk—you know, we can do a lot in Washington to help education. But the constitution of almost every State in the Union makes it clear that education is the primary responsibility of the States and the communities and the schools.

Now, let me ask you something. No one here, I take it, would dispute the proposition that we have the finest system of higher education in the world in America. No one disputes that. Otherwise, why do people come here from all over the world every year to get into it? And no one would seriously assert that America's elementary and secondary schools are the finest in the world. But they could be, and in points they are, and from time to time they manifest that.

You look over the horizon and you ask yourself, what are the big challenges of the future? The first thing that comes to mind is we've got to prove we can have the finest elementary and secondary education for all our kids without regard to their income, their background, their race, or their region in the world.

Now, if you believe that, then every time you're in the coffee shop, every time you're on the street, every time you're talking to somebody, you have to say to them, "You cannot make these decisions in November—you cannot cast a vote for Governor; you cannot cast a vote for Congress; you cannot cast a vote for the Senate—you cannot make these decisions without asking yourself, 'Who's got the best ideas for education; who's best for my children or my grandchildren; what's Arkansas going to look like 50 years from now?'" You know this is true.

In the Congress—let me give you another example—a huge issue—I'm the oldest of the baby boomers, and if present rates of birth, immigration, and retirement continue, by the time all of us get retired, there will only be about two Americans working for every person drawing Social Security. Unless we make some changes and start to make them now, by the time this happens we will have an unsustainable situation in which we will either have to have a huge cut in the Social Security benefits of retirees or a huge increase in the taxes on our kids, thereby undermining their ability to raise our grandchildren.

Every baby boomer I know is determined to avoid both these consequences. Now, are there ways we can do it? You bet there are. But we have to start now, which is why I have said, "Let's don't spend any of this surplus, even on stuff Democrats like. Let's don't give any tax cuts, even tax cuts Democrats like, until we save Social Security for the 21st century." That's important.

Believe me, this is a huge issue. Some of their leaders are saying, "Well, now they estimate we'll have a \$63 billion surplus this year, and that means the surpluses out in the years ahead are going to be even bigger than we thought. And we can't use all that money. We need a big tax cut now." And, oh, it just happens to be right here before the election.

Well, I know it's right here before the election, but let me remind you, man, we've been waiting for 29 years for a balanced budget.

[Laughter] It took me 5½ years to get it done because there was a \$290 billion deficit when we got up there. And we won't have a balanced budget or a surplus officially until the new fiscal year starts on October 1st, after we close our books at midnight on September 30th. It looks to me like, after 29 years of being in the red, after the years of 1981 to 1993 when we quadrupled the debt of the country in 12 years, it looks to me like we could wait just one year until we figured out how to save Social Security and stop assuming that we were going to have a surplus that hadn't even materialized yet. I'd just like to see the bank account just for a day or two. Wouldn't you? [Applause]

Now, if you believe that, that's an important idea. You need to know if you believe that. And you need to tell your friends and neighbors who aren't as political as you are or maybe not even Democrats—and maybe they're independents, maybe they're Republicans, but they're thinking about this—"Look, you got to think about this. This is not just where you go in and vote the way you normally do. We're in a time of enormous change. We didn't just elect the right people in 1992; we began to do the right things. And it is profoundly important that we do the right things in the future: saving Social Security and Medicare for the 21st century; making education the best in the world; proving we can grow the economy and preserve the environment; taking care of our health care system so that we don't keep ferreting people out and we, instead, keep bringing people in."

And let me just mention one other thing, that Arkansas people I think understand more, partly because we have so many farmers here. One of the biggest problems we've got now, looming ahead, is our trade deficit's gotten real big. Now, why has our trade deficit gotten real big? Because of the economic crisis in Asia, primarily. What's happened? Well, when the people you're doing business with run out of money, one of the things that they do is mark down the things they're selling you so it's cheaper, and they hope you buy more of it. And they still don't have any money to buy what you've been selling them.

Now, I have been trying for 6 months—now, this is a hard one, except for people in agriculture who understand it—I've been trying for 6 months to get the Congress just to pay America's fair share to the International Monetary Fund. And there are a lot of politicians up there

making those election year speeches, saying, "Oh, man, this is just a big bailout to the foreigners," and "Why should we be doing this?"

We contributed, along with other nations, to this fund to stabilize and reform economies when they get in trouble. Why should we do it? Well, 30 percent of the growth that you just applauded for, when I came in and I started reeling off all those statistics, came because we were selling more of our stuff to other countries. We have 4 percent of the world's people in America; we have 20 percent of the world's income. If we want to keep doing better, we've got to sell something to the other 96 percent. And we have to expect them to keep doing better, too; otherwise, they not only won't want to, they won't be able to buy more of our things.

That's what this International Monetary Fund issue is about in Washington, DC. If we want our neighbors to buy our products, they've got to have the money to do it. And when they get in trouble because they're developing their societies and their economic systems, this whole fund was set up not as a bailout, not as a gift, not as a welfare program but as an instrument to force reform and revitalization.

These are things worth debating. You know, there's a big debate here in Arkansas because of what some of the elected officials said about whether I should have gone to China. I take it there's not as much debate now as there was before I went. And I hope there's not. But let me ask you—so we've got to decide that. This matters.

You look all over the world. We've got people that differ with us. They have different religious systems, different political systems, different cultural values. We have to decide when we deal with them and when we don't. Now, if people do things we really think are terrible, should we have economic sanctions? I think we should. But look what happened when I put economic sanctions on India and Pakistan. We pointed out, "Well, we don't like it if it's on food." And we say, "Well, we don't like it if it's on food because you shouldn't punish people when they're eating. But we also don't like it because it hurts our farm income in a bad year." So we want a mixed approach, where we kept trying to reach out and work with people.

China has got 1.2 billion people. They're going to have a lot to do with how your children and grandchildren live. And we ought to try to get along with them and work with them

and build a common future with them if we can. And we ought to have a way of expressing our honest disagreements when we have to. And you can only do both of those things if you're dealing with people. This is worth debating.

The last point I want to make is this: Something a long way from Arkansas usually is my foreign policy job, a lot of the challenges I face. But you just look around the world at the things I've dealt with since you sent me to Washington. Last week, three little Irish-Catholic boys killed in a firebomb in Northern Ireland, because they're still fighting over religious battles that have roots that are 600 years old. In Kosovo, a place a lot of Americans still have a little trouble finding on a map, we're worried about a new destabilizing war breaking out because the Albanians and the Serbs can't get along, the same thing that happened in Bosnia. In the Middle East, we still have trouble because we can't get people to take just one more step to bring the Arabs and the Jews, the Israelis, together. But we're working on it.

When Hillary and I went to Africa, we went to Rwanda, where two different tribal peoples that most Americans aren't even aware exist, in a country that has been coherent for hundreds of years, got in a fight, and 900,000 people or so died in a matter of 100 days. Why? Because as we know from our own painful civil rights history, getting people to be pitted against each other because of their differences is deeply ingrained in the human psyche and easy to bring up and very often profitable for people who seek power.

And if you contrast that with what we are trying to achieve in America today, where we're a more and more diverse country, from more and more different backgrounds, in a world that is getting smaller and smaller because of technology, this country's best days are clearly still ahead. But we have to do the right things as well as elect the right people. And it's time the American people and the people of our State actually had to think about that. What are the right things to do in education in Arkansas? What are the right things to do in health care? What are the right things to do in economic policy? What is the right policy in building one community, one State, and one Nation, across all the lines that divide us?

I have tried to give the Democratic Party new ideas based on old values. I have tried to persuade the American people that the con-

sequences that are good that are coming today are due to them, but also due to the fact that in Washington we have done the right things.

Now, this is a very important election. It's important for that little child there and all the kids in this State. And it's very important that the citizens of our State not do what people so often do when times are good, which is just relax and say, "Just leave everything more or less the way it is," because when times are good but changing rapidly, you have to use the good times and the confidence people have to deal with the underlying challenges, and because as all of us who are older here know, no conditions last forever. If we can't use these good times to deal with our long-term challenges, when will we ever do it?

So I ask you—I'm glad to see you; I've had a good time; I've enjoyed the jibes and the cheering and the yelling. But I want you to keep clearly in mind that we have a future to build for these children. You've got a State to build and a country to build. And the reason we're in the shape we're in today is because we had good ideas that we implemented that had good consequences. And the reason that I will be a member of this party until the day I die is that more often than not, we have been the instrument in this century and in my lifetime in fulfilling the vision that the Founding Fathers gave us to always deepen our freedom and always perfect our Union.

So I want you to help me. I want you to elect these people. I want you to work. And I want you to go out there and literally grab your friends and neighbors by the shoulder and say, "Let's talk about this. Don't go through this election in a fog. Don't say, 'Oh, everything is fine; let's just keep on going the way we're going.' Think about where we are as a State and Nation. And think about where we were in 1992." And I think you'll have quite a good case to make.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:05 a.m. in the auditorium at the Embassy Suites Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Arkansas gubernatorial candidate Bill Bristow; senatorial candidate Blanche Lambert Lincoln; Judy Smith, candidate for Arkansas' Fourth Congressional District; Kurt Dilday, candidate for Lieutenant Governor; Mark Pryor, candidate for State attorney general; Jimmie Lou Fisher, State treasurer; Gus

Wingfield, State auditor; Charlie Daniels, State land commissioner; Arkansas Supreme Court Associate Justice Donald L. Corbin; Mary Anne

Salmon, executive director, Clinton Arkansas Office; and Vaughn McQuary, Arkansas Democratic Party chair.

The President's Radio Address

July 18, 1998

Good morning. I'm speaking to you from my home State of Arkansas, a State that, like many across our Nation, depends heavily on agriculture. America's farm communities are more than a critical part of our economy. They are places where American values have deep roots and flourish: faith and family, hard work and respect for neighbors, devotion to community. Every American has a stake in the strength of rural America.

With family incomes rising, the lowest unemployment in nearly 30 years, the highest homeownership rate in history, most Americans today are enjoying the dividends of the strongest American economy in a generation. Unfortunately, life on the farm is not so easy today.

For 5½ years, I have worked to expand opportunity for our farm families. We've strengthened crop insurance, provided critical disaster assistance to ranchers who have lost livestock, doubled our use of export credits from last year, improved our school lunch programs by buying surplus commodities, and worked to diversify the sources of enterprise and income in rural America.

But with the economic crisis in Asia weakening some of our best customers for farm products, and with strong world crop production bringing prices down, and with farmers facing floods and fires and drought and crop disease, our farmers face a difficult and dangerous moment. Many farm families have been pushed off their land, and many more could suffer the same fate unless our Nation revives its commitment to helping farmers weather hard times.

When I signed the 1996 farm bill, at a time when farm prices were very strong, I made clear my concern that there was not an adequate safety net for farmers. The bill had to be signed to avoid putting our farmers in an even more difficult situation under the old 1949 farm bill. But sooner or later, prices were bound to fall so low that we would need that safety net. That

day has come. With prices for many farm products plummeting, America's farm families face a crisis, and we have an obligation to help.

At the same time we see a very different crisis in some parts of the world, a crisis of hunger, where too many families face famine and starvation. For decades, American Presidents have addressed such crises. That's what I'm doing today.

Today I am acting within my full authority as President to take immediate steps to help our family farmers and to reduce crop surpluses at home. Within days, the United States Government will begin to purchase more than 80 million bushels of wheat, which could lift prices as much as 13 cents a bushel. With this wheat, I've instructed Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman to launch a new food aid initiative to press the world struggle against hunger.

Secretary Glickman, working with our Agency for International Development, will use the authority granted to him by Congress to oversee substantial donations of U.S. wheat to countries where the need is greatest, places such as Sudan and Indonesia. Donations will also be made to private humanitarian groups. All told, this is in the best humanitarian tradition, an action based on human need to help save lives as it opens new links of trade with these nations. It's good for American farmers, good for our economy, and it's the right thing to do.

This effort will provide a much needed boost to U.S. wheat farmers, but we can and must do more. I'm pleased that this week Congress took prompt bipartisan action to exempt agricultural trade from U.S. sanctions against India and Pakistan in the wake of their nuclear test. But more congressional action must follow. We should expand eligibility for direct and guaranteed loans, extend marketing loans when crop prices are low or transportation problems make marketing difficult, give farmers more flexibility to plant other crops when their primary crops