

Mar. 11 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999

Statement on House Action To Support Use of United States Armed Forces in Kosovo

March 11, 1999

I am pleased with the House vote which demonstrates the broad, bipartisan support for our efforts to bring peace to Kosovo. This vote sends a clear message to both parties that it is time now to sign an agreement that stops the fighting in Kosovo and creates real self-government for

the Kosovar people. The vote confirms the strong commitment of the United States to continue our efforts to provide the leadership necessary to bring about a peaceful resolution to this conflict.

Remarks on Arrival in Hope, Arkansas

March 12, 1999

I must say, I did not expect to see you here when I heard it was cold and rainy, and I am very grateful to you for coming. I want to thank all the Federal and State and local officials who came out to say hello to me there at the airport.

I'm delighted to be here. I want to just get out and shake hands with all of you and say again how very much I appreciate you coming out. I hope none of the kids get sick standing in this rain, and I hope it's something that when you dry off will always be a good memory for you.

I'd like to say just briefly to all the children that are here, you know, I'm coming home because we're going to dedicate the house that I lived in for the first 4 years of my life. And a lot of what I learned that was good, that I took with me for the rest of my life, I learned

back then. And I want every one of you to believe that people from Rosston and Chidester and all the other small places around here—doesn't matter where you came from in life; it matters what you do with your life. So make the most of your schools and have a wonderful time.

And again, you'll never know how much I appreciate you being here. I was stunned when I saw the crowd out here, and I knew what the weather was. I always say that the people here stuck with me through rain or shine, and now it is literally true.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:15 p.m. on the tarmac at Hope Municipal Airport.

Remarks at the Dedication Ceremony for the Clinton Birthplace in Hope

March 12, 1999

Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. My friend Tilmon Ross, thank you for the prayer. And Joe, thank you for the introduction.

I have to say that I'm here with mixed feelings. This is the coldest March 12th in the last 100 years in Hope, Arkansas. [Laughter] You have totally destroyed the case I have been making for global warming for the last 5 years. [Laughter]

You know, we were out at the airport and the Congressman, the State officials, the judge, the county officials, the city board, everybody came out there, and it was worse there than it is here, believe it or not. It was raining a whole lot harder; the wind was blowing. And there must have been 600 people out there—all those school kids—I'm sure I made a lot of money for the hospitals in the area. [Laughter] There will be people being treated for flu

for 3 or 4 weeks after this. But I was very moved. And in a funny way, the rain makes this day more poignant for me.

I'd like to thank the young people who sang from the Hope and Yerger Choirs. I want to thank my good friends who are here from the State Legislature, and Jimmie Lou Fisher, Mark Pryor, and Gus Wingfield and Charlie Daniels, our State officials who came. I don't know if Congressman Dickey is still here—he was at the airport—I thank him. I thank all the people who had anything to do with this, the people on the foundation and those who gave their money and time, those who gave memorabilia and memories.

I'd like to thank all the members of my family who are here. I'd like to say a special word of appreciation because my brother and sister-in-law and my little nephew came all the way from California to be with us today, and they're over there. And I'm glad they're here.

I would like to thank all the people from Arkansas who came down here and who have been a part of my administration, but I have to single out my good friend Mack McLarty. He and Donna Kay came down and, as all of you know, he's been an integral part of every good thing that's happened since I've been President. And I want to thank him and thank them for coming down with me today.

And I'd like to thank—a lot of people from Arkansas came, but I'd like to say a special word of thanks to Bob Nash, because I'm going to Texarkana when I leave here and he's from there. Thank you, Bob. He also has the worst job in the White House, because he supervises my appointments, which means when I appoint somebody I write them a letter and they're happy; and when I disappoint them, which is about a 10:1 ratio, Bob has to tell them. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank Beckie Moore and Joe Purvis and my longtime friend Rose Crane for all the work they've done and along with the foundation board. The three of them just gave me a tour of the house. I saw the old pictures and the toys and everything, and I'm just stunned by the work that has been done.

There are so many more people I'd like to thank: Brent Thompson—the architects—Stan Jackson; all of you who rescued this old place. Last time I was here before you started working on it was in 1990, and I thought when I walked through the front door it would come down

around my ears. And I cannot tell you how moved I am by this.

It's cold and it's windy and it's rainy and I won't keep you long, but I would like to say a few things that I worked on last night and this morning. A poet once wrote, "The accent of one's birthplace lingers in the mind and in the heart, as it does in one's speech." Well, so many accents of Hope linger in my mind and my heart.

We're not far from the site of the old sawmill where my grandfather worked as a night watchman and where, as a little boy, I used to go and spend the night with him, climbing the sawdust pile, and sleep in the back seat of his car. We're just minutes—I just drove by it—from the place on which his little grocery store stood, where I used to look up at the countertop and wish I could reach the jar of Jackson's cookies.

I still remember that my grandfather was the first person who taught me by his example to treat all people, without regard to their race, the same—and also without regard to their income, because he gave food to people without regard to whether they had a dime in their pockets.

We're not far from Miss Mary Purkins' kindergarten where I went with my friends Mack McLarty, Joe Purvis, Vince Foster, George Wright, and maybe some more people who are here today, and where I broke my leg in the first of many major mistakes I was to make in my life, jumping rope in my cowboy boots. [*Laughter*]

And we're not far from Rose Hill Cemetery, where my beloved mother, my grandparents, and my father, whom I knew only in my dreams and my mother's memory, lie now in eternal rest.

In this house, I learned to walk and talk; I learned to pray; I learned to read; I learned to count from the playing cards my grandparents tacked up on the kitchen windows which are directly behind us now.

Though I was only 4 when I left this place, it still holds very, very vivid memories for me, and I just relived a lot of them walking through the house. I remember we watched the house burn right across the street there, where the trucks are. I remember throwing a pocketknife into the ground in that backyard I shared with my friend Vince Foster. I remember hurrying

down the stairs on Christmas morning and dragging my little toys across the living room floor; waiting outside on that sidewalk for my grandmother to walk home from work.

I remember watching the old telephone when it rang, always hoping that it was mother calling from New Orleans, where she went to study anesthesia after my father died. And I still miss her every day. She would love what you have done here—the fact that you preserved her mother's rosebush and that her birthday club planted one of her bushes here. And I want to especially thank my good friends Elias and Jody Ghanem for this garden which they have made possible to be planted in her memory. Thank you, and God bless you.

In that wonderful video that my friends Harry and Linda Thomason made when I ran for President in 1992, I talked about how I used to fly all over this country, look out across the vast landscape of America, and think about how far I had come from this little woodframe house. Well, believe it or not, I still think about that no matter where I travel.

I said back then something I want to say again. In many ways, I know that all I am or ever will be came from here—a place and a time where nobody locked their doors at night, everybody showed up for a parade on Main Street, kids like me could dream of becoming part of something bigger than themselves. Of course, Hope wasn't perfect; it was part of the segregated South, and it's had its fair share of flaws. And as Mack and I were reminiscing this morning, it had a gossip or two. But in those long-ago days just after World War II, we were raised to believe in two great qualities that I have tried to bring back to America: a sense of personal optimism and a sense of community, of belonging, of being responsible for the welfare of others, as well as yourself.

I believed then, and I believe now, the places we come from say a lot about us. And places like this say a lot about America, Mr. Mayor. That's why people take family trips to towns like Lamar, Missouri, to see the birthplace of Harry Truman—it's a small white frame house, just 20 by 28 feet; why they go to Stonewall, Texas, to see the two-story farmhouse where Lyndon Johnson was born.

We visit these places not because great events happened there but because everyday events happened there, not because they're grand but precisely because they are ordinary, the modest

homes of modest people. We make them into landmarks because they remind us that America's greatness can be found not only in its large centers of wealth and culture and power but also in its small towns, where children learn from their families and neighbors the rhythms and rituals of daily life. They learn about home and work, about love and loss, about success and failure, about endurance and the power and dignity of their dreams.

I want to close with a story. Back when I was Governor, whenever I would come to Hope, I'd always drop by and visit with my Uncle Buddy and Aunt Ollie. They helped to raise me, and I loved them a lot. After they had been married well over 50 years, my aunt developed Alzheimer's, and she had to be moved to that nursing facility that's connected to the hospital.

One night, I stopped by to see my Uncle Buddy when he was living alone and going to see his wife, when most of the time she didn't really know who he was anymore. Our talk was like so many we had over the years; it was full of his country wisdom and full of funny jokes, and he was laughing and making me laugh. But when I got up to go, for the first and only time in our long, long relationship, he grabbed my arm, and I turned around and I saw tears in his eyes. And I said to my uncle, "This is really hard, isn't it?" And he said these words I will remember till the day I die. He said, "Yeah, it is. But I signed on for the whole load, and most of it's been pretty good."

Now, in this town, from my family and friends, that's what I learned: to sign on for the whole load. Though far from perfect, I have tried to do just that for my family and friends, for our beloved State and Nation. If I had not learned that lesson here 50 years ago, we wouldn't be here today.

And so to my family and friends I say, thank you for love and loyalty and the lessons of a lifetime; thank you for being there for me through this whole wonderful ride. To these young people I say, dream your dreams and know that you can best fulfill them if your neighbors get to live their dreams, too.

Because of these gifts, I can say with even greater conviction what I said to America back in 1992: I still believe in a place called Hope.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:30 p.m. in front of his birthplace home. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Dennis Ramsey of Hope; Hempstead County Judge Wallace Martin; Joe Purvis, chairman, and Beckie Moore, executive director, Clinton Birthplace Foundation; State Treasurer Jimmie Lou Fisher; State Attorney General Mark

L. Pryor; State Auditor Gus Wingfield; Commissioner of State Lands Charlie Daniels; the President's brother Roger Clinton and his wife, Molly, and their son, Tyler; former Special Envoy to the Americas Thomas F. (Mack) McLarty and his wife, Donna; and architects Brent Thompson and Stan Jackson.

Remarks at a Reception for Representative Max Sandlin in Texarkana, Texas

March 12, 1999

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you. You know, I told Leslie, I said, "Max is doing so well I don't need to say anything. If I say anything now, it's going to be an anticlimax." [Laughter] He had me halfway believing that stuff by the time he got through. [Laughter]

Let me say to all of you, I am delighted to see such a large crowd. I'm sorry, apparently some people had to be turned away; I wish I could have seen them as well. I thank you for coming. I thank you for coming to see me and for coming to support your Congressman. I want to thank—Mr. Mayor, thank you for making me feel so welcome. And I thank the whole committee that was involved in this: my long-time friend Judge Ed Miller—thank you, Judge—Molly Beth Malcolm and Willie Ray and all the others who are here on the host committee.

I want to thank my friend of many years, once my law student, John Rafaelli, who has got a lot more money than I do and is putting us up in this beautiful hotel now. I thank him for that.

Let me say just a couple of words. You know, I came today for two reasons. I came here to help Max, and I also went home to Hope to dedicate the birthplace that the local foundation there set up. They restored the old home that I lived in from the time I was born until I was 4 years old. And it was an interesting day. You know, it was cold and rainy, and the wind was blowing. I said, you know, I always got humbled when I came home, but this was the worst. I mean, for 5 years I've been trying to convince the American people that this global warming was for real. [Laughter] And we have

the coldest March day in 100 years in Hope; I don't know how much ground I lost today on that. [Laughter]

But as you might imagine, it was a very emotional day. A lot of my—my brother and his wife and my wonderful young nephew came in from California. My stepfather was there; a lot of my kinfolks from all over southwest Arkansas and from Texas came in on my mother's and my father's side of the family. And last night, when I was coming back from a remarkable trip I had to Central America to see the victims of the hurricanes there and the associated disasters and to reaffirm the partnership that we have for the future, I sat and tried to write down a few things that I wanted to say. And I had, surprisingly, since I was 4 when I moved out of that place, a lot of memories still of that wonderful old house.

And it occurred to me that in that little town where I was born and where I spent so much time in the intervening years, when I was a kid, nearly 50 years ago, there were two things that we were raised to believe in that town that I have tried to bring to this country and that I have tried to get every child in this country to believe: One is to be optimistic, to believe that you can create a life for yourself and live out your dreams. The other is to have a sense of belonging, to believe that we are part of one community in our towns, in our States, in our country, and increasingly with like-minded people all around the world, that we belong, and that because we belong we have a responsibility not only to ourselves and our loved ones but to others, and that the better our neighbors do, the better we'll do.