

Remarks to the Community in Little Rock

January 17, 2001

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you. I want to——

Audience member. We love you!

The President. That's what I want to say, too. I want to thank you for coming, and I want to thank you for waiting. We had a wonderful moment in the Arkansas Legislature. I got to speak to the legislature and see a lot of my old friends. And you know, with term limits there's been a lot of turnover, and about a third of the legislature, as nearly as I can tell, got their start working in one of my campaigns. [Laughter] So I had a wonderful time.

Thank you, Mayor. I want to thank Rodney Slater and Hershel Gober for doing a great job in the President's Cabinet and being part of this vast array of Arkansans who came down here with me today. Thank you, Vic Snyder, for your friendship and support. Thank you, Mike Ross, for making the campaign and going to Congress. We're proud of you.

Thank you, Senator Pryor, for coming home today so we could be together on my last trip to Arkansas. Maybe by the time I get around to writing a book, I'll be able to do some justice to the absolutely essential personal and political role David Pryor played in the success of this administration in the last 8 years. And I'm very grateful to him.

I want to thank all the State officials who came out. Thank you, Sharon Priest. Thank you, Jimmie Lou and Charlie, Gus, Mark Pryor. I want to thank Little Joe and the BK's. It's just like being home. And I want to thank the Trumpet and Zion Church choir.

You know, Jim Dailey said about everything I could think of to say. And he gave a terrific speech, and I hope somebody for me still got it on tape. I'm going to play that some day when I'm feeling down, you know? [Laughter] I want to thank him for his friendship.

Chelsea and I are delighted to be here today. I wish Hillary could be here but, you know, she's otherwise occupied. And I could tell you one thing. She won that thing be-

cause she worked harder, and she learned to do that here. And I was very proud of her. I think the day she was sworn into the United States Senate, I honestly believe, was the happiest day of my life since Chelsea was born. It was an amazing thing and a real tribute to her and to all of you who have helped her along life's way.

I was thinking that it was about 8 years ago that I had my farewell rally to Arkansas when I left to become President in this very place. And I was looking out across this sea of faces, thinking how many of you were there then and how many of you were there 10 years ago and 20 years ago and, in some cases, 27 years ago, when I first started.

I got tickled when I was walking out of the legislature tonight. I ran into a guy named Red Milligan from Marion County, and in 1974, early '74, I went up and hunted him up because somebody told me he could get me some votes. And I asked him to be for me. And he got a guy named Carnie Carlton, and he said, "Well, we're going to drive you out in the country." He said, "You need to know our county has more dirt roads than any other county in Arkansas. And we're going down to Leon Swaford's store"—I still remember this, 1974—which is just about at the four corners of Marion and Searcy and Boone and Newton Counties. You can't get there from here, even today. [Laughter]

I got in the truck. We're driving down the road. He drives me about 20 minutes. We hadn't seen another living soul. They stomp on the brakes; the cab of the truck fills with dust. He whips out this bag of Redman—[laughter]—it's a true story—he said, "Son, I don't know if you can make it or not. You know, you're a university teacher and all that." He said, "I'll tell you what. If you'll chew this Redman, I'll be for you." [Laughter] "And if you don't, I'm going to kick you out and see if you can find your way back home." [Laughter] And I looked at him, and I said, "Open the door." [Laughter] True story.

And he told it again today, and he started laughing. He said, "Well, if that's the way you feel about it, I guess I'll be for you, anyway." [Laughter] It was those kind of encounters that helped me learn a little bit

about human nature and public life and politics, the kind of thing that's hard to learn if you start out in a big place, where you don't have time to listen to people and see how they live and go down every little backroad. I made a lot of backroads with a lot of you in this audience today, and I just want to thank you.

I also want to say that if anybody had told me when I left here 8 years ago that I could come home with my country having the longest economic expansion in history and the largest number of new jobs in this period of time; where we'd actually be paying down \$600 billion of the national debt in the last three budgets of my administration; that we'd have all-time high homeownership, minority business ownership, college-going rate, welfare rolls cut by 60 percent, the lowest crime rate in 25 years—I could go on—if anybody told me that all these ideas that I talked so passionately about in the campaign of '92, that I thought would work because they were beginning to work in Arkansas, I would have said, "I'll take that right now. For my country and our future, I'll take it right now." I never would have dreamed that it would have worked out as well as it has.

And I just want you to know that I know perfectly well I never would have been President if it hadn't been for the people of Arkansas. I told somebody yesterday that I know a little bit about American history and a lot about how a lot of people got to be President, and of all the ones that I know at least, I'm the only one that I can honestly say got to be President because he had personal friends who stood up, traveled the country, fought, spoke up, and determined to make the campaign go.

And because of you, I was able to make some other friends and see some other people and learn some things about this country of ours. It's quite an interesting place, America, growing more diverse every day; we're growing more independent every day; we're growing more connected to the rest of the world every day. And I did my best to prepare this country for this new century and this whole new way of living and working and relating to each other.

And when I leave office at noon on Saturday, I will leave with a heart filled with grati-

tude, happy and pleased that all the options are open for the American people; that choices still have to be made, but we actually have it within our grasp to make America debt-free this decade, for the first time since 1835; to give every child in this country a world-class education; to bring free enterprise and opportunity to people and places that have been left behind, something that's very important to us here in Arkansas, because we have people, and we still today have people who haven't been part of this prosperity; to give the working families of this country that don't have health insurance access to health coverage for the first time in our country's history; to secure Medicare and Social Security for the baby boomers' retirement; and to continue to be a huge force for peace and freedom throughout the world. I couldn't have asked for more.

I'd also like to say that I'm well aware that I've just been the captain of this team, and without a team, you don't win in public life. It really is a team sport, public service. Jim Dailey mentioned some of the Arkansans that have served with me, and I mentioned some more when I was over at the legislature, because a number came down today. But I want you to know that over 460 of your fellow citizens from this State have worked in our administration in these last 8 years, and America is better because of what they did.

And finally, let me say I'm looking forward to being here and building my library and center. I believe it will be the most important educational institution as a library, a museum, a tourist destination, a learning site, of any that have been built, just because I have the benefit of coming into my own as a former President and building this library when all this wonderful technology is out there. I hope you like the building design. I worked hard on it, myself, for a year. It will be like a bridge out into the Arkansas River, and I think it will be a real beacon for people all around the country, and I expect people from all around the world to come here. I'll get it up quick as I can.

We'll have an educational program and offer a graduate degree in public service, which I hope will inspire other young people to spend at least some of their life in public

service, which has been so good to me and which I have found so richly rewarding. So I'll be around quite a bit.

I want to say, too, when I came in from the airport, we passed two of Chelsea's schools, Mann and the Booker Arts Magnet School. And I'd like to thank, since she came home with me, all the people here in Little Rock and throughout the State who were so good to her during her growing up, and her teachers and all the others. It means a lot to me.

I've got a daughter about to graduate from college and a wife going into the Senate. It seems to me that one of the things I'll have to do is go to work—[laughter]—which won't do me any harm. But between my larger public service and doing what I can to support my Senator and my daughter, I will be here a lot, and we'll have a chance to do a lot of things together, to reminisce over old times.

But the main thing I want to say to all of you is, I want you to be proud that we proved that national politics and National Government and the direction of this Nation is not the private province of some elite somewhere in some big, distant place; that people with common sense, with basic American roots anywhere in the country, who have the right vision and the right ideas and are willing to work in good faith with all different kinds of people, can move this country forward.

And I want you to know, too, for all the storms and all the sunshine—I said this to the legislature, and I want to say it again because it's absolutely true—there has never been a day—and tonight will be the same way when I get home—that I haven't landed on that helicopter on the back of the White House lawn and not felt a thrill, not felt like a 17-year-old boy looking at the White House for the first time.

And when I walk out of the White House for the last time and I sit at the inauguration of my successor and I leave this office, I will leave more idealistic and more hopeful about my country than the day I took the oath of office 8 years ago. And that's the way you ought to feel. That's the way you ought to feel. And none of it would have been possible

without you. I love you. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:28 p.m. in hanger 1 at Adams Field Airport. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Jim Dailey of Little Rock; former Senator David H. Pryor; Arkansas Secretary of State Sharon Priest; State Treasurer Jimmie Lou Fisher; Commissioner of State Lands Charlie Daniels; Auditor of State Gus Wingfield; and State Attorney General Mark Pryor.

Statement on Efforts To Ensure Safe, Clean Drinking Water

January 17, 2001

When we turn on our taps, Americans expect the water that comes out to be clean and safe. Access to clean, safe water is fundamental to our quality of life. That is why my administration has made providing clean, safe tap water to all communities a top priority. As a result, since 1993, the number of Americans receiving tap water that meets tough Federal health standards has increased by 23 million.

Today I am pleased that this administration is taking further action to improve the quality of our drinking water by strengthening the drinking water standard for arsenic. This new drinking water standard will provide additional public health protections for 13 million Americans, including protections from cancer, cardiovascular disease, and other health problems.

My administration has worked hard to ensure that Americans enjoy the safest drinking water in the world. I proposed and, in 1996, signed amendments to significantly strengthen the Safe Drinking Water Act. In implementing this new law, my administration has already provided added protections for consumers from dangerous, disease-causing microbes such as *Cryptosporidium*, preventing as many as 460,000 cases of illness a year. We have ensured that Americans have the information they need to make important public health decisions for themselves and their families by requiring that 55,000 water systems provide new annual reports to their customers on the quality of their drinking water. And recognizing that good water quality comes at a cost, we have established the