

Today, more than three in five older Americans lack affordable and dependable prescription drug coverage. The burden is getting worse. According to Families USA, the price of prescription drugs most often used by seniors has risen at double the rate of inflation for 6 years in a row now.

Two groups in particular bear a tremendous burden, rural Americans and women. As Senator Daschle knows so well, people in rural areas are much less likely to secure prescription drug coverage. According to a study released today by the Older Women's League, almost 8 out of 10 women on Medicare use prescription drugs regularly, and most of them pay for these medications out of pocket. In total, women spend 13 percent more than men do for prescription drugs, in spite of the fact that on average, their incomes are 40 percent lower.

America's seniors, men and women, deserve better. No one should be forced to take a bus trip to Canada to get medicines made in the U.S. at a lower price. We desperately need a comprehensive plan to provide a prescription drug benefit that is optional, affordable, accessible to all, based on competition, not price controls, to boost seniors' bargaining power to get the best possible price, and one that addresses the devastating burden of catastrophic coverage.

We will have in our budget, especially with the improved economy, the funds to deal with catastrophic coverage as well, and we absolutely should do that.

The budget I have presented to Congress will continue our efforts to pay down the debt and pay it off by 2013, will be able to provide protection against catastrophic costs, and will provide voluntary prescription drug coverage to all Americans.

Adding the voluntary prescription drug coverage to Medicare is the smart and the right thing to do. I will say this one more time. We would never think of creating Medicare today without it, and it is high time we fixed it.

Now, let me say without getting into a fight over the legislation that's been proposed, I don't think it's enough to stop at \$15,000 income limit to give help on prescription drugs. Half the people who need the help fall within the income limits of \$15,000 to \$50,000. I

don't think we should write a plan that basically is designed to please the people who are selling the drugs instead of the people who are buying the drugs.

And as long as we are trying to make the price competition system work and give bargaining power to seniors, we ought to do this right and cover the people who need it. This is not about winning a political fight. It's about giving people a chance to fight for a good long life.

And I want to introduce now Betty Dizik, someone who know firsthand the enormous burdens of prescription drugs. She's had to make some very hard choices in order to afford the drugs that she desperately needs, and she is exhibit A for why we are all here today.

Betty, come on up here and tell us your story. Give her a hand. [*Applause*]

Thank you.

[*At this point, Ms. Dizik, Senator Thomas A. Daschle, and Representative Richard A. Gephardt made brief remarks.*]

**The President.** Thanks to Congressman Gephardt's consideration, none of you will have to spend your hard-earned money to buy prescription drugs to treat your cold that you got from being flooded out here. [*Laughter*] But let me thank you, Betty, thank you, Secretary Shalala, and thank all the Members of Congress. Look at our legislation. We need some Republican support. This is a good bill. It will make a big difference.

Thank you, and bless you all. Get in here before you get wet.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:40 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Medicare recipient Betty Dizik.

### **Remarks to the National Conference on Building Prosperity in the Delta in Arlington, Virginia**

*May 10, 2000*

Thank you very much. Thank you. Good afternoon, and welcome. Thank you for coming here to meet. I know that we're having a reception over at the White House later this evening; I hope all of you will come, and I look forward to seeing you all there, as well.

I want to begin by thanking Conn Davis for his introduction. He's an impressive young man. In addition to going to Boys Nation, you might be interested to know that he's a football standout and Eagle Scout, and from my point of view, most important, he plays trombone in his school's jazz band. [Laughter]

I also want to thank all the members of our administration who have been part of this. And I can't mention them all, but I especially should note, of course, Secretary Slater is from the Delta, from Lee County, in Arkansas; Bill Ferris, the head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, from Mississippi; our FCC Chairman, Bill Kennard; our Office of Personnel Management Director, Janice Lachance, is here. I thank all of them and the others who are helping me with the Delta, as well as all the people on the White House staff who have worked so hard on this, Lynn Cutler, Lisa Kountoupes, and many others.

Governor Musgrove, we're glad to see you here. Thank you for coming, sir. And we appreciate your leadership, and we're glad to see you down there. I thank Mayor Herenton from Memphis. You know, when I was a boy, we used to go over to the Delta, and everybody who lived east of Little Rock would say that they were not from Arkansas. They lived in the State of Delta, and Memphis was its capital. So I'm glad to see you here, sir. Thank you very much.

I want to thank my Arkansas Congressman from the Delta, Marion Berry. I think he's still here. And if any of you had any idea how many hours he and Senator Blanche Lambert Lincoln have spent literally haranguing me about the entire Delta, not just Arkansas, you would all supplement their salaries generously. They have been wonderful. I want to thank Marion Berry and Blanche Lincoln for what they have done.

Lieutenant Governor Wood, we're glad to have you here. My old friend Jess White, we've been working on these issues for more than 15 years together. And I'd like to say a special word of appreciation to a former Delta Congressman, Mike Espy, who's here—I think, plainly, one of the two or three best Agriculture Secretaries this country has

ever had. And I really thank you very much for being here.

I won't go into this in great detail today, but I'm going to have in the next few months some further proposals on agriculture, which I think are important. We should not forget the agriculture component of the Delta's future and the fact that as I warned when it passed, the last farm bill we passed basically is bad for family farmers except when prices are high. When prices are high, everybody's getting along all right. We need to do better in the next farm bill and with agricultural policy to recognize the unique characteristics of the family farm structure that, thank goodness, is still alive in most of the Delta, and we need to do what we can to preserve it.

So I thank you, Mike Espy. And all the farmers that are here, I thank you, and I hope that we will remember that.

Finally, just by way of introduction, I would like to say a special word of appreciation to all of the business leaders who are here, large and small. And if I might, I'd like to say one special word of appreciation to Wayne Leonard and the folks at Entergy. They have been really devoted to this whole idea of our new market strategy and rebuilding the Delta. And I've had I don't know how many people who have told me in the last couple of months that they've had meetings with Wayne or various Entergy executives who have said, "Well, here's what our company's into. Now, let's get past that and let me talk to you about what I really want to talk to you about, which is rebuilding the Delta."

So, for all of you in the private sector that have that kind of commitment—obviously, most of this will be done with and through you, and I thank you all very, very much.

Those of you whom I have had the privilege to know in Arkansas over the last several decades, some of you all my life—there's my State Senator out there, Bud Canada; thank you for being here—and those of you with whom I worked on the Delta Development Commission or on the Southern Growth Policies Board know that this is more than a political issue to me, even more than a public policy problem. I've been interested in the people and the problems and the promise of the Delta for 40 years.

You know, I loved music when I was a child. I was 15 years old when I first went to New Orleans. I still remember everything I did. The first place I ever went where hamburgers cost more than a dollar—I was horrified. [Laughter] I still remember going to Preservation Hall and sitting there as a 15-year-old boy for 4 or 5 hours listening to these old guys play music that I would kill to be able to play like. I still remember everything about it. I still remember how the Delta looked and the bends in the river.

And I still remember when I was in college—I used to take several days off when I was in college, either during Christmas or summer vacation, just to drive over to the Delta and wander around—just me, alone. I'd get up on the levee and ride up and down and go into these little old towns along the Delta and talk to people, just trying to get a sense of the pulse of the place.

And I still remember some of the things that weren't very good, too. I remember the—it was in the Delta that I last saw segregated restrooms marked out. And I remember when we made our campaign comeback in 1982, and I ran for Governor with the help of Rodney Slater and my friend Carroll Willis, who may be here today, two sons of the Delta. We told the people of the Delta we were never coming to a segregated meeting in the Mississippi Delta again, and we were going to have to—it was about more than an election—we were going to turn this region around, and we were going to have to do it together. And a lot of people thought I was nuts. And within 30 days, everybody thought I was a genius.

And we've all been working together over there ever since, with some ups and downs and twists and turns. But I think that I have been privileged to be a part of the last 20 years of the history of the Delta. And I loved the opportunity I had to do this Delta commission, because I got to learn a lot about southern Illinois, for example, which is south of Richmond. A lot of people don't know that. I learned a lot about western Kentucky and southeastern Missouri, where Conn is from, and places that I otherwise might never have been able to become acquainted with.

And I guess, more than anything else, what I want to say is that the pledge we made

a decade ago when we issued the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission report is still what we ought to be working on, to make the people of the Delta full partners in America's future. That's why we're here today. The report that I have just been given is, in a way, a rededication to our continuing mission.

I guess what I want you to know more than anything else is, we're making progress, and we now know more than we did when we started about how to do better much more quickly. I want you to know that the Federal Government will do our part, and I will personally work on these issues until the day I leave office, and then after I do, for the rest of my life. This is a big personal issue with me, as I know it is with the Vice President and all of our people in our administration who come from this region.

Now, I want to begin with special thanks on the substance of this to Secretary Slater. We got 24 agencies together to help Secretary Slater run our Federal task force on the Delta, and we've put together the report that he has just given me. It's given us a chance to look back a decade and to look forward to the challenges and opportunities of the decade ahead.

Since 1990, a great deal has been done. You know that in the Nation, we have the longest economic expansion in history and the lowest unemployment rate since January of 1970, over 21 million new jobs. But the policies we put in place I think had a special impact in the Delta, especially the expansion of the earned-income tax credit and the efforts we've made that you heard Conn talk about to bring computers and access to the Internet to our schools and other public facilities throughout the Delta.

Conn's example is pretty instructive. In 1995 his school district in East Prairie had 24 computers. We helped them get 350 more at a 70 percent discount. Now, thanks to the E-rate program that the FCC promulgated, that Vice President Gore did so much to fight for, there's a \$2 billion subsidy that goes out to the poorest school districts across America every year which enables people to make the most of these computers.

In 1994, when we started this program—I'm sure the Vice President went over this—

but we had only 3 percent of our classrooms and 16 percent of our schools connected. This year we have over 95 percent of our schools, including 90 percent of the poorest schools in America, connected to the Internet, and almost three-quarters of our classrooms. And this will make a big difference, both educationally and economically, in the Delta in the years ahead.

Over the last 7 years, we've had over \$2 billion in transportation improvements, from ports to highways to airports; over \$6 billion in job training, welfare-to-work, and youth opportunity initiatives; and again, \$250 million just to connect the schools that were poor in the Delta to the Internet; more than \$10 million in direct investment in the enterprise zones and the empowerment communities, a program, again, which the Vice President has led, which has leveraged 10 times that much from private resources.

I have done what I could to do this in a bipartisan or even a nonpartisan manner. And I know Rodney said the Speaker of the House was coming to the White House tonight, to the reception. If he is there, I want every one of you to go up and shake his hand and thank him for working with me to pass the new markets legislation in Congress. I'll say more about that in a minute, but I think that is the biggest single thing we could do to help the Delta economy in a quick way. And I will say more about it, but I want you to thank him for that.

Just the tours we have taken in the Delta have already led to more resources in places like Hermitage, Arkansas, at the tomato cooperative, and Clarksdale, Mississippi. And the Private Sector Enterprise Corporation of the Delta has created more than 5,200 jobs and helped support more than 600 local businesses.

Since the 1990 Delta report, more than 10,000 Delta residents got phone service for the first time. It's hard to talk about the Internet if you don't have a telephone line. And lest you get too discouraged, let me tell you what a big problem this still is in other places, in physically remote areas. I was at the Navajo Reservation in Shiprock, New Mexico, which is in northern New Mexico near the Colorado and Utah borders, where the unemployment rate is 58 percent, and

the percentage of people without telephones is 70 percent. I was introduced by a young woman like Conn—a little younger than you—a brilliant young girl, a Native American girl, who won a contest and got a beautiful computer. And she couldn't log on to the Internet because she had to take the computer home to a home without a telephone line.

So this is a big deal, the fact that 10,000 more Delta residents have gotten telephone service. The Delta unemployment rate has gone from 7.5 percent when I took office to 5.1 percent in February. In Mississippi, the Delta counties have created jobs at a rate 13 times greater than the national average, which is saying something.

But unemployment is still above the national average. Wages and homeownership are still below the national average. Poverty and infant mortality have gone down but are still too high. And we know that the statistics don't tell the whole story. There are still towns without proper sewage systems and children sick from pollution and malnutrition. There are still millions of Americans seeking to live their dreams without a way to do it in the Delta.

I'm here because it's a big personal issue with me, but I also am here as President because it's in our national interest to do something about this. I've said this over and over again, but I want you to remember this. One of the most significant debates we have here in Washington—and one of the things, by the way, that as American citizens you'll be called upon to decide in the coming election—is, how we can continue this overall economic expansion? All of us have been there when times got bad in America. And when times got bad in America, they were always worse in the Delta. When the country got hit hard, we always got hit harder.

When I served as Governor during the decade of the eighties, until the year I ran for President there was only one month—one month—in the last 10 years I was Governor when our unemployment rate was at or below the national average. So we know when times are bad, we suffer more.

On the other hand, when times are good—you've followed this in the press; there is a

big debate now. Unemployment is at 3.9 percent. Is inflation just around the corner? Should the Federal Reserve raise interest rates more? If they raise interest rates more, will it cramp credit so much that it will kill the expansion? How long can this thing go on? Is this just going to be like a laboratory animal that sooner or later just runs out of steam and keels over?

Well, we had these academic debates up here, and right underneath our noses in the Mississippi Delta, in Appalachia, in the inner cities, on the Indian reservations, there are people who could start jobs, start businesses, grow the economy with no inflation whatever. If people are unemployed or underemployed and there are new opportunities out there and you create new workers, new employers, new taxpayers, and new consumers at the same time, there is no inflation in that growth.

So every person in America ought to be interested in the Mississippi Delta. If you're making money on Wall Street today and you'd like to keep on making it and you're worried that either high interest rates or a coming recession would hurt you, you should want the Delta to do well. If you're worried about where you're going to sell your next products in Silicon Valley, you should want the Delta to do well.

This is a huge issue for the Nation because no one knows how to do this. And as I say, that will be a big debate in the elections. Are we now so prosperous we ought to go back and try what we did in 1981 and later and have a great, big tax cut and hope it works? Or should we have a smaller tax cut and keep paying the debt down and invest in our people? You know what I prefer, but I think that it's important to understand we're going to have this debate in the context of, number one, what should we do with our prosperity, and number two, how do we keep this economy going? And it's already the longest economic expansion in history.

And right there, before the eyes of every American who knows anything about this, is the Delta and every other underdeveloped area in our country. And I'm telling you, there are billions upon billions upon billions of economic growth potential that are totally noninflationary. Because of the problems

we've had in the past, it is America's promise for the future, not just yours, that we ought to be developing here.

Now on the other hand, we know that it won't happen by accident. We have to create networks and opportunities and incentives to get this done. I have asked Congress, as Secretary Slater said, to create a Delta Regional Authority with \$30 million to invest in the region's economic future. I've asked for another \$129 million in targeted assistance for the region. And I thank my Senator, Blanche Lambert Lincoln, and Congressman Marion Berry. They sponsored the regional authority bill in Congress. I thank Senator Bill Frist for his strong bipartisan support. We've got a number of bipartisan cosponsors from across the Delta, and I hope we can bring this authority to life.

And while you're here today, I hope you will ask Senator Cochran and Senator Lott, particularly, to give this thing a shove, because I think they could sort of shove it out there if they wanted to, and we need them.

I'm sure Jess White has already talked about this, but the Appalachian Regional Commission proves that these things do make a difference. They make a difference because they institutionalize concentration on a specific area and its opportunities. And it makes a difference when you've got somebody who is paid to get up every day and think about you and what you can do in an organized, focused way.

We also want to announce today new support for the Delta in three broad areas: attracting new business and economic development, investing in basic infrastructure, and building strong communities.

I know this morning the Vice President presented our new package of \$20 million in Delta economic development initiatives, loans and grants for small businesses, training, community technology centers, community financial institutions, and tourism. That's an important issue.

Let me emphasize one part of that, the community technology centers. The congressional majority took that out of my budget, and I'm going to try to get it back in. But let me tell you why it counts. The computers are great for Conn. And in the districts where they can take the computers home and the

parents can learn to E-mail the teachers, learn to use it, that's great. But most places in the Delta, we have a lot of adults who could benefit from what they could learn just by learning how to use the computers and learning what resources are available to them on the Internet. That's what these community computer centers are all about. They are designed to set up a thousand more of them and to support the few that are out there now—there's the network out there now in the country—so that all the adults in the low income places in America can go in and learn to use the Internet for their own benefit, both because they developed computer skills and to get the information off of it.

Now, this is a big deal. I'll just give you two examples of the potential, because I want all of you to start thinking about this, and I want you to help me get these community computer centers. I'll just give you two examples. One is an American example, eBay. eBay is a site on the web where you can trade things. You get on. You find out somebody's got something to sell, and you can buy it. If you've got something that you want to sell, somebody else can buy it. There are now 30,000 people making a living on eBay, not working for the company, making a living trading on eBay, and a significant percentage of them are former welfare recipients.

Now, that's an amazing thing. Why? This is a big deal. What does the Internet do that's different, that's important for the Delta? It collapses time and space, the physical isolation that you feel. Conn talked about all the wonders of smalltown life, which I share, but being physically isolated. The Internet can collapse time and space. It can bring any subject to his school. It can bring any piece of information in the Library of Congress. The whole Encyclopedia Britannica's on the net now. And the same thing is true for the economy. So that's one example.

Second example: I was in India recently, as you may remember. I went to one of the poorer states in India, Rajasthan, to a little village where the village women met me and showed me their dairy cooperative, and the local government people showed me how they were governing. And then they took me to the town's public building, which was an

old building, but inside the public building was a brand-spanking new computer.

And this lady came in with a newborn baby, and she wanted to learn how she could best take care of her child. And there was someone there to assist her, and the program was done in English and Hindi—modified in other languages when they need them, in other parts of the country. And this lady—every piece of information on the Federal and State government that they had already was on the net—everything—it was on their website there.

So she calls up the Health Department website and punches the—she clicks the mouse for “Early Childhood Care,” and a couple of pages come up with great visuals, so that if you're virtually illiterate you can still figure out what it says. She punches the printer. She gets this unbelievable information, spits right out. And this woman, in a country with a per capita income of \$450, takes home with her newborn information just as good as you could get from the best suburban medical center in this area.

Now, this is why we need the community computer centers. And I hope you will help me get them all over the Delta. And I thank the Vice President for the work he's done on that.

We also have some basic infrastructure needs. There are still communities in the Delta that don't have safe drinking water, that don't have adequate sewage systems, that basically have—their basic public health infrastructure is inadequate to support any new industrial investment of any size.

I remember when I first went to the Delta, running for Governor in '78. I'd go in these little old towns, and there was sewage open in the streets. I gave every penny of Federal money I could beg, borrow, or steal to little places that didn't have any political clout, because there was 150 people here and 250 there, to clean it up, and it changed the lives of a lot of these communities. A lot of those places are doing much better 20 years later just because we gave them basic infrastructure.

So today we're going to give \$30 million more to 19 communities like that to improve the water supply. This is going to be a big issue for the whole world for the next 50

years—you mark my words—clean water and adequate sewage, things that most of us take for granted—huge issue around the world.

Most people believe that AIDS is the biggest public health problem in the world. It is in Africa. Seventy percent of the cases are there. Malaria and TB, they're the big problems. But we still have more children every day die in poor places in the world because of dysentery and other problems—diarrhea—directly related to dehydration because they don't have safe water.

So we shouldn't forget that. So I'm making this commitment today to \$30 million more as a symbolic one, but I ask you to continue to support these initiatives as well.

This is about more than bricks and mortar. We also have to make communities strong and healthy. We also want to do more on safety. You know, I said this a couple of days ago when we got the last crime report: With crime now down 8 years in a row, we know we can lower the crime rate, but no one believes we're as safe as we ought to be. And I'm trying to put another 50,000 police officers out there. Today we're going to put some more in Helena and Greenwood, Louisiana, and I hope you will continue to support that.

We're also supporting environmental education and environmentally sound farming, helping more Delta residents to buy and build their own homes, and funding a new public/private partnership to provide regional planning support that much of the Delta has never had.

And let me just say this about the housing issue. Again, we now know things we didn't know 15 years ago. A couple of years ago I went out to California, to the Inland Empire, which is east of L.A. It's the industrial area east of L.A., San Bernardino area. And on the rail line that runs out of L.A., I met with HUD and the Energy Department and the Home Builders at this joint effort to build a low income housing project for low income working people. And the deal they made these folks was: If you'll live here, even if you have to go to Los Angeles to work, we pledge to you that we will build you a home where your power bills will be 40 percent lower, at least, than they would be in a home of this size anywhere else in California.

And what did they do? They had the basic insulation. They used these new windows that cost a little more money, but they keep out a lot more heat and cold, and they let in a lot more light. And they used light bulbs that cost about twice as much, but they last 3 or 4 times as long and, therefore, they're energy efficient. And they had solar panels that looked just like ordinary tar shingles you put on a roof. You can't tell the difference, except they're slightly wider now. And I can report to you that after a couple of years those working people—a lot of these people were working for \$25,000 a year. Their average fuel bills are 65 percent below the State average for the same square footage in California.

Now, we could build housing like that all over the Delta. It would put people to work building the houses. You would probably get the financing worked out for some of the energy conservation stuff, working with the utilities. It would enable them to manage their power load better, and it's like a huge tax cut. Can you imagine what it would be like if your power bill was two-thirds lower every month? So there are real opportunities here I think you ought to look at for economic development and improving the quality of life.

Now, we want to do more, but I need your help on three things that we're trying to do here. First, the new markets initiative, we're working with the Democrats and the Republicans in the Congress—and the Speaker has taken a big personal interest in this because he's from rural Illinois—and we're trying to take the ideas that some of the Republican House Members have who are interested in this, and ours, and put it together. But when we get all finished, whatever it's called and whatever it looks like, the bottom line is, here's what we're trying to do: We're trying to give people with money in America the same incentives, to invest in poor areas in America that they can get today, in terms of tax credits, loan guarantees, and other incentives to invest in poor areas in Latin America or Africa or Asia or anywhere else. I think it's a very important thing.

And again, I favor the foreign investment incentives. You know, we just passed through the House, and I think we're going to pass

today or tomorrow in the Senate, the Africa/Caribbean Basin Initiative. I want to be a good neighbor. I like this. But we ought to understand that our biggest markets are those that are right here before us. So I need your help in that.

The second thing is, I want you to help us pass this Delta commission legislation. I want you to talk to all the Senators and all the Representatives from all the States from the Delta. This is a totally nonpolitical deal. I don't care whose name goes on it. I don't care what happens. I just want to know that when we're not here anymore and our stewardship is over, that there is an institutional focus where somebody gets up every day and thinks about this region. And I want you to help us pass it.

Last thing I want you to help us do is to pass our educational initiatives that are necessary to turn around these schools. And I want to close with this because it's really important. You know as well as I do, if you want more outside investments, you want people to come in, you've got to be able to prove you've got good schools, that you're educating people that have good skills and that people who come in from the outside, their kids will be in good schools.

So I'm going to close with this story. I just got back from one of my education tours. And I was in Owensboro, Kentucky; which is in western Kentucky; therefore, it's in our region. So—is somebody from over there? [Applause] So I'll tell you this story. Now, in 1989 before I became President, I worked with President Bush and the Bush administration to define these national education goals. And then in 1993 we passed this program called Goals 2000 to help States and school districts meet the goals.

Then, we realized that we needed to do more, so we said—we passed through the Congress in the next couple of years, legislation that said all the States had to have standard, and they had to identify schools that were low performing and come up with strategies to turn them around. Now I'm trying to pass legislation that goes further, but let's just focus on that. And what I tried to do is to say that we ought to give States funds to help these low performing schools work, to train the teachers better, to support the

principals. We also ought to end the practice of social promotion but not call kids failures when the system fails them. So we ought to give every school district that needs it after-school, summer school programs, and all of that. And we've been working on that.

Now, here's my exhibit A for the Delta: Western Kentucky, Owensboro. In 1996 Kentucky said, okay, we're going to identify all our failing schools, and here they are, 170 of them. Within 2 years of just being identified and supported and focused on, 91 percent of those schools were off the list. Now—[applause]—no, no it gets better. So here's Owensboro, exhibit A; two-thirds of the kids in Owensboro are eligible for free or reduced lunches—not your rich, suburban school, right?—two-thirds of the kids. Now, in 4 years since they were identified, and this school—this elementary school I was in—as a school that was low performing, here's what has happened.

Four years ago there were 12 percent of the kids reading at or above grade level; today, 57 percent are. Four years ago there were 5 percent doing math at or above grade level; today, 70 percent are. Four years ago there were zero kids in this school doing science at or above grade level; today, 64 percent are. This school is now the 18th best grade school in Kentucky, even though two-thirds of the kids are at or below—are eligible for school lunches—two-thirds.

Now, here's the other thing. In Kentucky, 10 of the 20 highest performing grade schools—10 of the 20—have half or more of the kids eligible for free or reduced lunches. Race, economics, and location are not destiny if you've got a good education system and you give these kids a chance to learn.

So again I say, I need your help. Ask the Congress to help us with the new markets. Ask the Congress to help us with the Delta commission. Ask the Congress to give enough money to give every school in the country that's not performing well a chance to give their kids summer school and after-school programs, teacher training programs, the things necessary to make these schools work.

I'd give anything if when I had been Governor we knew as much about what to do in the schools, in the economy, as we now

know. And that's the last point I want to make. When I took office here, even a lot of people that helped me in '92 were not really sure that anything could get better. And if I had told you in 1992, "I want you to vote for me, and I'll get rid of this \$300-billion a year deficit, and, oh, by the way, we'll be running surpluses 3 years in a row, and when I leave office we'll pay off \$350 billion of the national debt," you would have said, "You know, he seems like a nice young fellow, but he's slightly deranged. We better send him home." [*Laughter*]

So we know now; so we don't have an excuse. We know we can make the economy better. We know that we can have schools that are very poor perform at a very high level. We know we can lower the crime rate. We know we can grow the economy and improve the environment. We know we can cut the welfare rolls in half and still support low income people who are working and trying to do right by their kids, if you give them the right child care and transportation and other support they need. It's not like we don't know we can do better now.

And I would argue that when you know you can do better, when you're not just living on hope but you've got evidence, you have a heavier responsibility. So I'm glad you're here. I want you to tell us more of what we can do. I want you to give me every chance you can to do everything I can while I'm in office. I want you to help me pass this legislation.

But when you leave here, more than anything else, I want you to believe we can do this. We can do this. This is not a wing and a prayer. This is not hope. This is evidence. We can do it. It's just a question of whether we're prepared to pay the price of time and effort and organization and passion.

Everybody loves the Delta. It's about time we all did something about it.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:20 p.m. in the Arlington Ballroom at the Crystal Gateway Marriott. In his remarks, he referred to student Conn Q. Davis, who introduced the President; Gov. David R. (Ronnie) Musgrove of Mississippi; Mayor Willie W. Herenton of Memphis, TN; Lt. Gov. Corinne Wood of Illinois; Jesse L. White, Jr., Federal cochair, Appalachian Regional Com-

mission; J. Wayne Leonard, chief executive officer, Entergy Corp.; Caroll Willis, director, community service division, Democratic National Committee; Arkansas State Senator Bud Canada; and student Myra Jodie, Steamboat Navajo Nation.

### **Statement on Congressional Action on Appropriations Legislation**

*May 10, 2000*

Today both the House and Senate subcommittees passed appropriation bills for Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education that fail to invest in the Nation's future and turn back our progress in helping opportunity and prosperity reach all corners of America. During this period of economic prosperity and budget surplus, we should seize the opportunity to improve our Nation's schools, advance the health and well-being of our citizens, and train and protect our workers. Regrettably, misguided priorities and insufficient resources in the bills adopted today have led the Congress in a different direction. Unfortunately, these actions today invest too little in our schools and demand too little from them.

The House bill shortchanges essential initiatives and fails to support our Nation's children and schools. It fails to provide sufficient funding to strengthen accountability and help turn around low performing schools, reduce class size, increase after-school opportunities, renovate aging and neglected schools, close the digital divide, improve teacher quality, and provide mentoring to help children go to and succeed in college. It hurts unemployed and working Americans by cutting training and other programs that help them find jobs and work in safe environments. The bill fails to make key investments in childcare, preschool, and other important services for poor working families. The House bill fails to support key health programs by reducing funding for mental health services, family planning services, and substance abuse programs and eliminates funding to improve access to health care for the uninsured. The bill also cut funding needed to ensure nursing home quality and strengthen health benefits administration.