

Remarks to the Community in Helena, Arkansas *August 7, 1999*

Thank you very much. Good morning. Thank you for coming out in the heat. Congressman Berry asked me—we were standing up here; Congressman Berry said, “You smell that cotton dust that’s been in here a hundred years?” [Laughter]

I am glad to be back. I want to thank Senator Lambert Lincoln who has done such a wonderful job; my good friend Congressman Berry. I want to thank Mayor Weaver for coming out and Dr. Robert Miller, the mayor of Helena, my longtime friend. And I want to thank our Secretary of Transportation, Rodney Slater, from Lee County.

Let me say to all of you, I’m about to go down to the Cultural Center for a business meeting about the future of the Delta in Arkansas, but I just want to say a word or two. And I’ll be brief because it’s hot, and I want to get out and shake hands, and then I want to go to work.

Yesterday in Washington I was able to announce that our country had produced 19 million jobs, and then some, since I became President. But the unemployment rate in the deep Delta is still twice the national average. The income is less than two-thirds the national average. And a lot of the things that we have tried to do in the last 6½ years have helped some discrete communities, but not the whole region.

In my State of the Union Address this year, in an attempt to build on the work that we’ve done with the enterprise zones and the empowerment communities, under the leadership of Vice President Gore, I proposed that we look at the Mississippi Delta, at Appalachia, at the Indian reservations, at the small towns and the inner-city communities that have been left behind as a big new market for America; that if we had parts of America where we hadn’t had new investment and new jobs and new opportunity, and we were growing like crazy and we had the best economy in a generation, we ought to find a way to get people to invest in the areas that have been left behind.

And one of the things that I asked the Congress to do is to give people in America with money to invest the same incentives to invest in poor communities in America we give them to invest in poor communities overseas.

Now, I just went on a tour. You probably saw the press when I was Clarksdale, Mississippi, but I was also in Appalachia; I went up to South Dakota to an Indian reservation; I went to Phoenix and East St. Louis and Los Angeles. There is an enormous feeling out there in the country today that we ought to really make an effort—it’s the first time I have felt this—there’s a great feeling in the Congress, and I think in both parties, that we ought to do something for the areas that have still not felt the economic recovery of the country. And that’s what we’re here to talk about. That’s what I’m going down to the Culture Center to discuss.

So the last thing I want you to know—and I know Secretary Slater would echo this—is that you couldn’t have two better people representing you than Blanche Lambert Lincoln and Marion Berry. They wear us out every single week to do something for you.

And finally, let me just say it’s good to be back here. All of you have been very good to me for more than 20 years now. I probably wouldn’t be President if it weren’t for eastern Arkansas, and I am very grateful. And I want you to know that in the year and a half I have left on my term, I am going to do everything I can to bring more economic opportunity not only to the Delta but to every place in America that is not a part of what our country as a whole is enjoying today.

Thank you, and God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:50 a.m. in the West Hangar at West Helena Municipal Airport. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Johnny Weaver of West Helena, AR.