

person, one conscience, one soul at a time. We can. We can all make a difference.

I hope you can tell that I'm an optimistic fellow, and I'm optimistic—and rightly so—because I'm the President of the greatest nation on the face of the Earth, full of the most decent and compassionate people. Thank you for helping Bill.

May God bless you, and may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:45 a.m. in the Regency Room at the Regency Club. In his remarks, he referred to Cindy Simon, wife of candidate Bill Simon; and David H. Murdock, chairman and chief executive officer, Dole Food Company, Inc.

The President's Radio Address

August 24, 2002

Good morning. While visiting the west coast this week, I saw the destructive effects of one of the worst wildfire seasons in history. The catastrophic blazes we have seen this summer, and which I saw firsthand in Oregon, threaten the safety of forest communities and firefighters, destroy homes, businesses, farms and critical wildlife habitat, and leave behind long-lasting environmental damage. I join all Americans in thanking the brave firefighters for their service.

As we work to put out the fires and bring relief to their victims, we also have a responsibility to prevent the devastation that can be caused by future fires. For too long, America's fire prevention strategy has been shortsighted. Forest policies have not focused on thinning, the clearing of the forest floor of built-up brush and densely packed trees that create the fuel for extremely large fires like those experienced this year.

This hands-off approach to forest management has been devastating to our environment, and it can take more than a century for forests to recover from these fires. One forest ranger said of this year's fire season, "In the next few years to come, it won't be the exception; it will be the norm because of how we have managed our forests."

We need a different approach. People who fight fires and study forests agree that we

must strengthen the health of our forests through a combination of thinning and quickly restoring areas damaged by fires. By actively managing our forests in this way, we'll help our environment by reducing the number of acres of forest land that catastrophic fires burn each year.

On Thursday, I announced important new steps to restore the health of America's forests and help prevent the kind of devastating fires we have seen this year. We will guard against excessive redtape and endless litigation that stand in the way of sensible forest management decisions.

I have directed Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman and Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton to reduce bureaucracy and speed up the process of thinning on public lands. And I urge Congress to pass legislation that will ensure that vital forest restoration projects are not tied up in courts forever. Some Members of Congress have already gotten important forest reform passed for their States because they know it is the fastest and most effective way to get forests thinned. We should pass this important reform to help protect all of America's forests.

My administration will work with Congress to deliver on the unfulfilled promises of the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan. The plan was crafted to protect wildlife habitat and recreational areas, while employing more than 100,000 people through sustainable timber harvesting in a small portion of the forests. My proposals will reduce the threat of wildfires that have destroyed people's homes and livelihoods. They will restore the health of America's forests, provide greater safety to our citizens, and protect our environment for generations to come.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9:35 a.m. on August 21 at the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on August 24. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 23 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks to the Community in Las Cruces, New Mexico

August 24, 2002

The President. Thank you all. Please be seated. It's great to come to a place where you can see cowboy hats and belt buckles, boots. Thanks for letting me across the State line. [*Laughter*] I was just raised right around the corner, in Midland, Texas. So I kind of consider Las Cruces to be kind of home.

But thank you all for greeting me today, and thanks for the warm welcome. It is my honor to be here in this beautiful State, in this dynamic city, to talk about the three great goals we have for this country—three great goals: First is to win the war on terror; second is to make sure that we protect our homeland; and third is to assure you that we will not rest until our economy is strong. Anybody who wants to find work must be able to find work in this country. We're going to help this economy grow.

And this is a great place to talk about the strength of America. It's a great place to come to talk about the fact that, even though we've got challenges, we can overcome these challenges because we're Americans. We work hard. We have great values. We're optimistic people. There is no challenge that we can't overcome, and the people of this great part of the country understand that as well as anybody else.

I want to thank my friend the senior Senator, Pete Domenici. He's a fine, fine man. Not only is he a fine man, he is a great United States Senator. And not only is he is a great United States Senator, he loves New Mexico a lot.

And then, of course, there's the retiring Congressman, Joe Skeen, who has brought such class to the office of—that he has held. We're real proud of Joe. We're proud of his courage. We're proud of his strength. We're going to miss him in Washington, DC, but Washington, DC's loss is your gain. He and Mary love this part of the country, and he's going to have a lot of farewells. This is not his farewell speech from me, but nevertheless, it's my honor to talk in front of his constituents and tell him how much we love him and how much we care for he and Mary. Joe,

thanks for coming today. [*Applause*] They sure love you, Joe.

Jay, I want to thank you very much for inviting me and this small entourage I travel with—[*laughter*—to this very important campus. It's—New Mexico State has got a proud reputation, and you've made it even more proud, Jay. And I appreciate your service. I want to thank all the folks who helped put this event on, particularly in this beautiful facility, where I guess the Aggies tend to dominate.

I want to thank Ruben Smith, the mayor of Las Cruces, for being here. Mayor Smith, thank you for your time. Dora Dominguez, the president of the Greater Las Cruces Chamber, helped put on this event, and I'm most grateful for the Chamber members who are here. I want to thank very much Sara Misquez, who is the president of the Mesquero Apache Tribe, who is with us today. I appreciate Jesus Segura, who is the mayor of Sunland Park.

I want to thank very much a special person who met me out there at the airport, Ophelia Chaffino. She is a USA Freedom Corps volunteer. She is a foster grandparent who tutors 4th and 5th year-olds. Let me tell you why I want to bring up the—Ophelia and people like her. Because I understand, and I hope you understand, the great strength of our country is not our governments. The great strength of our country is our people. And when people—and people can make a significant difference in all kinds of ways in the communities in which they live. The fact that Ophelia wants to mentor children is a significant contribution.

Oh, you know, some may step back and say, "Changing one life isn't that much." Changing one life is a lot—a lot. And I want to thank the soldiers in the armies of compassion which exist in Las Cruces, all across New Mexico, and all across our country, for working hard to make our society a compassionate and decent place. Where are you, Ophelia? Thank you for being here. Please stand up and wave.

I appreciate so very much Ruben King-Shaw, Jr., who works for the Health and Human Services Administration, being with us today. Why don't you stand up, Ruben? I'm going to say something about you. Ruben