

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.

Remarks to the Community of Bradley County in Hermitage, Arkansas  
November 5, 1999

Thank you very much. Well, good morning. Thank you all for coming. I want to thank all the folks who are here with me, but especially Secretary Clickman and Secretary Slater and our Small Business Administrator Aida Alvarez for the work they have done on some of the projects we're talking about today.

I want to thank Congressman Dickey for being here and Congressman Kanjorski for coming all the way from Pennsylvania to make this tour with me. I want to thank Randy Clanton. Randy gave a good speech, didn't he? [*Applause*] You know, if tomatoes go in the tank again, Randy could go into politics. It's amazing; I think he's really got it. [*Laughter*]

And I want to thank Jimmie Sue Wade and James Carter, because they went on the tour with me today with Randy and all the other co-op members. I want to thank all the folks from the Department of Agriculture and all the people from Arkansas who work in Washington who came home with me and all of the local officials. I look out, and I see friends of mine not only from Bradley County, including all the people who came down from Warren, but from Calhoun County and Ashley County and Desha County and Chicot County and Drew County and Columbia County. There's a lot of people here who have been my friends a long time. I thank you for coming.

And Mr. Mayor, I know you've been in office 5 months, and I'm sorry it took me so long to get here. But I thought we ought to give you a little time to get organized. [*Laughter*] And I'm glad to be back in Hermitage. You know, I know there has been some publicity about how I first became associated with your community. But the first thing I want to tell you is we came here today not because of my long association with this community but because of the success of this co-op and because we want every rural community in America to know what you have done and to know that they can have a better future. That's the truth.

Gene Sperling, my National Economic Adviser who has organized all these new markets tours to places we're trying to get more investment in, he came to see me, and he said we were going to Newark, New Jersey, and Hartford, Connecticut. And I said, "Well, we've got to go someplace in rural America." "Oh," he said, "Mr. President, we've got a great place. We're going to take you home. We want you to go to someplace called Hermitage. Do you know where that is?" [*Laughter*] And so then I regaled my whole White House staff with the story of how I first came to Hermitage over 22 years ago as attorney general. Some of you remember that. You were having a labor problem because the people who came here to work didn't have adequate housing, and nobody would pay any attention to you, and you couldn't get any help from anyplace. I just came down here one night and sat and listened for 3 or 4 hours and learned more about tomato farming than I had ever known in my life and than I've ever heard since.

And then President Carter was elected, and we got some help, and we built the facilities. So a couple years later, I ran for Governor. And you've got to understand; I was 32 years old, and I was scared to death. But I knew people in Hermitage, so I came down here. And the rest of the State didn't know all that much about me. But the day I came down here, because of what I had done to help with the housing, the school was shut down, the school band played for me, we had a parade down the main street. Everybody showed up in the whole town, and I thought it was the darndest thing I'd ever seen. And so I'm driving out—it was amazing. I went crazy. I called back to Little Rock. I was just euphoric. I still—I'm still excited about it 22 years later.

So then, I'm driving to some other campaign stop, and I'm doing an interview—a dumb thing to do, right? I'm doing an interview. And so the reporter asked me a pretty good question,

and I gave a fairly careless answer over something, and it wound up being somewhat controversial. So the only thing that was on the news that night, the only thing that was in the paper the next day was this rather careless answer I'd given to this question. And I kept going around—I was going up to total strangers saying, "But you should have seen the crowd in Hermitage." There was no press out there. [Laughter] And finally, my staff got so sick of hearing me saying it—that's a true story, 1978—they gave me a T-shirt which said on it, "You should have seen the crowd in Hermitage." Over 21 years later, I still have that T-shirt, and they made me wear it around, so I wouldn't have to keep talking about it.

But I tell you what. I asked the mayor. There's 639 people who live in this community. There are more people than that today. So again I say to an unbelieving media: You should see the crowd in Hermitage today. It is amazing.

Let me say one other thing. You know, I used to come to Warren to the Pink Tomato Festival every year, and I learned a valuable lesson. I'd rather come here and go through and watch you package these tomatoes than enter the tomato-eating contest. [Laughter] It was not a good year for me. That's the year I got beat for Governor and I lost the tomato-eating contest—[laughter]—and I was sick for 3 days. It took me a whole week before I wanted to eat tomatoes again. But I got over it, and I'm glad to be here.

Let me tell you why we're here today, and let me just ask you to let me be serious for a minute, because this is very important. When we say, well, you did great with this co-op, when we say we thank Burger King and now Kroger and others for buying your tomatoes, when we say in 2 years you went from 3,400 to 61,000 cases sold, that's something that makes you proud. But remember what Randy said about the quality of rural life and the importance of people being able to make a living on the land.

You know, one of the things that bothers me is that in spite of all the prosperity we've had, there are still people and places that are untouched by it. I am very proud of the fact that I've had a chance to serve as President and to bring some commonsense ideas about how to build a 21st century economy on the old-fashioned values that Secretary Slater mentioned. And we've worked hard at it. And I'm grateful that I've had the chance to serve.

When I look at all these little children here who are going to spend most of their life in a new century and a new millennium, when people in the smallest American communities can be in touch with people all over the world, thanks to the Internet, I am grateful for the fact that in the last 7 years, we have, as we learned today from the latest unemployment figures, we now have had, in the last 7 years, 19.8 million new jobs in America and a 4.1 percent unemployment rate. That's the lowest it's been in 30 years. We've got the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years; the lowest poverty rates in 20 years; over 5 million men, women, and children lifted out of poverty by the dignity of work. We have the highest homeownership in history, the longest peacetime expansion in history, the first back-to-back surpluses in the Federal budget in 42 years. I am proud we'll have the chance to do that.

You know, when I went up there, a lot of people deridingly referred to me as "the Governor of a small southern State" and thought that nobody who came from the backwater of America had enough sense to do that job. But one thing that I didn't forget, coming from Arkansas, was basic arithmetic, and I figured out pretty quick that we couldn't keep spending more than we were taking in without continuing to have high interest rates, high unemployment, lower incomes, and deep trouble. And we turned the country around. And we did it and still continue to invest more in education, in rural America, in technology, in the environment. It was hard to do, but we did it. We also have the smallest Federal Government in 37 years, because we had to stop doing a lot of things to keep investing in what matters.

So the first thing I want to say to you is thank you for giving me the chance to be Governor for 12 years, thank you for giving me the chance to steer through all the tough economic times we had in the eighties, thank you for staying with me as we have turned this country around, and it's moving in the right direction. But now, for the first time in my lifetime—literally, for the first time in my lifetime, we have a chance as a nation—and I would argue, we have the responsibility as a nation—to deal with the large, long-term challenges this country faces. In my lifetime, the only time the economy has been remotely this good was in the 1960's, but we had to deal with the civil rights crisis

at home and the Vietnam war abroad, and eventually we lost our economic prosperity. These things don't last forever. But now we have a chance to deal with those challenges.

What are they? I'll just mention a few: The aging of America. We're going to have twice as many people over 65 in 30 years. I hope to be one of them. [Laughter] But there will only be two people working for every one person drawing Social Security. So I have asked the Congress to adopt my plan to lengthen the life of Social Security to 2050, so it takes into account all the baby boomers and doesn't bankrupt their children and grandchildren, and to lengthen the life of Medicare and add prescription drug coverage for all these seniors who can't afford to buy their medicine anymore. I think that's important.

Challenge number two: to deal with the education of the children of America. Finally we have a number of schoolchildren in our schools larger than the baby boom generation and, by far, the most ethnically and racially and culturally diverse group of kids in our history. Look at all the Hispanic kids that are in Arkansas today, all the Hispanics in this crowd today. When I came down here last time as Governor, these folks weren't here. I'm glad they're here. They're adding to our State; they're strengthening our communities; they're making life more interesting. But it's more challenging. The school district across the river from where I live now, in Arlington, Virginia, has children from—listen to this—180 different national and ethnic groups, speaking—their parents speak over 100 different languages, in one school district. And I tell you, in a global economy, that's a good deal, not a bad deal. But we've got to give every child a world-class education, whether they live in a rural area or an urban area, whether they're poor or rich or middle class. And we've got a chance to do it now.

The third thing I think we ought to do to keep our prosperity going is to keep paying down the debt. Do you know, in 15 years, this country could be out of debt for the first time since 1835, when Andrew Jackson was President? That's a good thing to do. We ought to do that. We ought to do that, because it means lower interest rates, more jobs, higher incomes, a more stable future.

There are many other challenges. We've got the lowest crime rate in 30 years; we can make America the safest big country in the world if

we keep doing what works. We've got cleaner air, cleaner water, safer food. We've protected more land in this 7 years than any administration except those of Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt. We've got some big environmental challenges, and we've got to prove we can do it and grow the economy, not shut the economy down. It's a big challenge, but we can do it.

But let me tell you what I came here to talk about, because to me it is a huge challenge. It bothers me that we've got 4.1 percent unemployment and the lowest poverty rates in 20 years, and there are still whole communities that have been completely left behind by this recovery. You know it, and I know it. There are people in places whose lives have not been positively changed. They're in the Mississippi Delta; they're in Appalachia; they're in the inner cities; they're on the Indian reservations. Reverend Jackson and I went to Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. People are dying to go to work. They're good people, just like you are. You know what the unemployment rate is there? Seventy-three percent. There are people and places that are left behind. And there are small towns and rural areas, in places you wouldn't imagine. When I was in upstate New York recently and all these little towns there that look a lot like rural Arkansas or rural Pennsylvania, I discovered that if you just had the upper part of New York as a separate State, it would be 49th in job growth since I've become President. This is a problem everywhere; in every region of our country, there are small towns and rural areas where agriculture can't sustain the economy anymore under the old rules where the economy is in trouble.

And that's what we're doing here, because you have done this co-op, because the government made a contribution, because the bankers made a contribution, because the business people buying the tomatoes made a contribution, and because now you can have a life here in this part of our State, and you can prove that people can make a living in rural America and do something good. And I believe that we need more of these kinds of co-ops throughout our country.

You know, when Congress passed the farm bill back in '95, I had to sign it; otherwise, we'd have gone back to one that was 40 years old. And I said then I thought the row crop farmers were going to be in terrible trouble the first time crop prices dropped, because it

wasn't a good system, because there was no safety net. So now, we spent the last 2 years appropriating huge sums of money because we didn't build a safety net in '95. And I think it was a mistake, and I hope we will.

But we also need to look to the people that are growing our vegetables, growing our fruits. All over the country there's people like this who are having the same problems you've had who haven't organized themselves as you have. So let me say, I want to help you do more, but the main thing I want America to do today is, every little old rural community where people are about to give up and they think their kids are going to have to leave home to find work, I want them to see this on television tonight and say, if we get our act together, if we work together, if we have a partnership between the local community, the people who are producing food, the people who can buy it and the government and the bankers, we can make it. We can turn our community around. We can create a new market.

Now, we're trying to do our part. And I know all you ever read about in the papers is when the Republicans and Democrats are fighting in Washington, but we don't really fight over everything. And one of the things that we're working on is to try to get a common approach to bringing economic opportunity to poor communities. And the Congress has already adopted a part of what I asked for in this so-called new markets initiative.

Let me explain what I mean by that. Randy did a good job of talking about how you made a new market here. But we came to this new markets term because we were trying to answer two questions. One is the one I've been talking about. Don't we have a moral obligation to give the people who haven't participated in this recovery who are dying to work a chance to succeed? That's the first question.

But let me tell you. There's another question which you may hold the answer to, which is a far more complicated one. If we've got the longest peacetime economic expansion in history, and we keep growing, in February we'll have the longest expansion in American history, including those that occurred in the world wars—the longest economic expansion in history. How do we keep it going? How do we continue to find new jobs and new opportunities with no inflation? The answer is new markets. So the same people that we ought to be helping

morally, because they haven't participated in our recovery, we also ought to help because it's in the self-interest of everybody else in America, whether they're in the inner cities or the Mississippi Delta or South Arkansas or Appalachia or on an Indian reservation.

So what we're trying to do here is to highlight what we can do with existing government programs, like the ones we've celebrated here. We also are asking Congress to pass a package of tax incentives and loan guarantees that quite simply will give investors who want to invest in south Bradley County or any other place that's got a high unemployment rate the same incentives to invest in developing markets in America that they get today to invest in developing markets in Latin America or Asia or Africa or anyplace else. We ought to take care of the American needs and give people those same incentives right here at home, and that's what we're trying to do.

Now, meanwhile, there's more practical things we can do here. And I want to just mention a couple. Farmer's Bank is just finalizing a loan of almost \$5 million, that will be guaranteed by Secretary Glickman's Department of Agriculture, for this co-op, which will enable the farmers to do even more to boost the value of their crop and do business year round. Now you can build that repackaging facility and farm supply store you've been talking about and spend more of Bradley County dollars here.

Second thing I want you to know is you're already being copied, and I want—by your neighbors. We are building on the success of this co-op by strengthening others. RSI, which buys supplies for Burger King, has committed to purchase up to 200 acres of cucumbers in the Mississippi Delta. I don't know how many pickle slices that is, but it's 3.2 million pounds of cucumbers. That's a lot of pickles, and it's a lot of new business for the Mississippi Association of Co-operatives, a group of co-ops of farmers not far from here.

I also want to compliment something that was done by the Small Business Administration, in working with the Heartland Community Bank in southeast Arkansas with Georgia Pacific and International Paper, to work with small minority-owned businesses who will help to hire 60 more people to work in the woods there, to help during the harvesting season and pruning season. These are the kind of cooperative efforts that I think offer the best promise to turn

around the situation in rural America, over and above what we've got to do to fix the farming bill.

So again I say, I remember the first time I came to Hermitage. I'll remember the parade all my life. But I think in many ways I'll remember this best of all. In many ways, the people here got me started. In 1978, I think I got over 90 percent of the vote in Hermitage the first time I ran, and I'm grateful for that. It's been a long time since then, and it's been 92 years since the Rock Island Railroad built a depot here, on the old road between Tinsman and Crossett. But now, thanks to you, thanks to what you've done, you've made a new beginning for the 21st century.

And what I want to come out of this, let me say again, for farmers everywhere, for people

in rural America and small towns everywhere, when they look at your face, when they see your pride, when they hear your results, they need to know we can make a new beginning everywhere, and the rest of us need to be committed to making a new market everywhere in this country people haven't had their fair chance at the American dream.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 a.m. in the courtyard at the Hermitage Tomato Cooperative. In his remarks, he referred to Randy Clanton, director, Hermitage Tomato Cooperative Association; farmers Jimmie Sue Wade and James Carter; Mayor Mike Colvin of Hermitage; and civil rights leader Jesse Jackson.

## Radio Remarks on Expanding a Wildlife Refuge To Protect the Salmon Habitat in the Columbia River

November 5, 1999

Today I announced the expansion of a wildlife refuge to protect the prime salmon habitat along the Columbia River. This supports our treaty with Canada to protect Pacific Coast salmon.

My budget proposes increases for salmon restoration, but Congress has provided only a fraction of the resources necessary to do the job. So, again, I call on Congress to provide the necessary resources to support this treaty and

to work with me on a budget process that observes our obligations and protects and preserves our environment.

NOTE: The President's remarks were recorded at approximately 12:15 p.m. at the Hermitage Tomato Cooperative Association. These remarks were also made available on the White House Press Office Radio Actuality Line.

## Remarks in a Teleconference on Agricultural Issues With Rural Radio Stations in Hermitage

November 5, 1999

*The President.* How are you doing?

*Stewart Doan.* Fine, sir. Welcome back down to Arkansas.

*The President.* Nice to hear your voice, Stewart.

*[Mr. Doan of the Arkansas Radio Network began the conference by listing American farmers' problems, including low commodity prices, high production costs, reduction in exports juxtaposed*

*with a rise in imports, and the growing number of farmers exiting the business. He asked what incentives existed for crop growers to stay in farming for the next century.]*

*The President.* Well, let me say first of all, I think we've got to change the '95 farm bill. When the Republican Congress passed it at the end of the session, they did it in such a way that I had to sign it, because otherwise we