come to support the idea of adding voluntary prescription drug benefits to Medicare. Both parties have agreed to the principle that the benefits should be available and affordable to all Americans. There's no reason we can't come to an agreement on the details of how to provide it. Fundamentally, again, as with so many of the things we deal with here in Washington, this should not be a Republican or a Democratic partisan issue. It should be an American issue.

I want to thank Senator Daschle and Representative Gephardt for their support and their leadership on this issue, and I'd like to ask them now to say a few words, beginning with our leader in the House, Mr. Gephardt.

[*At this point, Representative Richard A. Gephardt and Senator Thomas A. Daschle made brief remarks.*]

The President. Thank you very much. Before I close I would just like to ask all of you to join me in expressing our appreciation to Ron Pollack and Families USA. They've been there on these issues year in and year out. I don't think they get as much acknowledgement as they deserve. But this is further evidence that the proposal we have is right for America from a source that everybody can trust.

Thank you, Ron.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:55 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Representative Gephardt and Senator Daschle.

Remarks to the Community in Whiteville

April 26, 2000

Thank you very much. Well, I leaned over to Mayor Jones, and I said, "Is it really true that no previous President has ever been to Whiteville or Columbus County?" And she said, "It's true." And I said, "They don't know what they were missing." I'm glad to be here today.

I want to thank Craig Turner for the presentation he made. I want to thank the mayor for welcoming me here; your fine Congressman, Mike McIntyre. And I want to thank the other Members of Congress who are here: Bob Etheridge, Robin Hayes, and especially, Representative Eva Clayton, who is the cochair of the congressional rural caucus. I welcome all them.

I want to say an appreciation for all the business leaders who came here, and Secretary Rodney Slater and our FCC Commissioner, Bill Kennard, and our Under Secretary of Agriculture, Jill Long-Thompson, and many others who are here. I'd also like to acknowledge that I have a business liaison, Jay Dunn, who's from Wilkes County, North Carolina. I'm glad he's here.

But I want to say a special word on behalf of three people. First, I don't think anybody has ever put this together, but I'm not sure that I would be President if it weren't for North Carolina, even though I never won your electoral votes, for two reasons. One is, 21 years ago, my then-colleague as a Governor, Jim Hunt, gave me the first position of national leadership I ever had in the Democratic Governors' Association. And if it hadn't been for that, I might never have gotten started. And secondly, if it hadn't been for Erskine Bowles, I probably would not have succeeded as President. So I am very grateful to Jim Hunt, who is, I agree, the finest Governor in the United States of America today.

And to my friend Erskine Bowles, who could be doing a lot of other things today, who has a touch of gold—everything he touches turns to gold. He could be out making money, but instead he'd rather be here with you in Whiteville making a better future for the children of this county and a better economy for you.

I want to say in plain language why I am here and why I hope all across America people will see you on television tonight and read about you tomorrow and think about this. I have been honored to be your President for over 7 years. I still marvel at the fact that I was born in a little town of 6,000 in Arkansas, and my mother's people came from a little community of 150, 8 miles from there. Our kinfolks are still there.

I keep on my desk in the White House a series of pictures that have my family's history, starting with a picture of my grandfather

in Bodcaw, Arkansas, population 150 in 1906. And there are still about 150 people there.

So I think I understand your life. I was amazed, though, I must say, to hear one of your businessman tell me today that he was selling fertilizer to farmers in Arkansas. Now, when I was Governor, one thing we had plenty of was fertilizer, and some people thought I supplied a lot of it. [*Laughter*]

But I've loved being President, and I've loved working on the economy. And I'm proud of the fact that we've got the longest economic expansion in history and 21 million new jobs and the lowest unemployment in 30 years and the lowest minority unemployment rate ever recorded. I'm proud of that.

But it bothers me that in the face of the longest, strongest, creative economic growth in our history, there are people and places who have been left behind. And mostly they are places that are physically isolated. Whether they are small rural towns like Whiteville, remote Indian reservations like the ones I have visited in New Mexico and South Dakota, or remote inner-city neighborhoods, where people with money and investment don't go very much, there are people who are physically isolated.

And I have started in the last 2 years of my Presidency this whole effort to convince the rest of America that you're a very good deal, and we ought to invest in you and your future.

If you follow this on the news at night, you know that there's a big debate about how much longer this economic expansion can go on. And about every week or so, somebody says, "Oh, it can't go on any longer, because there's got to be inflation, and then we'll have high interest rates and the thing will shut down."

And so I spent a lot of time thinking about how to keep it going, because I kind of like that. I like seeing you do well. And I'd like to see my Vice President get his fair share of credit this year in November. So I think about it.

But what I want you to understand is this. The rest of America has a big stake in your success. Why? Because if the unemployment rate here were 3 percent and everybody that wanted a job had one, and you all had better jobs with growing businesses, what is that? That's growth for the rest of America without inflation—more workers, more business owners, and more consumers—everybody in America. And all those places with 2 percent unemployment, they ought to be pulling for you because you're their meal ticket to the future, to keep this economic growth going.

So what I tried to do is to say to people with money, "Look, I want you to have the same incentives to invest in rural North Carolina, rural Arkansas, the inner cities, the Native American reservations—I want you to have the same incentives to invest in poor areas in America we give you today to invest in poor areas of Latin America or Asia or Africa. Look to America and the new markets here." That's the first part of this.

The second part is this—and that's what we're here about today. You hear all about this digital divide; some of you have a computer, and some don't—and even if you do, maybe you use the Internet with your telephone line, and maybe you don't. But what I want you to understand is that the Internet is the fastest growing means of communication in all human history.

When I became President—listen to this—when I became President 7 years and 3 months ago, there were 50—5-0—50 sites on the World Wide Web. Today, there are 50 million—in 7 years. And one of these places is this fertilizer business in rural North Carolina where two Arkansas farmers, at least, found their way on the Internet and they said, "This guy will sell me fertilizer cheaper than the guy down the street will. I think I'll order it." This is unheard of.

Let me tell you, I have seen things you would not believe. I've been in little villages in Africa where people have no maps and no schoolbooks, where they can get all the most modern information. I've been in little villages in India, where the income every year is $450 a year, where women with newborn babies can get the most modern information about how to care for their children because of the Internet.

And what we're here to tell you is, number one, we believe in rural North Carolina and in rural America, Internet access ought to be just as likely as telephone access. And number two, you ought to be able to use it in the fastest possible way. And number

three, if you can, it'll mean more jobs, more businesses, higher incomes, and more opportunity.

Why is that? We're standing here in front of the railroad station. You know what the railroad brought to the rural South? You know what the highways brought to the rural South? You know what electricity brought to the rural South? What did they do? They helped to make it possible for people to live out here in the country and move back and forth and make a living.

But we never quite caught up in rural America, did we? Why? Because no matter how you cut it, no matter how many roads we had or how many powerlines we had or how many trains ran through our town, we were still a long way away from everybody else, and it took time to get from here to there—wherever "there" was. Isn't that right?

So most people who kept on living in rural America did it because it's a great place to live. It's a nice way to live. President Johnson left Washington, DC, and went home to this little town in Texas, where he was from, and they said, "How can you bear to live in this little one-horse town after living in Washington, DC, for 25 years?" And he looked at Walter Cronkite, and he said—I'll never forget this for as long as I live—he said, "I can bear to live here because, here, people know when you're sick, and they care when you die."

Now, so we live here. But with all these improvements, you never quite caught up. Now here's what I believe, and why I'm spending the last year of my term in the White House trying to build support among Republicans and Democrats for giving these extra incentives to invest in these areas and making sure we close the digital divide and every one of your classrooms and every one of your businesses has access to really high-speed service on the Internet. Because what does the Internet do that the railroads didn't do, that the highways didn't do, that a rural airport didn't do, that electricity didn't do? What does the Internet do? It collapses time and distance.

We have never been able to do that. That's what I want you to think about. You've never been on a computer in your life—I want you to think about that when you leave here. It collapses time and distance. Therefore, for the first time in my lifetime, we have a chance to move more people out of poverty and unemployment and lack of access to businesses more quickly in rural America, isolated inner cities, and Native American reservations than at any time in the history of this country.

And when people see you on television tonight, I want them to think about this town abolishing time and distance because of what Jim Hunt, the telephone companies, and others have done to provide broad-based Internet service to you through this broadband. That's what I want them to think about.

I want to thank Bell South and Sprint and GTE and the telephone co-ops for working with Governor Hunt to do this. I want to thank Qualcomm and the other companies that came here today, that show us other ways to get you really good Internet service. But if you never thought about this in your life, I want you to think about it. I don't care if you don't have a college degree. I don't care if you never finished high school. You need to figure out how these computers work. You need to figure out how to get on the Internet. You need to figure out how it will help you, and if you don't have people here who can help you, you need to figure out how to get somebody to come into this community and run the education programs to teach you how to do this, because this is the future of America.

Now, it's true, it's more expensive in rural areas than in the cities now, and it's not hard to figure out why. They've got more customers and less space, so it's cheaper. So, Governor Hunt's got a plan to overcome that, and we are trying to help. We are making available, through our rural utility service, loans that will allow rural areas to offer high-speed Internet to help cut the cost. We've got businesses involved that are helping us do all kinds of things.

Qualcomm, one of the companies that is represented by its chairman here today, is going to spend a million dollars to provide wireless high-speed services to eight underserved rural communities, including those here in North Carolina, including this country. And that's going to make it easier to get.

MCI WorldCom, $2 million to increase wireless Internet access in three rural communities in the South; AT&T, over a million dollars to develop information and technology management training at North Carolina State, North Carolina A&T, and other universities; Red Hat Software, in Durham, North Carolina, providing free training and certification to use the software to employees of a hundred different rural small businesses—every small business in this town ought to take advantage of that and get on the Internet and find your customers wherever they are. This is a good beginning.

But you just remember this. You've got to be for this folks. You've got to believe in this. Now, I'm not running for anything; I'm not giving you a campaign speech. [*Laughter*] I'm telling you, I have now spent more than 20 years trying to bring jobs and opportunity and hope to places like this community. I believe I've learned something about it. I have pleaded and begged with people to invest in places like this community. I have given tax breaks to people to do it. I have built roads, and I have made roads bigger. I have built airports, and I've made them bigger. I've done everything known to man to try to get more jobs into the rural parts of my State and in America, since I've been here.

I can only think of two more things we can do: give people the same incentives to invest in you we give them to invest in poor areas overseas; and make sure the Internet is universally available at affordable prices. But you remember what I'm telling you. In the whole 20th century, we never caught up. You can't stop change. We're always going to be losing jobs and getting jobs. We all try to save every one we can. But the economy changes, and it's going to change faster.

But we can catch up if, for the first time in our history, we can collapse time and distance, so that your children have access to every bit of information any children in the richest places in the world have; so that your businesses have access to every potential customer and supplier any place in the world; so that you have access to anything you'd ever need to know and learn as soon and as well as anyone else does.

That's what this Internet is. That's why it has gone from 50 to 50 million webpages in just 7 years. And it can be this community's ticket to tomorrow. Every child here is just as smart, just as worthy, just as able as every child in the richest community in the United States or any place else in the world. They deserve that.

So a long time from today, I want you to remember more than that the President finally came to your hometown. [*Laughter*] I want you to remember why we came here—because of your Governor and Erskine Bowles and these other leaders, we have a chance to collapse time and distance and to give you your chance to live your dreams.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:15 p.m. at the Whiteville train depot. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Ann W. Jones of Whiteville; W. Craig Turner, corporate secretary, board of directors, Remote Data Systems; Gov. James B. Hunt, Jr., of North Carolina; former White House Chief of Staff Erskine B. Bowles; Irwin Jacobs, chairman and chief executive officer, Qualcomm, Inc.; and White House Associate Director for Business Outreach Jackson Dunn.

Remarks at a Memorial Service for Daisy Bates in Little Rock, Arkansas

April 27, 2000

Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary, for those wonderful words and for doing a wonderful job in Washington. Governor, Mayor, Senator Lincoln, Representatives Snyder and Berry and Hutchinson, Lieutenant Governor Rockefeller, and Attorney General Pryor and Senator Pryor, we're glad to see you here today. Thank you.

To Larry Ross and all of the committee and Carlotta, thank you for your words. And Ernie, Minnijean, Jeff, and Elizabeth, thank you for being here. I thank all the people who provided our magnificent music, and I thank Janis and Diane and my longtime friend John Walker for what they had to say about Daisy. And I want to thank the Gaston and Bates families for inviting me here today. I've had a good time. [*Laughter*] And I'm glad I came. And I think Daisy's getting a good kick out of us making such a fuss about her today. [*Laughter*]