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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 pregnancy 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.

Statement on Productivity Growth

August 8, 2000

Today's announcement that productivity rose at a 5.3 percent annual rate last quarter is a remarkable confirmation of the continued strength and vitality of the U.S. economy. Over the past 3 years, productivity has grown 3.3 percent annually—more than twice the growth rate of the previous two decades. Rising productivity has been the key to the combination of strong growth, rising wages, and low core inflation underlying our record economic expansion. Today's news is further evidence that our commitment to fiscal discipline, opening markets, and investing in people has helped lead to an unprecedented era of business investment, innovation, and technological advance that is providing new opportunities for millions of Americans.

This continuing productivity growth underscores the importance of maintaining the fiscal discipline that has been so crucial to this investment-led economic expansion. The majority in Congress continues to pursue a series of misguided tax breaks which, taken together, would bring America back to the era of deficits and knock us off the path of fiscal discipline that has led to this prosperity. Their approach is wrong for America. Let's work together to ensure that our strong economy will continue to grow.

Statement on Signing Legislation To Expand Women's Rights National Historical Park

August 8, 2000

I am pleased today to sign S. 1910, bipartisan legislation to expand the Women's Rights National Historical Park, in Seneca Falls and Waterloo, New York, with the addition of the home of Jane Hunt. In 1848 early supporters of women's rights, meeting at Hunt's home, resolved to convene the Nation's first women's rights convention. A century and a half later, the addition of the Hunt House to the historical park is a fitting tribute to all those who have engaged in the struggle for women's rights. With this legislation, this historic home will be purchased by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and donated to the National Park Service. Jane Hunt made a tremendous difference in the lives of American women, and this legislation will ensure that her efforts are remembered and honored in the years ahead.

NOTE: S. 1910, approved August 8, was assigned Public Law No. 106–258.

Memorandum on Impacts of Wildland Fires to Rural Communities

August 8, 2000

Memorandum for the Secretary of Interior, the Secretary of Agriculture

Subject: Impacts of Wildland Fires to Rural Communities

We are a little over halfway through the 2000 fire season and all indications are that it will be the worst season in 50 years. As of August 7, 2000, 63,623 wildland fires have so far this year burned more than 4 million acres at a cost of $500 million in firefighting expenses. There are up to 300 new fires every day, and Federal, State, and local agencies are managing 50 fires over 1,000 acres in size. The current weather conditions following the prolonged drought in much of the west are drying out millions of acres of forest and rangeland, and the National Weather Service's near-term forecast calls for continued hot, dry conditions with the probability of additional lightning-caused fires.

Over the last several years, the U.S. Forest Service and the Department of the Interior have increased their efforts to protect communities, watersheds, and threatened species from the risk of fire, including reducing hazardous fuels on at-risk public and private lands.

In the western National Forests alone, there are more than 56 million acres at risk. Since 1994 when the Forest Service treated approximately 385,000 acres across the United States, the Department of Agriculture has increased annual hazardous fuels treatments almost four-fold. Last year, almost 2 million acres were treated. But there is much more to be done. You are currently working to develop a long-term strategy to expand Federal efforts to protect communities in the urban-wildland interface and the underlying ecology of these areas. This long-term plan will set targeted funding priorities to reduce fire risk in fire-dependent ecosystems throughout the country. The plan will focus on protecting communities, watersheds, and species and is a critical component of any fire management program.

To help address this issue in the near term, today I am directing you to report back to me in 30 days with recommendations on actions that may be taken to respond to this year's fires; to reduce the impacts of these wildland fires on rural communities; and to ensure sufficient firefighting resources in the future. First, the report should consider potential responses to this year's fires, including:

- A short-term plan for rehabilitation of fire-damaged ecosystems, including means to minimize the introduction of invasive species, reduce threats to water quality, and protect endangered species. The plan should also address the role of natural restoration processes in these efforts.
- An assessment of the economic impacts in affected areas.

Second, the report should focus on the short-term actions that Federal agencies, in cooperation with States and local communities, can take to reduce immediate hazards to other communities in the wildland-urban interface. As part of this effort, the report will examine how the Federal Government, in cooperation with State and tribal governments, and local communities, will prepare for anticipated extreme fire conditions in the future, by analyzing fire management planning and firefighter personnel and resources.

You should use this information to review firefighting and prevention needs and work with the Office of Management and Budget to determine whether there are additional FY 2001 funding needs so that the Administration may request, and the Congress may provide, additional resources before the end of the fiscal year.

William J. Clinton

Remarks on Presenting the Presidential Medal of Freedom

August 9, 2000

The President. Thank you. Good afternoon. Welcome to the White House. I want to join Hillary in welcoming all those who have been acknowledged and all the other