

mean, I had lost, and no one had ever been elected, defeated, and reelected again.

I wouldn't be here today if this meeting turned out that way, in the Delta. I'm telling you, my whole life since then was riding on the outcome of what these 85 people in this barbecue joint were going to do.

Wilbur is smiling. He knows all this. I don't know if I can tell this story. And you could feel the tone of the meeting go cold. And all of a sudden, this guy stands up in the back, named John Lee Wilson, who was the mayor of a little town called Haines, Arkansas—150 people. He's not alive anymore. I'd give the world and all if he were here today. John Lee was in jeans and a white T-shirt. He wasn't a lawyer. He weighed about 300 pounds, on his light days. [Laughter] He had arms bigger around than my neck. And he said, the young lawyer might have had a point, but all he knew about this whole deal was that before I became Governor the first time, sewage was running open in the streets of Haines and the children were sick. And after I had served, they weren't sick anymore.

And he said, "If we don't stick with people who stick with us, what kind of people will we be?" He said, "Governor Clinton may be going down, but I'd rather go down with him than run off from him." And they all—and the room changed again. And the Delta stayed with me, and the rest is history.

I owe you, and I owe the memory of John Lee Wilson, whom I revered and loved and remember to this day. And I'll do my best to be faithful.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3 p.m. in the Civic Auditorium at Mid-South Community College. In his remarks, he referred to student Sandra Eason O'Sullivan, who introduced the President, Glen Fenter, president, and Alex Coulter, board of trustees chair, Mid-South Community College; Mayor William H. Johnson of West Memphis; Crittenden County Judge Brian Williams; State Representatives Steve Jones, Marvin Steele, and Bobby L. Glover; State Senator Kevin Smith; Lt. Gov. Winthrop P. Rockefeller of Arkansas; Carl Whillock, former president, Arkansas State University; Wilbur Peer, Associate Administrator, Rural Business-Cooperative Service, Department of Agriculture; and John Gammon and N.S. (Ness) Sechrest, long-time friends of the President. This

item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

## **Memorandum on the Arkansas Delta Circuit Rider Pilot Project**

*December 10, 1999*

*Memorandum for the Secretary of Agriculture, the Attorney General, the Secretary of Commerce, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Education, the Secretary of Energy, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, the Secretary of the Interior, the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Transportation, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Administrator of the Small Business Administration*

*Subject: Arkansas Delta Circuit Rider Pilot Project*

The Delta region of the United States is rich in historical, archeological, geological, natural, and cultural assets. The Delta region also has tremendous human capital in the people who live there and hold strong hopes for the future. The Delta's human, natural, and cultural resources have the potential to contribute significantly to the region's future.

Despite great progress in a wide range of economic and social areas, the Delta region, particularly the Delta communities of Arkansas, still often lag behind the rest of the country. Substandard housing, inadequate transportation systems, limited access to capital, low educational levels, and lack of adequate health care have hindered progress and caused hardship. While nationwide unemployment levels have fallen during my Administration, the Arkansas Delta communities still suffer from disproportionately high unemployment. Furthermore, in the Delta counties of Arkansas, only 55 percent of the adult population has a high school diploma.

While Governor of Arkansas, I chaired the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission. In 1990, the Commission submitted an action plan to address the economic development needs of the region. This action plan

has served as a guidepost during my Administration for creating further opportunities for investment in the region.

During my Administration, we have continued to provide resources to the entire Delta region and to the Delta communities of Arkansas to promote job creation, improve transportation and housing, and address environmental needs. In 1998, the Department of Transportation organized a meeting with local Delta leaders at which ten Federal agencies pledged to work together to coordinate a Government-wide review and assessment of the Delta; their review resulted in the recent publication of *The Mississippi Delta: Beyond 2000 (Interim Report)*. My Administration has designated two rural Enterprise Zones (EZ) and seven Enterprise Communities (EC) in the Delta, including two ECs in Arkansas that receive assistance from the Department of Agriculture (USDA)—one in Mississippi County and one in East Central Arkansas. As part of the EZ/EC program, these communities have engaged in extensive community planning and have gained a number of tax incentives to promote investment opportunities. The USDA provides significant resources to the Delta in grants and loans through its rural housing and business programs. The Department of Commerce has provided over \$100 million to the Delta from 1993 to mid-1999. Approximately 1100 low-income Arkansas homes were weatherized last year through Department of Energy funding. The Department of the Interior is assisting in the development of the Arkansas Delta Heritage Trail, a new quasi-State park composed of a 78-mile rail corridor that traverses some of the richest natural and cultural resources of the State. The Department of Transportation has provided approximately \$140 million to complete highway reconstruction, surfacing, widening, and other projects in Delta counties. However, Federal funding alone is not sufficient to revitalize the Delta region. As part of my July 1999 “New Markets” trip to Clarksdale, Mississippi, I announced nearly \$15 million in new private investments in the Enterprise Corporation for the Delta, a non-profit organization that uses Federal grants to leverage private investment in business.

Other Federal efforts seek to empower the Delta communities by providing information and assistance directly in the communities where they are needed. The USDA and the Environmental Protection Agency provide significant on-the-ground technical assistance to rural communities nationwide through circuit rider programs for both drinking water and wastewater. The Small Business Administration (SBA) also regularly engages in active outreach activities in the Arkansas Delta Region, where SBA staff meet with small business entrepreneurs in the field. These programs have been very successful in assisting communities and individuals, but have been limited in the number of agencies that participate and the topics that are covered.

To build on the success of these circuit rider programs and to address the great need expressed by Delta communities for technical assistance, I am expanding my Administration’s efforts in Arkansas’ Delta communities by creating a pilot Arkansas Delta Circuit Rider program to provide, for the first time, a concentrated, coordinated effort by 14 Federal agencies to address needs in areas such as housing, economic development, transportation, environment, tourism, cultural resources, infrastructure technology, education, and health care. The Arkansas Delta Circuit Rider program will bring the expertise and resources of the Federal Government directly to communities that need assistance by providing a more integrated Federal response across several agencies and reaching out to the communities to search for solutions. Accordingly, I direct each of you to work with the USDA as lead agency in the development of a pilot program to be based on a circuit rider concept with the goals of helping Delta communities (1) systematically identify needs and priorities in economic and community development; (2) draft strategic plans to leverage both private and public resources for such development; and (3) implement their plans. This initiative should forge a coalition of Federal, State, local, private business, nonprofit, and other interested parties in meeting the unique needs of each community. The investment of resources by each agency will vary depending on the specific needs of each community

but should include providing information; conducting traveling seminars; deploying staff; and staffing regional offices.

I further direct you to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) no later than March 1, 2000, with the specifics of the pilot program, including an implementation framework and schedule; mechanisms to assemble the Circuit Rider team after receiving a community's request for assistance; and details of the types of assistance to be provided. This MOU should establish the Arkansas Delta communities Circuit Rider pilot program for a minimum period of 5 years in order to assist communities in addressing both long-term and short-term needs.

As we look to the new millennium, we should make every effort to ensure that no areas of this country are left behind. This pilot project, taken together and in full coordination with the other resources devoted to community and economic development, will help to build capacity in the communities of the Arkansas Delta and will empower the area's residents to achieve their full potential.

**William J. Clinton**

NOTE: This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

### **Remarks at the Earle High School Dedication Ceremony in Earle, Arkansas**

*December 10, 1999*

Thank you very much. Wow! Well, this is a wonderful end to one of the best days I've had in a long, long time. We started out this morning in Little Rock, and I spoke at the annual Chamber of Commerce banquet. I talked to them about the library and the public policy center I wanted to build not just for Little Rock but for our entire State. And then I went to West Memphis, to the community college, which I helped to establish, where the enrollment, by the way, has increased by tenfold since I've been President. I'm very proud of them, and I know all of you are.

And I told them that I was going to support the legislation sponsored by Senator Lincoln and Congressman Berry, with \$110 million

for a Delta commission to invest in the economic future of the Mississippi Delta next year.

Then I got a little barbecue. [*Laughter*] And sidled up here to Earle. Thank you, Secretary Riley, for making this journey with me and the journey of the last 22 years now. Thank you, Secretary Slater, for coming out of the Arkansas Delta and going all the way to become Secretary of Transportation.

I'm not sure you heard the superintendent when he said this, but Secretary Slater's chief of staff and a longtime supporter of mine is a wonderful attorney named Jerry Malone, who graduated from Earle High School. Jerry, stand up. Where are you? There you go.

I want to thank my friend of 30 years, the Lieutenant Governor, Rockefeller, for making this trip with us today. I thank my longtime friends County Judge Brian Williams and Mayor Sherman Smith. We also have the head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Bill Ferris, who is from the other side of the Mississippi River in Mississippi, here with us today. I thank him for coming.

And I want to introduce the vice president and foundation executive of MCI, Caleb Schutz, who has decided to help this school—I'll explain more about why later, but thank you very much. I'd like to thank all the people from the Arkansas Department of Education who are here, Simon and others. Thank you, Principal Nicks and members of the school board. And thank you, Jimmi Lampley; you were terrific.

I have to tell you, when I met President Kennedy in 1963, I didn't give him a library. [*Laughter*] I didn't even give him one of my Trojan band jackets. [*Laughter*] Now I've got this football jacket, making me an honorary Bulldog.

You won't believe this, but when we were down in West Memphis, we had this meeting about how we could train people in the Delta that don't have jobs to get some of these real good jobs in transportation. There are 80,000 jobs driving trucks and working in terminals, for example, vacant today.

So Secretary Slater was working on that, and he invited the man who runs the USA truckline from Fort Smith, but they train all their truck drivers here in West Memphis.