

Dec. 21 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1994

The Vice President. Congratulations again. Have a great holiday season, and Happy New Year. You've gotten a jump on a happy new year. Let's make the best of it.

The President. God bless you, folks.

NOTE: The teleconference began at 1:25 p.m. The President spoke from the Oval Office at the White House.

Remarks on Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities

December 21, 1994

Thank you very much. I want to thank the Vice President for his strong leadership in the Community Enterprise Board, Secretary Espy, Secretary Cisneros, Secretary Shalala, Attorney General Reno, the other members of the Cabinet and the administration who are here. And I congratulate all the communities who have won here today.

This is an especially happy day for me because this announcement completes a commitment that was rooted in the campaign I waged for President but far more in my personal history as a public servant. There are many people here in this room to whom I owe a great deal of gratitude. But I want to say a special word of thanks to all those who worked with me for years and years and years, before I ever thought of even running for President, on the complex job of developing poor and distressed areas.

Secretary Espy and I were partners a long time before we ever thought he'd ever be the Agriculture Secretary or I would be the President. I thank my friend, Bob Nash, from Arkansas for the work he's done in rural development. Henry Cisneros and I were having the conversations that we celebrate today for years before we were ever in the positions that we now hold. And there are others here, too numerous to mention, who were an inspiration to me because of what they did at the community level. But I'd like to mention in particular the outstanding work done by Andrew Cuomo, before he came to work at HUD, in New York and dealing with the problems of housing and homelessness.

I say this because I came to this job with the absolute conviction that most problems in America had been solved by somebody somewhere and that we would never solve any of our most fundamental problems unless we did it at the community level. And if you look at the work that we have done in this administra-

tion, the work that Attorney General has done in law enforcement; getting people together at the community level; what is embodied in the crime bill, community strength, taking money by reducing the size of the Federal Government and giving it back to the community; if you look at the work that we have done in human services with giving 21 States permission to pursue welfare reform and get through Federal rules and regulations, nine States permission to pursue the work of health care reform; if you look at the work we have done in education and training and the way the Federal laws have been rewritten to push more decisionmaking, more power down to the grassroots level, it is clear that to me, we have got to rely on the energy and the capacity of people to work at the community level where, frankly, they work in a far less partisan atmosphere than we have worked in Washington, where people deal with human problems in a human way and reach across the divisions of party and income and race and background to try to get something done. That is what I came to Washington to do.

If you look at any number of other areas, you will see that. If you look at the fact that we've been able to solve some of the long-standing environmental problems; if you look at some of the things that are being done by Director Brown in the drug control area; just over and over and over again, what we want to do is to empower people at the community level to make the most of their own lives by solving their problems, and have the Federal Government be a support to them for a change and not a burden.

That is what this is all about. And if I could construct a model of how it would all work in the end, it would be what national service does today, what the AmeriCorps program does.

It is a totally nonbureaucratic, nonpolitical, grassroots, creative, entrepreneurial way of solving human problems. That is what we ought to be about. And for all of you that worked on this program, for all of you that had anything to do with my personal history before I came to this job, I thank you for the contribution that you have made because this is a very important departure from the way the National Government has operated for years and years and years. And it is critical to the work that we must do here to restore a sense of opportunity and a sense of responsibility to this country and to rebuild the middle class.

If you look at the announcement that I made last week advocating a middle class bill of rights, looking forward to the next session of Congress, it furthers the goal of personal empowerment, recommending first of all, that people ought to be able to deduct the cost of post-high school education for themselves and their kids and have a tax break for raising their children. It advocates that we should let everybody save more money in an IRA, but also take it out for something other than retirement if they need to take care of themselves for education or first-time homebuying or health care or the care of a parent, building on the capacity of people to solve their own problems. But the most important thing we can do is to do it in a way that helps communities to grow, that helps families to grow, that helps individuals to prosper.

You know, we spent a lot of time in the last 2 years trying to clean up some of the problems we found here and fix things so that we could do things like what we celebrate today. We had to bring the deficit down in order to do that. We made a downpayment on middle class tax fairness by giving an income tax cut to working families with incomes under \$25,000 of an average of \$1,000 a year this year. That's something I'm very proud of because it shows that we're going in the right direction.

But because we've got the deficit down, we can move on to have these empowerment zones. We can move on now to do the kinds of things that are in the middle class bill of rights. And we should continue to work on it, always with the idea that at the end of the day the actions of government should empower people and communities to take more responsibility for their own lives and their own successes. That's what the family leave law was all about. That's what expanding Head Start was all about. That's what

changing the whole student loan law was all about, so more people could borrow money at lower interest rates to finance their college education. And that's what, as I said earlier, national service was all about, and it is certainly what the middle class bill of rights is all about.

I want to say, also, that we have to do this in a way that is responsible not only for today but for tomorrow as well. Too many times, because of the heat of this election or this election or the one just ahead, politicians have told people the easy answers without telling them the hard ones as well. And I want to say, I am especially proud of the fact that we have paid for these empowerment initiatives through reducing the size of the Federal Government, through getting rid of a lot of yesterday's Government so we would have more of tomorrow's opportunity.

This week, as you know, the Vice President and I announced another round of reinventing Government, of reductions that some of the Cabinet members here present took in their own operations to generate another \$24 billion to pay for the middle class bill of rights. We will continue to do more of that.

Because we have been responsible and disciplined, the overall health of the economy is sound. We have produced more than 5.2 million new jobs in this country in the last 2 years, and we will continue to do that if we can keep overall economic conditions favorable. What we now have to do is to bring the benefits of those overall things to ordinary Americans. The middle class bill of rights will do it by having more tax fairness, focusing on education, focusing on growth.

All the community initiatives will do it, whether it's in the crime bill or the education bill or in the initiatives at HUD, or in national service. And this empowerment zone program will do it by saying to the American people, the Government's going to be a help to you, not a burden. Just imagine this, Chicago got 200 separate organizations to roll up their sleeves and work and agree on a project. You're lucky in Washington if you can get two people to agree to do that. *[Laughter]*

But out there where people live, where they're not worried about what's in today's headlines but what their children's lives are going to be like tomorrow, they can do it if we help them. Just imagine in Detroit, a city that was given up for dead 10 years ago, the private

sector committed \$2 billion to this endeavor. All we had to do was to put up the \$100 million and the prospect of the tax benefits. How did it happen? Because of the energy generated at the local level just because the Federal Government said we want to help you decide your own future for a change. And I tell you, as you probably heard on the telephone call, I've been in the hills and hollows of Kentucky. I have walked up and down the poorest communities in America in the Mississippi Delta. I have been all over south Texas. I know those places. And they have good, smart people, too. And their children deserve a future, too. And all we did was to give them a chance to figure

out how they can make a better future for themselves.

Now, that's what this administration is all about. That's what public life is all about out there on the main streets of America. And what we ought to do at this Christmas season is make a new year's resolution that next year with the middle class bill of rights, with more responsibility, with more empowerment, with more opportunity, that's what we're going to make public life like in Washington for a change.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:17 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building.

Statement on the Death of Dean Rusk

December 21, 1994

Today we mourn the passing of Dean Rusk, who served our Nation with dignity and with strength as Secretary of State under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Dean Rusk belonged to that great generation of Americans who helped guide our Nation and its allies through the dangerous years of the cold war. The world has changed immeasurably since he served at the side of Presidents, but the principles he helped forge—steadfast American promotion of freedom and opposition to tyranny—are as vital as ever.

Dean Rusk's decency, and his loyalty to the Presidents whom he served and to those who

served under him, remains a source of inspiration. When he concluded his 8 years as Secretary of State—the second longest tenure of any American who served in that position—President Johnson awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and he said, "The man who has served me most intelligently, faithfully, and nobly is Dean Rusk."

We will always treasure Dean Rusk's contribution to the United States. And we will honor his memory by always striving to emulate his example.

Statement on the Pacific Northwest Forest Plan

December 21, 1994

Today a U.S. District Court upheld the Northwest Forest Plan. This decision allows us to continue to move forward in pursuit of my commitment to the people and the environment of the Pacific Northwest and northern California.

For years, gridlock over the management of public forest lands created an uncertain future for the people of the region. It was a problem

my administration inherited, and one that we made a priority to solve.

Just 7 months after the announcement of the forest plan, much has already been done. Unemployment for the entire region is at its lowest level in years, millions of dollars have been distributed to more than 100 communities for economic revitalization, and work is underway to analyze and restore damaged watersheds and protect millions of acres of old-growth habitat.