

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON CENTRAL, THURS., OCT. 3, 1991

Remarks of  
Governor Bill Clinton  
Little Rock, Arkansas  
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CONTACT: Bev Lindsey

Thank you all for being here today, for your friendship and support, for giving me the opportunity to serve as your Governor for 11 years, for filling my life full of blessings beyond anything I ever deserved.

I want to thank especially Hillary and Chelsea for taking this big step in our life's journey together. Hillary, for being my wife, my friend, and my partner in our efforts to build a better future for the children and families of Arkansas and America. Chelsea, in ways she is only now coming to understand, has been our constant joy and reminder of what our public efforts are really all about: a better life for all who will work for it, a better future for the next generation.

All of you, in different ways, have brought me here today, to step beyond a life and a job I love, to make a commitment to a larger cause: Preserving the American Dream... Restoring the hopes of the forgotten middle class... Reclaiming the future for our children.

I refuse to be part of a generation that celebrates the death of communism abroad with the loss of the American Dream at home.

I refuse to be part of a generation that fails to compete in the global economy and so condemns hard-working Americans to a life of struggle without reward or security.

That is why I stand here today ... because I refuse to stand by and let our children become part of the first generation to do worse than their parents. I don't want my child or your child to be part of a country that's coming apart instead of coming together.

Over 25 years ago, I had a professor at Georgetown who taught me that America was the greatest country in history because our people believed in and acted on two simple ideas: first, that the future can be better than the present; and second, that each of us has a personal, moral responsibility to make it so.

That fundamental truth has guided my public career, and brings me here today. It is what we've devoted ourselves to here in Arkansas. I'm proud of what we've done here in Arkansas together. Proud of the work we've done to become a laboratory of democracy and innovation. And proud that we've done it without giving up the things we cherish and honor most about our way of life. Solid, middle-class values of work, faith, family, individual responsibility, and community.

As I've traveled across our state, I've found that everything we believe in, everything we've fought for, is threatened by an administration that refuses to take care of our own, has turned its back on the middle class, and is afraid to change while the world is changing.

The historic events in the Soviet Union in recent months teach us an important lesson: National security begins at home. For the Soviet Empire never lost to us on the field of battle. Their system rotted from the inside out, from economic, political and spiritual failure.

To be sure, the collapse of communism requires a new national security policy. I applaud the President's recent initiative in reducing nuclear weapons. It is an important beginning. But make no mistake -- the end of the Cold War is not the end of threats to America. The world is still a dangerous and uncertain place. The first and most solemn obligation of the President is to keep America strong and safe from foreign dangers, and promote democracy around the world.

But we cannot build a safe and secure world unless we can first make America strong at home. It is our ability to take care of our own at home that gives us the strength to stand up for what we believe around the world.

As governor for 11 years, working to preserve and create jobs in a global economy, I know our competition for the future is Germany and the rest of Europe, Japan and the rest of Asia. And I know that we are losing America's leadership in the world because we're losing the American dream right here at home.

Middle class people are spending more hours on the job, spending less time with their children, bringing home a smaller paycheck to pay more for health care and housing and education. Our streets are meaner, our families are more broken, our health care is the costliest in the world and we get less for it.

The country is headed in the wrong direction fast, slipping behind, losing our way... and all we have out of Washington is status quo paralysis. No vision, no action, just neglect, selfishness, and division.

look to the White House and ask, why are all of our incomes going down, why are all of us losing jobs? Why are we losing our future?

For 12 years, the Republicans have talked about choices without really believing in it. George Bush says he wants school choice even if it bankrupts the public schools, and yet he's more than willing to make it a crime for the women of America to exercise their individual right to choose.

For 12 years, the Republicans have been telling us that America's problems aren't their problem. They washed their hands of responsibility for the economy and education and health care and social policy and turned it over to fifty states and a thousand points of light. Well, here in Arkansas we've done our best to create jobs and educate our people. And each of us has tried to be one of those thousand points of light. But I can tell you, where there is no national vision, no national partnership, no national leadership, a thousand points of light leaves a lot of darkness.

We must provide the answers ... the solutions. And we will. We're going to turn this country around and get it moving again, and we're going to fight for the hard-working middle-class families of America for a change.

Make no mistake -- this election is about change: in our party, in our national leadership, and in our country.

And we're not going to get positive change just by Bush-bashing. We have to do a better job of the old-fashioned work of confronting the real problems of real people and point the way to a better future. That is our challenge in 1992.

Today, as we stand on the threshold of a new era, a new millennium, I believe we need a new kind of leadership, leadership committed to change. Leadership not mired in the politics of the past, not limited by old ideologies ... Proven leadership that knows how to reinvent government to help solve the real problems of real people.

That is why today I am declaring my candidacy for President of the United States. Together I believe we can provide leadership that will restore the American Dream -- that will fight for the forgotten middle class -- that will provide more opportunity, insist on more responsibility, and create a greater sense of community for this great country.

The change we must make isn't liberal or conservative. It's both, and it's different. The small towns and main streets of our America aren't like the corridors and backrooms of Washington. People out here don't care about the idle rhetoric of "left" and "right" and "liberal" and "conservative" and all the other words that have made our politics a substitute for action. These families are crying out desperately for someone who believes the

promise of America is to help them with their struggle to get ahead, to offer them a green light instead of a pink slip.

This must be a campaign of ideas, not slogans. We don't need another President who doesn't know what he wants to do for America. I'm going to tell you in plain language what I intend to do as President. How we can meet the challenges we face -- that's the test for all the Democratic candidates in this campaign. Americans know what we're against. Let's show them what we're for.

We need a new covenant to rebuild America. It's just common sense. Government's responsibility is to create more opportunity. The people's responsibility is to make the most of it.

In a Clinton Administration, we are going to create opportunity for all. We've got to grow this economy, not shrink it. We need to give people incentives to make long-term investment in America and reward people who produce goods and services, not those who speculate with other people's money. We've got to invest more money in emerging technologies to help keep high-paying jobs here at home. We've got to convert from a defense to a domestic economy.

We've got to expand world trade, tear down barriers, but demand fair trade policies if we're going to provide good jobs for our people. The American people don't want to run from the world. We must meet the competition and win.

Opportunity for all means world-class skills and world-class education. We need more than photo ops and empty rhetoric -- we need standards and accountability and excellence in education. On this issue, I'm proud to say that Arkansas has led the way.

In a Clinton Administration, students and parents and teachers will get a real education President.

Opportunity for all means pre-school for every child who needs it, and an apprenticeship program for kids who don't want to go to college but do want good jobs. It means teaching everybody with a job to read, and passing a domestic GI Bill that would give every young American the chance to borrow the money necessary to go to college and ask them to pay it back either as a small percentage of their income over time, or through national service as teachers or policemen or nurses or child care workers.

In a Clinton Administration, everyone will be able to get a college loan as long as they're willing to give something back to their country in return.

Opportunity for all means reforming the health care system to control costs, improve quality, expand preventive and long-term care, maintain consumer choice, and cover everybody. And we don't

have to bankrupt the taxpayers to do it. We do have to take on the big insurance companies and health care bureaucracies and get some real cost control into the system. I pledge to the American people that in the first year of a Clinton Administration, we will present a plan to Congress and the American people to provide affordable, quality health care for all Americans.

Opportunity for all means making our cities and our streets safer from crime and drugs. Across America, citizens are banding together to take their streets and neighborhoods back. In a Clinton Administration, we'll be on their side -- with new initiatives like community policing, drug treatment for those who need it, and boot camps for first-time offenders.

Opportunity for all means making taxes fair. I'm not out to soak the rich. I wouldn't mind being rich. But I do believe the rich should pay their fair share. For 12 years, the Republicans have raised taxes on the middle class. It's time to give the middle class tax relief.

Finally, opportunity for all means we must protect our environment and develop an energy policy that relies more on conservation and clean natural gas so all our children will inherit a world that is cleaner, safer, and more beautiful.

But hear me now. I honestly believe that if we try to do these things, we will still not solve the problems of today or move into the next century with confidence unless we do what President Kennedy did and ask every American citizen to assume personal responsibility for the future of our country.

The government owes our people more opportunity, but we all have to make the most of it through responsible citizenship.

We should insist that people move off welfare rolls and onto work rolls. We should give people on welfare the skills they need to succeed, but we should demand that everybody who can work go to work and become a productive member of society.

We should insist on the toughest possible child support enforcement. Governments don't raise children, parents do. And when they don't, their children pay forever and so do we.

And we have got to say, as we've tried to do in Arkansas, that students have a responsibility to stay in school. If you drop out for no good reason, you should lose your driver's license.

But it's important to remember that the most irresponsible people of all in the 1980s were those at the top ... not those who were doing worse, not the hard-working middle class, but those who sold out our savings and loans with bad deals and spent billions on

wasteful takeovers and mergers -- money that could have been spent to create better products and new jobs.

Do you know that in the 1980s, while middle-class income went down, charitable giving by working people went up? And while rich people's incomes went up, charitable giving by the wealthy went down. Why? Because our leaders had an ethic of get it while you can and to heck with everybody else.

How can you ask people who work or who are poor to behave responsibly, when they know that the heads of our biggest companies raised their own pay in the last decade by four times the percentage their workers' pay went up? Three times as much as their profits went up. When they ran their companies into the ground and their employees were out on the street, what did they do? They bailed out with golden parachutes to a cushy life. That's just wrong.

Teddy Roosevelt and Harry Truman and John Kennedy didn't hesitate to use the bully pulpit of the Presidency. They changed America by standing up for what's right. When Salomon Brothers abused the Treasury markets, the President was silent. When the ripoff artists looted our S&L's, the President was silent. In a Clinton Administration, when people sell their companies and their workers and their country down the river, they'll get called on the carpet. We're going to insist that they invest in this country and create jobs for our people.

In the 1980s, Washington failed us, too. We spent more money on the present and the past and less on the future. We spent \$500 billion to recycle assets in the S&L mess, but we couldn't afford \$5 billion for unemployed workers or to give every kid in this country a chance to be in Head Start. We can do better than that, and we will.

A Clinton Administration won't spend your money on programs that don't solve problems and a government that doesn't work. I want to reinvent government to make it more efficient and more effective. I want to give citizens more choices in the services they get, and empower them to make those choices. That's what we've tried to do in Arkansas. We've balanced the budget every year, improved services, and treated taxpayers like our customers and our bosses, because they are.

I want the American people to know that a Clinton Administration will defend our national interests abroad, put their values into our social policy at home, and spend their tax money with discipline. We'll put government back on the side of the hard-working middle-class families of America who think most of the help goes to those at the top of the ladder, some goes to the bottom, and no one speaks for them.

But we need more than new laws, new promises, or new programs. We need a new spirit of community, a sense that we are all in this together. If we have no sense of community, the American Dream will continue to wither. Our destiny is bound up with the destiny of every other American. We're all in this together, and we will rise or fall together.

A few years ago, Hillary and I visited a classroom in Los Angeles, in an area plagued by drugs and gangs. We talked to a dozen sixth graders, whose number one concern was being shot going to and from school. Their second worry was turning 12 or 13 and being forced to join a gang or be beaten. And finally, they were worried about their own parents' drug abuse.

Nearly half a century ago, I was born not far from here in Hope, Arkansas. My mother had been widowed three months before I was born. I was raised for four years by my grandparents, while she went back to nursing school. They didn't have much money. I spent a lot of time with my great-grandparents. By any standard, they were poor. But we didn't blame other people. We took responsibility for ourselves and for each other because we knew we could do better. I was raised to believe in the American Dream, in family values, in individual responsibility, and in the obligation of government to help people who were doing the best they could.

It's a long way in America from that loving family which is embodied today in a picture on my wall in the Governor's office of me at the age of six holding my great-grandfather's hand to an America where children on the streets of our cities don't know who their grandparents are and have to worry about their own parents' drug abuse.

I tell you, by making common cause with those children, we give new life to the American Dream. And that is our generation's responsibility -- to form a new covenant: more opportunity for all, more responsibility from everyone, and a greater sense of common purpose.

I believe with all my heart that together, we can make this happen. We can usher in a new era of progress, prosperity and renewal. We can -- we must. This is not just a campaign for the Presidency -- it is a campaign for the future, for the forgotten hard-working middle-class families of America who deserve a government that fights for them. A campaign to keep America strong at home and around the world. Join with us. I ask for your prayers, your help, your hands, and your hearts. Together we can make America great again, and build a community of hope that will inspire the world.

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