

other resources devoted to community and economic development, will help to build capacity in the communities of the Arkansas Delta and

will empower the area's residents to achieve their full potential.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Remarks at the Earle High School Dedication Ceremony in Earle, Arkansas

December 10, 1999

Thank you very much. Wow! Well, this is a wonderful end to one of the best days I've had in a long, long time. We started out this morning in Little Rock, and I spoke at the annual Chamber of Commerce banquet. I talked to them about the library and the public policy center I wanted to build not just for Little Rock but for our entire State. And then I went to West Memphis, to the community college, which I helped to establish, where the enrollment, by the way, has increased by tenfold since I've been President. I'm very proud of them, and I know all of you are.

And I told them that I was going to support the legislation sponsored by Senator Lincoln and Congressman Berry, with \$110 million for a Delta commission to invest in the economic future of the Mississippi Delta next year.

Then I got a little barbecue. *[Laughter]* And sidled up here to Earle. Thank you, Secretary Riley, for making this journey with me and the journey of the last 22 years now. Thank you, Secretary Slater, for coming out of the Arkansas Delta and going all the way to become Secretary of Transportation.

I'm not sure you heard the superintendent when he said this, but Secretary Slater's chief of staff and a longtime supporter of mine is a wonderful attorney named Jerry Malone, who graduated from Earle High School. Jerry, stand up. Where are you? There you go.

I want to thank my friend of 30 years, the Lieutenant Governor, Rockefeller, for making this trip with us today. I thank my longtime friends County Judge Brian Williams and Mayor Sherman Smith. We also have the head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Bill Ferris, who is from the other side of the Mississippi River in Mississippi, here with us today. I thank him for coming.

And I want to introduce the vice president and foundation executive of MCI, Caleb Schutz,

who has decided to help this school. I'll explain more about why later, but thank you very much. I'd like to thank all the people from the Arkansas Department of Education who are here, Simon and others. Thank you, Principal Nicks and members of the school board. And thank you, Jimmi Lampley; you were terrific.

I have to tell you, when I met President Kennedy in 1963, I didn't give him a library. *[Laughter]* I didn't even give him one of my Trojan band jackets. *[Laughter]* Now I've got this football jacket, making me an honorary Bulldog.

You won't believe this, but when we were down in West Memphis, we had this meeting about how we could train people in the Delta that don't have jobs to get some of these real good jobs in transportation. There are 80,000 jobs driving trucks and working in terminals, for example, vacant today.

So Secretary Slater was working on that, and he invited the man who runs the USA truckline from Fort Smith, but they train all their truck drivers here in West Memphis. So the guy's been my friend forever—I mean, he's been my friend for 27 years and, coincidentally, runs this truckline, and he trains all his truckers here in West Memphis.

So right before I come up here to get this jacket and become an honorary Bulldog, he whips—I said, "Have you got any pictures of your wife and daughter?" And he said, "Yes." He takes out this beautiful picture of his wife and his 12-year-old daughter, and they've got a bulldog there. I said, "What's that bulldog's name?" And he smiled, and he said, "Clinton." *[Laughter]*

So I'm going to have a picture taken in this jacket and send it to him, and he'll have two bulldogs in the house. *[Laughter]* And we both respond in the same way. It will be great.

Finally, let me say a word about your superintendent. He has been a friend of mine a long time. I have known him probably since before most of the students here were alive. I have eaten his good food in his former life. [Laughter] I have met with his students. I have listened to year after year after year after year of fresh, vigorous ideas and passionate commitment, believing that the children of the Delta were as smart as any kids on Earth and had a right to the best education on Earth and become anything else they wanted to be on Earth.

I've had him sidle up to me with that sort of soft voice—[laughter]—you know, the way he kind of does his head like this, you know—[laughter]—I know him, man. I know him. I've been there. "Now, Governor, we just need a little money for this little thing here." [Laughter] "Now, you know how you love these kids. You don't want to let them get behind here."

What are you laughing about, Leon? You do the same thing. [Laughter]

So anyway, I was thrilled when he came here. You know, our tenures pretty well coincide. He came here not long after I became President. And I wasn't surprised when you approved that big bond issue, because this guy believes in your kids. He spent a lifetime, a lifetime that happened to coincide with this dramatic change in the economic and social organization of the Mississippi Delta. He spent a lifetime trying to lift up our kids, and I say thank you, my friend. I appreciate that.

Now, I rode over here with my good friend Ness Sechrest from West Memphis today, and we were thinking about all the trips we've taken to Earle. This sort of was an automatic stop for me. Whenever I'd get in a deep funk, I'd come to Earle and get to feel better—[laughter]—when I was Governor. And I miss so much—I want to say this before I leave Crittenden County—my man who was always my county coordinator here, Ron Owens, passed away in the last year, and I miss him terribly, and I wish he were making this trip with me today because I loved him like a brother.

But one time we came up here in 1982, and I was trying to get reelected Governor. And we went to the Church of God in Christ, Representative Jones' church. And at the time, Bishop Walker came with me, and at the time, Ron and Carrie Paige were pastoring the church there, back over there. And I see Finus; thank you for coming. Bless you. Thank you, Finus

Jones. So first, the choir got to singing, and Carrie got to singing. And then the bishop called my opponent "Old Hoghead" on statewide television. [Laughter] And I said to myself, "I'm either in or out after this. I don't know whether I am in or out, but something is going to happen now." There you are. Thank you, Bishop Walker.

In the bishop's defense, he only said that after the man I was running against said that African-Americans in Arkansas would vote for a duck if it was on our ticket. So it was a reaction, not an action. And God forgave him for his harshness. And so did the voters, I might add.

Anyway, I've been back to that church many times, and I've been back to this town many times, and I never come here without feeling renewed, because there's so much courage and hope and spirit. And today what I would like to say to you is this: First, thank you. Thank you for all the years we worked together, all the roads we've walked together, all the times you gave me a chance to serve.

I think that because of the times we went through, I was better prepared to deal with America as I found it in January of 1993: high unemployment, social decline, political division, discredited government. And now, thanks in no small measure to what I learned working with you, we've got the lowest unemployment and welfare rolls in 30 years and the lowest poverty rates in 20 years. We've got 20 million jobs and the first back-to-back budget surpluses in 42 years. We are on our way to taking this country out of debt in 15 years for the first time since 1835. And along the way, we have immunized 90 percent of our children against serious diseases for the first time, and over 7 million young people have already taken advantage of the HOPE scholarship tax cut to go on to college. I think it's been a good 7 years for our country.

And underneath that, we see the beginnings of equality starting to emerge. Nationwide, we have the lowest African-American and Hispanic unemployment rates ever recorded. We have the lowest female unemployment rate in 40 years. We have the lowest crime rate in 25 years.

This is all good news. But I came here today to ask the people of Arkansas, the people of the Delta, and the people of America one more time, what are we going to do with this prosperity? And one thing that I say over and over again is, countries are like—no different from

people and families and schools and football teams and businesses. It's easy to concentrate when you're in trouble and your back's against the wall.

The great British essayist Samuel Johnson said, "Nothing so concentrates a man's mind as the prospect of his own destruction." But when things are rocking along pretty good, people lose their concentration. And I've been saying to America, look, we've never had a time in our history when the economy was this strong and the society was coming together, and we don't have an internal crisis or an external threat. This is responsibility time. This is a time to look at those big questions that will affect the future of these children here, to take care of the retirement of the baby boomers now, to give all these kids a good education now, to bring economic opportunity to places like the Delta that haven't been part of this prosperity.

Now, if we can't do this now, we will never get around to doing this. Now is the time to be responsible and think about the long-term welfare of our country. And as I said, earlier today I talked about the economic issues, the thing I was going to try to do for east Arkansas, the entire Delta. And I want to give credit again where credit is due. I have been relentlessly pursued to do more and more and more by your Senator and your Congressman. Now, I get lobbied by 435 Members of the House and 100 Senators. Believe it or not, even the Republicans ask me for things from time to time. [Laughter] There is nobody any better or any more passionate than Senator Blanche Lambert Lincoln and Representative Marion Berry, and you ought to know that. They have taken care of you.

Today I want to talk just a little more about education and what we're trying to do and what we need to try to do to help you reach your full potential. In the last session of Congress, we got funds to double the amount of after-school programs that we have in our schools. That's really important for children everywhere.

I don't believe that we should promote people who don't learn, but I don't think we should punish people that the system—if the system fails them. We need to give the kids extra help, extra help. And the schools that can't afford it ought to have the resources they need to give that kind of extra help, so everybody can learn.

I think it is important that we hook up all of our classrooms to the Internet. First, all our schools, then all our classrooms. When Vice President Gore and I said in 1994 we want to wire all of our schools, including the poorest schools in America, and we're going to get the private sector to help us, and then we're going to make sure we train the teachers because, otherwise, the kids will know more about the computers than the teachers. And then, we're going to make sure that the poor schools can afford it.

And we passed something called the Telecommunications Act. For the first time in 60 years, we revised our communications laws, and the part of that we said we'll have this E-rate, which will give a discount to schools. Now, here, you connected the computers that you got from our technology literacy challenge grant to the Internet with the help of \$100,000 in discounts for the E-rate. That's what it meant to Earle: \$100,000 in discounts so you could afford to be on the Internet just like the wealthiest school districts in the United States of America.

In the budget I signed last month there will be another \$60 million in educational investments coming to the Delta, including \$7 million to hire 200 more teachers for smaller classes in the early grades, which I think is very important.

Now, to give you an idea—I'm kind of proud of this, but when we said—when Al Gore and I started working on this, only 3 percent of the total classrooms in America and 14 percent of the total schools had any Internet hookup. Now, over 50 percent of the classrooms and over 80 percent of the schools in America in just 5 years are hooked up to the Internet and can afford to be, thanks to this E-rate. So you're a part of the future. And I want to thank you for that.

Now, what I'd like to do now is to announce a generous new initiative coming not from the Government but from MCI WorldCom Foundation, to give the teachers at Earle High School and across the Delta region unprecedented access to the kind of world-class educational materials that in the past only the wealthiest school districts could afford. In cooperation with National Geographic and Mr. Ferris' National Endowment for the Humanities, the Foundation—the MCI WorldCom Foundation has developed a wonderful website called MarcoPolo.

It contains lesson plans and resource materials on everything from history to math to art. These lesson plans for teachers have been developed by some of our finest teachers and academics. And now they're available absolutely free over the Internet, thanks to MCI.

Now, to take advantage—who is here from MCI? Stand up. Everybody from MCI, stand up. Thank you. Give them a hand. *[Applause]*

Now, so that the teachers can utilize the website, the MarcoPolo foundation will train, free of charge, as many as 4,500 district curriculum specialists throughout the seven-State, Mississippi Delta region. They will then train 100,000-plus teachers on how to use the website.

A teacher in Earle, for example, will learn to go to the website, click on humanities, and be guided to a series of lesson plans on, say, the life of Socrates, developed by the experts at the National Endowment for the Humanities. The lesson plan then links to sites containing Plato's writing on Socrates, commentary by leading scholars. Then, it would provide questions teachers can ask students, such as imagining whether Socrates would have chosen to die for his ideas if Martin Luther King had been in a jail cell with him. It's a very interesting question. I think the answer to that is, probably. The site then links Dr. King's letter from the Birmingham jail, where King praises Socrates for being, and I quote, "A tension in the mind, so that an individual could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths." Now, just imagine helping high school students explore the idea of civil disobedience from Socrates to Martin Luther King over a period of 2,500 years, and being able to do it in every single school, no matter how rural, no matter how poor, no matter how distant, anywhere in the United States of America because of the generosity of MCI and this program. We thank them again.

The idea is that you've got to train the teachers, because it is going to be more and more possible every day for every school in America to offer lessons like these, things that would have been undreamed just a couple years ago, simply because of technology, if all the teachers can access it and make the most of it and get the students involved in it. The second thing I want to say is we're going to hold two conferences to help rural communities gain access to all the Federal programs that exist today but that are too hard for many small rural towns

with part-time mayors and small staffs to keep up with.

On March 9 next year, in Jonesboro, the Department of Education—thank you, Secretary Riley—will host a conference to help law enforcement officers and rural educators learn how to apply for school safety and drug prevention grants to develop safer schools. Then the Department will host a conference in Helena to help rural colleges obtain grants and assistance from Federal agencies so that nobody will ever be denied access to college or a good college education because of where they live or what their income is. These things are very, very important.

Now, let me just say this in closing. We can do all this, but the students have to do the most. You've got to believe that just because you live in a part of the country that had a tough time in the last 15 years when the whole economy changed and the world dumped upside down, you've still got to believe that you're just as smart as anybody anywhere. I believe that, and you've got to believe that.

But you also have to believe what that great genius Sigmund Freud said. He said, "Genius is 90 percent effort." Or, you know, I can't remember which great athlete said, "You know, a lot of athletics is luck, and it's amazing; the harder I practice, the luckier I get."

So the students here have to be committed to this. We can give you the tools of the 21st century; we can give you a chance to dramatically leapfrog the economic as well as the educational prospects that might have otherwise been here for you; but you've still got to show up for work every day. You've got to suit up as students the way you suit up in athletics or in band or anything else. You've got to suit up.

Now, it's more fun with the computers; it's more exciting with these modern programs. But I'm telling you, the future of this country, not just the future of this community and this county and this part of our State, the future of this country is riding on whether all of our children, without regard to their race or their background, can make the most of their God-given abilities. And to do it, you've got to be willing to work; and to be willing to work, you've got to believe. Nobody will pay a price for a goal that he or she believes cannot be obtained anyway.

And the thing that I liked the best about this whole day was Jimmi saying when she got

to introduce me and shake hands with me and she thought about me meeting President Kennedy, she realized she could do anything. That's true for the rest of you, so go out and do it. Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:40 p.m. in the gymnasium. In his remarks, he referred to student Jimmi Lampley, who introduced the President, and Ricky Nicks, principal, Earle Senior High School; J.B. Crumbley, superintendent, Earle School District; Leon Phillips, superintendent,

Lake View School District; State Representative Steve Jones; Lt. Gov. Winthrop P. Rockefeller of Arkansas; Raymond J. Simon, director, Arkansas Department of Education; Mayor Sherman Smith of Earle; Crittenden County Judge Brian Williams; Robert M. Powell, president and chief executive officer, USA Truck, Inc.; N.S. (Ness) Sechrest, long-time friend of the President; Bishop L.T. Walker, Church of God in Christ; and Ron Paige, former minister, Little Rock Church of God in Christ, and his wife, Carrie.

The President's Radio Address *December 11, 1999*

Good morning. The holidays are upon us, and across our Nation families and friends are gathering to celebrate the season. Today I want to talk about the steps we must take to make sure the food at these festivities, indeed, the food we serve every day, is the safest in the world.

For 7 years now, our administration has worked hard to strengthen our food safety standards for the 21st century. We've made significant strides by using the newest research and best technology available. We're using new, science-based standards for meat, poultry, and seafood. We've updated our standards for fruit and vegetable juices. We also established a nationwide early warning system for food-borne illness to catch problems sooner and prevent them from happening in the first place. We're making new advances each year, and are committed to moving forward on all fronts.

But the holiday season is only our latest reminder. When it comes to what we feed our families, there's really no such thing as too safe. We know certain foods carry a special risk for children, for the elderly, for those with weakened immune systems. My Council on Food Safety has identified eggs as one of those foods.

Every year, about 3.3 million eggs are infected with salmonella bacteria. This causes about 300,000 cases of illness. And when infected eggs still make it from the farm to the table, we know we have more work to do. That's why today I am taking new action on food safety to cut in half, over the next 5 years, the number of salmonella cases attributed to eggs. And our

goal is to eliminate these cases entirely by 2010. This aggressive action plan permits egg producers and processors to choose between two strategies of safety. The first happens at the farm, where extensive tests and rigorous practices will help prevent infected eggs from ever reaching your local grocery. The second happens at the packing plant, where new technologies like in-shell pasteurization will help keep eggs safe and free of bacteria.

I'm also announcing new steps to keep unsafe food imports outside our borders and out of our marketplace. We Americans are eating more imported food than ever, more than double the amount we consumed just 7 years ago. It used to be that only a dozen fruits and vegetables were available year round. Now it's common to find as many as 400 varieties, whether in the heat of summer or the chill of winter. Now, we have no reason to believe imported food is any less safe than the food we grow at home. But after several outbreaks of illnesses were traced to imported food, I directed the Department of Treasury and the Department of Health and Human Services to take action against unsafe imported food and to better protect our consumers. Today they're responding with a comprehensive plan. It set forth steps to prevent so-called port shopping so unsafe food stopped at one port can't find another way into our country. Customs and the FDA will also stamp rejected food with a clear label—"The United