

The Secretary of State is authorized and directed to report this determination to the Congress and to publish it in the *Federal Register*.

**William J. Clinton**

NOTE: This memorandum was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on July 2.

### **Remarks on Steps To Remove the American Bald Eagle From the Endangered Species List**

*July 2, 1999*

Thank you very much. I have to tell you I was very moved by that. Let's give him another hand. And all these young people, I thank them. [*Applause*]

Thank you, Levar. Thank you, members of the Earth Conservation Corps. I'd like to thank all the adults and sponsors who are here with them today, and one strong supporter of this program that is not here, my good friend Ethel Kennedy. I thank her and all of you for what you have done to give these young people a chance to contribute to the conservation of their community and to earn some money to go on with their education.

I'd like to thank Secretary Babbitt for his outstanding leadership in this regard. He has been a wonderful, wonderful steward of our Nation's fish and wildlife and natural resources over these last 6½ years, and I'm grateful to him.

I'd like to thank George Frampton, who works on these issues for us here in the White House; Jody Millar, the recovery coordinator for the Fish and Wildlife Service. I'd like to recognize in her absence Jamie Clark, the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, who I believe is absent because she's about to have a baby, which is a good way to support species preservation. [*Laughter*]

I'd like to thank Al Cecere and the great eagle, Challenger, who are here. They look very good today together, and I thank them for coming.

This is a special day for us to be having this announcement, because we're about to enter the weekend to commemorate the very last Independence Day of this century.

Yesterday Hillary and I joined a number of people at our National Archives to celebrate this Fourth of July with a renewed effort to give a special gift to America in the new millennium—the preservation of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

Today we honor the living symbol of our democracy, the American bald eagle. It was, in fact, on July 4th, 1776, the very day the Declaration of Independence was signed, that our Founders first considered the question of a fitting emblem for our Nation. Believe it or not, Ben Franklin wanted our national symbol to be a turkey. The press would be having a field day with that to the present day, wouldn't they? [*Laughter*]

Fortunately, in this case, Mr. Franklin, who had a lot of good ideas, had this referred to committee. [*Laughter*] Three committees, in fact, and finally, 6 years later, the Continental Congress approved a design for the Great Seal of the United States, a proud bald eagle—wings stretched wide, an olive branch in one claw, 13 arrows in the other. A “free spirit,” said Thomas Jefferson, “high-soaring and courageous.”

Yet, years later, even as its likeness was known world over and the very symbol of our might and our independence, here in America, the eagle struggled barely to survive. At our Nation's founding, as many as half a million bald eagles soared the skies in North America. Two hundred years later only a few hundred breeding pairs remained in the lower 48 States. Our majestic eagle was slipping toward extinction. You just heard Levar's story about Washington, DC, and the Anacostia.

But the American people decided to do something about it. First, we banned the pesticide DDT which had poisoned the eagles' fragile eggs. The naysayers said if we did so, it would wreck the economy. And, as we had seen before then, and time and again since, the people who say improving the environment will wreck the economy are wrong. We've done reasonably well with the economy while we brought the bald eagle back.

But banning DDT was only the first step. People all across our Nation banded together to guard nest sites; to nurse injured birds, like our friend Challenger, here, back to