

Aug. 7 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 2000

cooperation across frontiers. The terrorists took from us our colleagues, friends, and loved ones, but they have failed utterly to deter us from advancing these principles around the world.

Today we remember that, in many ways, the men and women who serve America in our diplomatic missions endure as much danger and

hardship as the men and women who serve America in our military. As long as the world is as it is, we cannot eliminate the risk. But we can and must give them the support they need to minimize that risk, and the backing they deserve to achieve America's goals in the world.

Remarks at a Lunch With Firefighters in Burgdorf Junction, Idaho August 8, 2000

Scott, I want to thank you for this. And I want to thank Dave Alexander for making me feel welcome here. And I just want to say I appreciate what you're doing. I could have used this about 7½ years ago, I think, when I got to Washington. There was a lot of underbrush that needed cutting there. [Laughter] I will treasure this for the rest of my life. Thank you.

I wanted to begin today, if I might, by thanking your Governor, Dirk Kempthorne, for coming out here with me, and Senator Larry Craig and Helen and Mike—both your Members of Congress are here from Idaho. And I'm very grateful to them for that. Let's give them a hand for being here and for the support they've given you. [Applause]

And of course, as Secretary Glickman said, our Secretary of Interior, Bruce Babbitt, came today, along with Louis Caldera, the Secretary of the Army, and Mike Dombeck, who is your chief of the Forest Service. And mostly we came here to say thanks.

I got to fly over at least some of the fires, and it was early morning, and I know they haven't reared their ugly heads yet, but I have some sense of what you're doing. I also got to see some places where you had succeeded in changing the course of the fire and limiting its reach, and I appreciate that very much. I know that Mother Nature will burn in our forests one way or the other, but it matters how it happens. It matters that people don't die. It matters that property is saved. It matters that precious and irreplaceable things are saved. And you're doing that.

I know a lot of the firefighters have been working here for weeks and weeks, and probably for months. Given all the problems we've had with wildfires this summer, you probably know

we've already lost 4 million acres, which is about twice the 10-year average, before this. So we're in for a rough summer, and I know how hard it is on you.

I'd also like to say a special word of appreciation to the people from the military who have come up from Fort Hood to teach you that one loud word in the English language. [Laughter] And I heard there are some marines here, too, somewhere, doing some work in this area, and I thank them. But obviously, I'm especially proud of this group from Fort Hood because their leader, Lieutenant Colonel Dell Williams, was my Army military aide before he got a real job with you guys. I told him today I was glad to see him having to do real work after having that White House job for a good while. But it didn't do him any permanent harm.

So I thank you for your service. And I thank you for the work you're doing together. We're going to release today about \$150 million in emergency funds to help continue to fight the fire and to help restore the area afterward. And I hope that restoration work will also lead to some jobs for the people in this area who have been disadvantaged by this fire.

And I have asked the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to undertake an intensive 90-day study and report back to me about what can be done to minimize the impact of wildfires like this, because this thing was pretty well—thanks to most of you who have been doing this for years—this whole issue was much more in hand over the last 10 years. And this has been a difficult year. And most of the people I talk to think that the next 2 or 3 years could also be difficult years. So we want to do whatever we can to make sure that we take care of the people, as well as the natural resource.

But the main thing I did—I just wanted to get in the plane this morning and fly here and say thanks. I know this is hard, and I know a lot of you are a long way from home. I know some of you have to get, almost, permission to go back to where you come from just so you can pay the bills and keep them from turning off the water and the electricity.

But I want you to know that your fellow Americans appreciate it. These fires have been very well publicized, and the American people know how they're being fought and who is fighting them. And you need to know that we're proud of you, and we're grateful to you.

I know there was a terrible fatality, and there is a funeral today, and our prayers are with the family of the man who lost his life. This

is hard, and I know it. And the main thing I wanted to do was just hop on Air Force One this morning at 6 o'clock so I could come over here and say thanks. You've done a good thing for your country and a good thing for your fellow Americans.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:55 a.m. in the Fire Incident Command Post in Payette National Forest. In his remarks, he referred to Scott Vail, incident commander, National Interagency Incident Management System Team One, who presented the President with a firefighter's axe; and Dave Alexander, forest supervisor, Payette National Forest.

Statement on the Decline in Teen Birth Rates

August 8, 2000

I am very encouraged by new data released today by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showing that teen birth rates in the United States have reached their lowest level since record keeping began 60 years ago. These preliminary data for 1999 show that birth rates among 15- to 19-year-olds dropped 3 percent from the previous year and 20 percent from the most recent peak in 1991.

This new information confirms that we continue to make impressive strides in addressing one of the most important social problems facing our Nation. By enacting welfare reform in 1996, taking executive action to require young mothers to stay in school or lose welfare payments, cracking down on child support enforcement, and launching a national campaign to prevent teen pregnancy, the Clinton-Gore administration has sent a clear message to young women and young men alike: Don't get pregnant or father a child until you are ready to take on the responsibility of parenthood. Working in partnership with States, communities, families, religious leaders, the media, and teens themselves, we have promoted innovative teen preg-

nancy prevention strategies that have contributed to the historic progress we witness today.

These encouraging trends cut across both younger and older teens, married and unmarried teens, all States, and all racial and ethnic groups. The sharpest decline last year was a 6 percent drop in the birth rate for American Indian teenagers. And since 1991, the African-American teen birth rate has decreased by 30 percent. Together, we are helping more young people make responsible choices and delay parenting until they are financially and emotionally ready.

However, we still have much to do, and I urge all sectors of society to continue their efforts to reduce teen pregnancy even further. To build on our progress in breaking the cycle of dependency, I call on Congress to enact my budget initiative to provide \$25 million to support "second-chance homes." These adult-supervised, supportive living arrangements for teen parents who cannot live at home offer parenting skills, job counseling, education, and other referrals that help reduce repeat pregnancies and improve the prospects for young mothers and their children.