

The President's Radio Address *September 9, 2000*

Good morning. This year our Nation is experiencing one of the worst wildfire seasons in memory. Extreme weather and lightning strikes have helped spark an estimated 250 fires every day. More than 6.6 million acres have burned already, and more than 35 large fires continue in 9 States. We've all witnessed the tragedy of family homes destroyed and admired the bravery of firefighters and citizens joining efforts to battle the blazes. I saw it firsthand in Idaho last month, and I'll never forget it.

Today I want to talk with you about important new steps we're taking to help communities recover and to ease the threat of fires in the years ahead. For months now, we've been mobilizing Federal resources to provide firefighters and communities the tools they need to combat the fires. More than 25,000 Federal, State, and local personnel have been engaged in the effort. We provided \$590 million in emergency firefighting funds, and recently I declared Montana and Idaho disaster areas, making them eligible for more Federal relief. But we must do more.

That's why I directed Interior Secretary Babbitt and Agriculture Secretary Glickman to prepare a report outlining a strategy to help communities recover from these fires and to ensure that others are spared from similar tragedies in the future. Today I'm accepting the recommendations contained in this report and announcing the first steps we're taking to implement them.

First, saving lives and property is and will remain priority one. Our Nation is blessed with the best firefighting force in the world. They're doing an extraordinary job in some of the most dangerous and difficult conditions imaginable. Some are finally returning home for well-deserved rest. But the fire season isn't over, and as long as the fires burn, our firefighters will continue to receive our strong support to get the job done as quickly and safely as possible.

Second, we're launching new actions to help hard-hit communities recover as the smoke clears. Once the fires are out, the threat doesn't stop. Rain, for example, could trigger mudslides, and dirty runoff threatens water quality. To help prevent further damage, we've dispatched more than 50 rapid response teams to work with local

communities to develop plans to repair damaged lands and protect precious water supplies.

In addition, we've just released nearly \$40 million for 90 restoration projects throughout the West. We'll also soon establish one-stop centers in Idaho and Montana, so that citizens can gain quick access to assistance, from unemployment aid to small business loans. We want to make sure the help gets to those who need it right away.

Finally, we must continue to take a long-range look to diminish the threats from fires in the years ahead. For almost 100 years our Nation pursued a policy focusing on extinguishing all wildfires. It was well-intentioned, but as a result, many of our forests now have an unnatural buildup of brush and shrubs. This excessive undergrowth fuels forest fires, making them far more dangerous and difficult to control.

Our administration has taken a new approach to protect communities and reduce wildfire risks by getting rid of the forest underbrush that has accumulated over the last century. We're reducing the risk of fire on more than 2.4 million acres a year, a fivefold increase since 1994. We want to work with communities to expand these efforts in an environmentally sensitive way, particularly in those areas at greatest risk of wildfire.

Today's report provides a blueprint for action, immediate steps to deliver assistance to hard-hit communities, new measures to build on our efforts to ease the threat of wildfires nationwide. The report recommends an additional \$1.5 billion to carry out this strategy, and I'm committed to working with the Congress to secure this critical funding.

Throughout this wildfire season, we've seen our fellow citizens come together to save lives and aid communities in need. That's the best of the American spirit. It's reflected in these new steps to help put out the fires today, help communities heal tomorrow, and help to reduce wildfire threats for years to come.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 6 p.m. on September 8 at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on September

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9. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 8 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Statement on Quality Child Care and After-School Opportunities *September 11, 2000*

Today the Urban Institute released a report highlighting the struggle working parents face in trying to provide supervised care for their children before and after school. The report found that over 4 million children of working mothers ages 6 to 12 were regularly without any adult supervision when they were not in school. While the report highlights that child care patterns for schoolchildren differ greatly from community to community, one thing is clear: Far too many children have no care when they are not in school. Millions of children without care in the hours after school are in harm's way—we know that crime and victimization rates among school-age children are highest in the after-school hours. The report also highlights research showing that high-quality after-school programs can give school-age children access to academic and enrichment activities that lead to improved student achievement and better behavior.

It is clear from this report that we need to do a much better job of providing working parents with access to affordable quality child care or after-school opportunities for their schoolchildren. That is why I call on Congress to respond to the needs of working parents for more help. I ask Congress to accept my budget proposal to invest \$1 billion in the 21st Century Community Learning Center program to provide over 2 million children with after-school opportunities. I also ask that Congress invest in child care options that can be used to provide child care for children up to age 13, expand the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit to help over 8 million families pay for child care, and boost the Child Care and Development Block Grant by an additional \$817 million.

NOTE: This statement was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 8 but was embargoed for release until 12:01 a.m. on September 11.

Remarks to the Community of Westchester County in Scarsdale, New York *September 11, 2000*

Thank you. Patty was really good, wasn't she? [*Laughter*] She did a great job. I want to thank her for being here, for the work she does as a parent and the work she does in her day job for our children.

And thank you Peggy Charren, a long-time friend of Hillary's and mine, and of all the children of America. Thank you, Andy Spano, for being here. And thank you, our great friend Nita Lowey. What a terrific Representative in Congress she is, and I hope you get a little help. Thank you.

I want to thank Eileen Lehrer and Ellen Lazarus and all the people here at the JCC

who made us feel so welcome today. I even got to walk downstairs and shake hands with some of the children and teachers and parents on what I understand is the first day of school—[*laughter*—which makes this quite appropriate.

This happens to me often—and I'm sure it will more and more now that Hillary is in politics as a candidate—but very often I get to speak last, and everything that really needs to be said has already been said. [*Laughter*] Everything that needs to be said has been said. But what does it all mean? And how can we distill it? So let me just try.