

Week Ending Friday, November 13, 1998

**Remarks at the Northwest Arkansas
Regional Airport Dedication
Ceremony in Highfill, Arkansas**

November 6, 1998

Thank you so much, Secretary Slater, for your support of this project and your terrific work. Thank you, Administrator Garvey, Senator Hutchinson, Congressman Hutchinson, Senator-elect Blanche Lambert-Lincoln. Now, up here in northwest Arkansas, from my point of view, she's got the best of all worlds. She's a Democrat with a Republican last name. *[Laughter]* I want you to get to know her; you'll like her a lot.

Congressman Dickey, Congressman Hammerschmidt, Mr. Green, thank you for your marvelous work here. Mr. Bowler, thank you for bringing American Eagle here. I want to thank the Springdale Band and the Fayetteville Choir. I thought they both did a superb job.

You know—I've got all these notes, but I don't really want to use them today. I was flying home today, and I have to begin by bringing you greetings from two people who were with me this morning who, for different reasons, wanted to come and couldn't. One is the First Lady, Hillary, who wanted me to tell her friends in northwest Arkansas hello and to say she wished she could be here. And the other is Senator Bumpers, who has a sinus condition and was told by his doctor not to get on the airplane, although I told him I thought it was a pretty nice plane I was trying to bring him down here in—*[laughter]*—and that we were trying to demonstrate that northwest Arkansas had a world-class airport. But he asked to be remembered to you.

I want to thank my good friend, former Chief of Staff and our Envoy to Latin America, Mack McLarty, for being here. And all of you all out here—I've been looking out in this crowd at so many people I've known for 25 years, many more—I've been sort of

reliving the last 25 years. I think I should begin by saying that in every project like this, there are always a lot of people who work on it. Rodney mentioned that many years ago, Senator Fulbright, who was my mentor, had the idea of there ought to be an airport here. I know how long Congressman Hammerschmidt has worked on this. This project started in the planning stage under the Bush administration, and we completed it. We had bipartisan support, and as Senator Hutchinson said, invoking our friend Senator McCain, we had bipartisan opposition to it as well. *[Laughter]*

And I have found that there is in any project like this a certain squeaky wheel factor; there are people that just bother you so much that even if you didn't want to do it, you'd go on and do it anyway. And I would like to pay a certain special tribute to the people who were particular squeaky wheels to me, starting with Alice Walton, who wore me out—*[laughter]*—Uvalde and Carol Lindsey, who guilt-peddled me about every campaign they'd ever worked for me in; and Dale Bumpers, who made me relive every favor he'd ever done for me for 20 years. *[Laughter]* Now, there were others as well, but I want to especially thank them.

I want to say to all of you, I'm delighted to see Helen Walton here and members of the Walton family. I, too, wish Sam were here to see this day. I thank J.B. Hunt, who talked to me about this airport. George Billingsly once said, "You remember, I gave you the first contribution you ever got in Benton County; now build that airport." *[Laughter]* I have a lot of stories about this airport. I want you to understand how high public policy is made in Washington. *[Laughter]* And we're all laughing about this, but the truth is, this is a good thing, and it needed to be done.

You know, when I was a boy growing up in Arkansas—Tim talked about how we were all raised to believe you could build a wall

around Arkansas—we thought in the beginning, for a long time, that roads would be our salvation. Forty-two years ago President Eisenhower signed the Federal Aid Highway Act into law, a bill sponsored by the Vice President's father, Albert Gore, Sr., in the United States Senate. And it did a lot of good for America and a lot of good for Arkansas. And a lot of trucking companies in this State did a lot of good with it, and a lot of poultry companies, like Tyson's and others, made the most of those roads. And then we began to see that air traffic was important as well. And Secretary Slater talked a lot about that. And I got tickled when Senator Hutchinson was talking about transporting apples from Hiwassee by railroad in the twenties. I thought to myself, I wonder if I'm the first President who has ever known how to get to Hiwassee? [*Laughter*]

But I got to thinking about that and how now we move from interstates to highways, and the people—all these people I've mentioned today, Senator Hutchinson, Senator Bumpers, Senator Pryor, certainly Congressman Hammerschmidt, and Congressman Hutchinson now, and Secretary Slater, and before him, Secretary Peña, and all the people in Northwest Arkansas and their supporters—understand today if you can't fly, you can't compete. But if you can fly, you can soar to new heights. Today in a sentence, at long last, northwest Arkansas can fly.

And this means a lot to me. When I was landing here, I called all my Secret Service detail leaders together and I said, "I want you guys to look out the window. This is where I started my political career. I've been on every one of these roads." And we were sitting here, Congressman Hammerschmidt reached over and he said, "You know, your career, the career that led you to the Presidency, really started 24 years ago last Tuesday." What he didn't say was, comma, "when I beat you like a drum up here for Congress." [*Laughter*]

But I learned a lot in that race. And ever since, driving into all the little towns and hamlets in this area, then as Governor, flying in and out of northwest Arkansas and all the airports that were up here, I have known for a long time that this could bring opportunity and empowerment, access to markets, a

boom to tourism—all of this will happen. And what I'd like to ask all of you to think about is to think of this airport—and it's not just going from here to Chicago but from here to tomorrow. I am glad to tell you that the FAA will release today a \$5 million letter of intent for continued development of this airport.

I'm glad to say that we have not abandoned our bipartisan commitment, we Arkansans, to other kinds of transportation. When the Congress passed, with the vote of every Member of Congress here present, and I signed the Transportation Equity Act this year, it will mean \$100 million more a year over the next 6 years to the State of Arkansas alone. And it, too, will do a lot of good to take us to the future.

We are committed also to modernizing the air traffic system. Our air traffic control system, with the new investments we're making in aviation service and infrastructure, will now be able to better handle the—listen to this—the 50-percent increase in global air travel we expect in just the next 7 years.

Our policy has helped our airlines and aerospace industries return to profitability. Now we're finalizing new means to promote more competition and lower fares at home. We've signed more than 60 agreements to expand air service with other nations, opening skies above as we open markets below.

We're also trying to do more to make sure those skies are safe and secure. Under the Vice President's leadership, with the joint efforts of the FAA and NASA and the airline industry, we're working to convert our air traffic control system to satellite technology, to change the way we inspect older aircraft, and most important over the long run, to combat terrorism with new equipment, new agents, new methods.

In the world of the future, we'll need great airports; we'll need wonderful airplanes; we'll need well-trained—well-trained pilots and people to maintain those airplanes. Our prosperity, more and more, will depend upon keeping the world's skies safe, secure, and open.

I've got to mention one other personal thing. I saw Lieutenant Governor Rockefeller here, and he probably has to hide it around election time, but when we were

younger men we studied in Oxford, England, together—when people typically took a boat. Now, people our age then look at me when I tell them I took 6 days to get from here to England and they think I need my head examined. We are moving around very fast now.

And the last thing I'd like to ask you to think about is where we are going and how we're going to get there. We'll have better roads; we'll have better airports; we'll have safer air travel. But to me, as I have seen all the people before me speak, the people that really did the work—all I had to do as President was to make sure my budget office didn't kill these requests and to make sure everybody I knew knew that I was personally supportive of this. But the Members of Congress and the others here present, the citizens, they did all the work. And all of you who worked on this—I saw the leaders stand up when their names were called—to me, this symbolizes America at its best: people working on a common objective, across party lines, putting people first, thinking about the future. It's a symbol of what I have tried to do in the 6 years I have been in Washington. And I learned most of what I know driving around on these backroads.

And I just want to tell all of you that I thank you for the role that you have played in helping to bring this country to the point where we not only have a surplus for the first time in 29 years but the lowest percentage of people on welfare in 29 years, the lowest unemployment in 28 years, the lowest crime rate in 25 years, the highest homeownership in history, with the smallest Government in Washington since the last time John Glenn orbited the Earth. And I am proud of that.

And what I ask you to think about is that we are—all of us—living in a smaller and smaller world, where our interdependence and our own power depends upon our constructive interdependence with our friends and neighbors beyond our borders—the borders of our region, our State, our Nation. If we're going to build a pathway to the future, we have to build it with air travel; we have to build it with the Internet; we have to build it with modern medical and scientific research; and we have to build it by giving

every child—without regard to income, race, region, or background—a world-class education.

We have to build it by recognizing that all the differences that exist in this increasingly diverse country—I know there are churches here in northwest Arkansas that now have service in Spanish on Sunday, which would have been unthinkable 24 years ago, when I first started traipsing around on these roads. All of that is a great blessing, if we decide, when we soar into the future, we're all going to take the flight together.

You built this airport together. Take it into the future together. Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:05 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to former Representative John Paul Hammerschmidt; Stan Green, chairman, and George Billingsly, member, Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport Authority; Peter Bowler, president, American Eagle Airlines; Alice Walton, chair emeritus, Northwest Arkansas Council, and her mother, Helen, widow of the late Sam Walton, founder, Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.; Uvalde Lindsey, secretary-treasurer, and his wife, Carol, president, Ozark International Consultants; J.B. Hunt, founder and senior chairman, J.B. Hunt Transport, Inc.; former Senator David H. Pryor; and Lt. Gov. Winthrop P. Rockefeller of Arkansas. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Statement on Signing the Automobile National Heritage Area Act

November 6, 1998

Today I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 3910, the "Automobile National Heritage Area Act."

In 1896, when Charles and Frank Duryea built 13 identical horseless carriages with the idea of selling automobiles for a profit, Michigan was a rural State of dirt roads, with an economy fueled by agriculture and the timber industry. Trains, canals, and rivers were America's means of transporting commerce. People in rural communities had no easy means of traveling to surrounding towns and cities. The car ended this isolation and transformed Michigan into an industrial giant and America into a moving, working, modern