

***DELTA VISION, DELTA VOICES
THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA BEYOND 2000***

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STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT WILLIAM JEFFERSON CLINTON

May 4, 2000

I am deeply grateful to all the people of the Delta and to the Federal agencies taking part in the Mississippi Delta: Beyond 2000 Initiative. You have faithfully continued the work we embarked upon more than a decade ago in the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission, which I was privileged to lead. I thank you for your counsel and recommendations for the future development of this vast region that lies at the center of America. Now, we must persevere in this initiative to ensure that people throughout the region can participate fairly and fully in the unprecedented prosperity our nation enjoys today and that we are committed to continue in the new century and the new millennium. As a son of Arkansas, I have traveled the beautiful valleys, wetlands, and other natural splendors of the Delta for much of my life. During my New Markets tour last year, I visited several Delta communities in Mississippi and Arkansas and met with many grassroots leaders. Those meetings only reinforced my determination to bring together Federal, State, and local government and the private sector to revitalize the region. We must continue to encourage private sector investment in underserved areas through such initiatives as Empowerment Zones, Enterprise Communities, Community Development Financial Institutions, the Community Reinvestment Act, and other financial incentives. In my State of the Union address earlier this year, I announced a budget proposal of more than \$150 million in specific set-aside funding targeted for the Delta—funding to promote job creation, to improve education, housing, and health care, to aid small business development, and to create community development initiatives. This Report presents an additional and impressive array of thoughtful recommendations for the Delta's future development, from the establishment of a permanent regional commission to the "circuit rider" proposal for technical assistance for the poorest and smallest communities. Much like the original Delta Report, it is a "handbook for action" that any concerned citizen can use to make a difference. I am especially grateful for the thoughtful contributions from so many grassroots leaders and organizations from the region, who are the true and powerful voices of the Delta. From the banks of the Potomac to the banks of the Mighty Mississippi, we are listening to those voices, and we are committed to working together to make our vision of prosperity and opportunity a reality for the people of the Mississippi Delta in the 21st century and the new millennium.

STATEMENT BY VICE PRESIDENT AL GORE

The roots of the Delta 2000 Initiative go back more than a decade. As Governor of Arkansas, President Clinton provided leadership from the initiative's earliest days. Today we can say that progress has been made. However, poverty in the Delta remains at unacceptable levels: it is 175 percent of the national average and more than half of the Delta counties have had poverty rates higher than 20 percent for the past four decades. Per capita income in the Delta's distressed communities is still only 53 percent of the national average. We can do better. We have to do better, and we will do better, because we are committed to ensuring that in this unprecedented period of prosperity we leave no one behind who works hard and plays by the rules.

The title of this Report captures the heart and essence of the work that lies ahead. Every initiative needs a vision, but I especially like the reference to voices—the voices of the people who live and work in the Delta and who call the region home. These voices are rich in all their cultural diversity. Local officials, business leaders, educators, church and community leaders, and common people all came together to have their thoughts and interests included. This Report illustrates that there are people behind this initiative; they are the driving force of its aspirations, and they are telling us where they are going with their dreams. In my role as the Chairman of the President's Community Empowerment Board (CEB), I have found that Federal programs at their best can only serve as catalysts and tools for action. However, it will be the more than 8.3 million people in the 219 counties and seven States who have helped to formulate the recommendations found in this Report who will continue to take actions to form partnerships with business, nonprofits, and local and State organizations to meet the unique challenges faced in this region.

I would like to thank Transportation Secretary Rodney E. Slater and the members of the inter-agency task force for their work on behalf of this effort. Secretary Slater was with the State of Arkansas when he initially became involved in this project, and I genuinely appreciate his dedication in staying with it for so long. This is also an opportunity for me to express my personal gratitude, since part of my home State of Tennessee is in the Delta. I certainly know firsthand the great need that exists in underserved communities within the Delta region and around our nation.

The Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities (EZ/EC) program is a major Administration innovation in the field of community development and is very much a part of this initiative. In 1994, we announced eight rural and five urban EZs and ECs in the Delta; in the next selection round, another rural EZ was designated. The EZ/EC program embodies what the Delta initiative is all about; it is based upon the principles of sustainable development, leadership from the grassroots level, economic opportunity, long-range strategic planning and community-based partnerships. The 26 Federal agencies that comprise the CEB have been working in partnership with the Delta communities and the private sector to make a real difference.

In 1998, I was proud to join Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman and Secretary Slater to host the signing of the Southern EZ/EC Forum Partnership Agreement by the community leaders and organizations in the Delta region Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities. The agreement committed all parties to work cooperatively to achieve sustainable economies and human development to raise the quality of life in the Lower Mississippi Delta region.

Today's Report presents many recommendations in transportation, health care, education, environmental and natural resource protection, and economic development. This Administration has proposed an additional \$159 million for increased economic opportunities in the Delta, including \$30 million to create a new Delta Regional Authority to bring resources of a Federal-State partnership to support economic growth. This funding will invest in infrastructure to support rural housing, transportation, and public works. In addition, it will support rural businesses and provide training for dislocated workers and technical support for teachers.

Let us all join together to push for the continued success of this initiative and bring the economic prosperity of America to all Americans. I assure you that I will be doing everything in my power to make the *Delta Vision, Delta Voices* a reality.

FOREWORD FROM RODNEY E. SLATER, SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

Mr. President:

It has been my privilege to work with you on the Mississippi Delta Regional Initiative—an issue of vital importance to the social and economic policy agenda of the Clinton-Gore Administration. As a son of the Delta, perhaps no issue has more significance to me personally or more potential for human impact than this Administration's ongoing initiative to address the social and economic challenges facing the Mississippi Delta region of the United States. This Report presents a dynamic series of goals and recommendations for the region's future as we enter the new century and a new millennium. While gradual progress has been made in many areas across the Delta, we realize the compelling need to work together for a historically impoverished region that has bestowed a rich cultural heritage upon our nation and contributed mightily to its productivity, yet still lags behind in the realms of social and economic progress.

I know of the great work ethic and values of the Delta's people, as well as the region's poverty and limitless potential. I was born in Tutwiler, Mississippi in 1955, and grew up in Marianna, Arkansas, one of America's poorest areas. At age six I held my first job working in a cotton field with my mother to earn the money for my first means of transportation—a bicycle. I learned the value of hard work growing up in Lee County, Arkansas, and I will never forget those lessons learned among the creative, energetic people of my home in the Mississippi Delta.

The unique attributes and needs, as well as the human and natural resources of the Delta have much to contribute to the economic and social fabric of the country. It is a "new market" for goods and services produced around the world and in the communities within its boundaries. It is a treasure of American history, culture and natural beauty. Its unique voice has been central to the growth of our own country and to the expansion of America's conscience and impact around the globe.

Therefore, I am honored to present this Report to you—*Delta Vision, Delta Voices: The Mississippi Delta Beyond 2000*. It is the product of the inter-agency task force that you established, and which I have been privileged to lead, to present dynamic goals and recommendations for the future of the Mississippi Delta. We know that the Federal government is only one actor in the region's development. Thus, a major part of this Report—entitled "Voices of the Delta"—consists of goals and recommendations written by a broad spectrum of grassroots organizations, including nonprofit foundations, elected officials, business, community and religious leaders, educators, as well as groups focused on transportation, agriculture, tourism, and many other vital issues. I want to commend both the "Voices of the Delta" as well as the Federal departments and agencies that comprised the task force and contributed so fully to its work.

These recommendations reflect the spirit of fiscal responsibility and strategic investment that you and the Vice President worked so tirelessly to usher in during the decade of the 1990s, leading to a new era of government fiscal responsibility, budget surpluses and record investment in these areas that strengthen America and Americans for the untold challenges and limitless opportunities of the new century and the new millennium. The recommendations focus on making sound investments for initiatives that work to promote sustainable, long-term development. As you stated in your 2000 State of the Union

Address—the first of the new millennium—we must always be aware of the need to avoid channeling our energies into policies that have proven ineffective, but instead to invest our resources in “what works” for long-term progress. The people of the Delta, of course, listened with great interest to your proposals for assistance to the Delta. Through your fiscal year 2001 budget proposal, as well as your support for the Delta Regional Authority, you demonstrated your resolve to institutionalize proven strategies to direct more resources to the distressed areas of the region. This Report embodies a wealth of experience and practical knowledge—primarily gleaned from people who live and work in the region—about “what works” for the Delta.

The Report updates and expands the work you and others rendered when you served as Chair of the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission. This commission was formed in 1988 by the bipartisan efforts of former United States Senator Dale Bumpers of Arkansas, former Congressmen Mike Espy of Mississippi (your first Secretary of Agriculture) and Bill Alexander of Arkansas, as well as prominent Republicans, including Senator Thad Cochran of Mississippi, the late Congressman Bill Emerson of Missouri, and former Congressman Webb Franklin of Mississippi. This Administration’s Delta initiative has sought to move forward in that same open spirit.

The original Commission placed an emphasis upon listening to the voices of the people throughout the region, conducting research and holding hearings in the region to gather the ideas and advice of the Delta. We have followed that example. In 1990 you submitted the Commission’s Report, *The Delta Initiatives: Realizing the Dream...Fulfilling the Potential*, to President George Bush, calling for an aggressive plan of revitalization and development of the Delta. In keeping with its Congressional mandate, the Commission focused on developing a ten-year economic plan for the Delta and assembled an ambitious public and private sector agenda for recommended implementation. While the original legislation ended the work of the Commission after submitting its Report to the President in 1990, the commitment to the implementation of the goals and recommendations has continued to this day.

During the Clinton-Gore Administration, we have continued the work and the dialogue with the region’s people initiated in 1988-90. For example, many of the transportation and community development recommendations in *The Delta Initiatives* had already been achieved by 1995. While I served as Administrator of the Federal Highway Administration, we published the Report *Linking the Delta Region with the Nation and the World*, an update of transportation and employment-related issues in the Delta. That document related the emergence of community development innovations such as the new Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community (EZ/EC) program designed to promote economic development and improve the quality of life in distressed areas. Under Vice President Gore’s leadership and that of former Mississippi Congressman and Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy, the Administration began working on this program from its first year in office in 1993, and approximately one-fourth of all the rural EZ/ECs nationwide that were announced in 1994 were located in the Delta. The program’s success led to its expansion to a second round in 1999, and proposes a third round in the FY2001 Budget. The 1995 Federal Highway Administration Report analyzed the progress toward fulfilling most of the Commission’s transportation recommendations. That progress has continued throughout the decade. The Delta has directly benefited from dramatic increases in the Highway Trust Fund receipts brought about by the Intermodal Surface Transportation

Sufficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). The major challenges that remain are now being tackled—as demonstrated by your FY 2001 budget proposal—with support for Interstate 69 and the Great River Bridge among the prominent examples. This Report will recommend new actions for finishing the quest to build an integrated Delta transportation network for the 21st century, ensuring that the New Markets of the Delta are accessible into the new millennium. This Report also marks another step toward fulfilling the Mississippi Delta Regional Initiative Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in July 1998 at a meeting of Federal officials and Delta grassroots leaders in Memphis, Tennessee convened at LeMoyne Owens College. At the Memphis conference, nine Federal agencies joined the Department of Transportation, including Agriculture, Labor, Interior, Education, Health and Human Services, Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, the Small Business Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency, to sign the MOU to establish a framework for promoting economic revitalization in the region. The Memorandum also underscored the rural nature of much of the Delta, stating: “This effort will build upon the work of President Clinton and Vice President Gore to strengthen rural communities for the 21st century.”

The departments and agencies stressed the importance of cooperating with State and local organizations in developing plans for revitalizing the region. The MOU was expanded further in 1999 with the addition of other Federal Departments and Agencies—the Departments of Treasury, Defense, Justice, Energy and Veterans’ Affairs, the Office of Personnel Management, the Social Security Administration, and the National Office of Drug Control Policy.

I would like to extend my deep appreciation to all the people in the federal agencies who have worked so hard on this Initiative. In particular, I would like to thank the Department of Transportation employees who worked so hard in providing coordination as the lead agency for this Initiative. The DOT Chief of Staff, Jerry Malone, is a native of Earle, Arkansas who has spoken at listening sessions and other major events in the Delta, and provided overall leadership for the personnel working on the project. A core team of four DOT employees worked steadfastly day by day from the inception of the initiative: Al Eisenberg, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy; Linda Darr, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Budget; Harold Gist, Associate Director for Intergovernmental Affairs; and Lee Powell, who is based in the USDA EZ/EC program but devoted almost an entire year on a full-time detail to the Delta Initiative. Many other DOT employees devoted countless hours to the initiative, as did many employees in the other agencies involved—we commend all of them for their attention to the issues regarding a vital region in America’s heartland.

One focus of the Delta 2000 Initiative has been gathering data and consulting with the Delta’s people to gain an honest insight into where we are now and what needs to be done in promoting the region’s development. This Report will provide brief highlights of Federal activities in the region during the 1990s. People wishing to know more about these activities are invited to consult the September 1999 *Mississippi Delta: Beyond 2000 Interim Report* and the exhaustive “Inventory of Federal Activities in the Delta Region,” both published at the Department of Transportation’s new Delta Website at <http://www.dot.gov/delta>. The *Interim Report* and “Inventory”—a Clinton-Gore Administration-wide, inter-agency effort cataloguing the Federal efforts and presence in

the Delta region—demonstrated that in many areas, progress has been achieved toward fulfilling many of the recommendations in *The Delta Initiatives* of 1990, but that much still remains to be done.

Many areas in the region demonstrated gradual progress in recent years. From 1993 to December 1999, the unemployment rate for the 219-county region declined from 7.5 percent to 4.2 percent. However, many rural counties still lag far behind the national average—which remained in the range of 4.1 percent at the end of the decade—as well as the regional average, in employment and per capita income. Urban counties in the Delta had an unemployment rate of only 3.1 percent, while the rural counties had a higher rate of 4.9 percent. This assessment of where we stand today was taken in the spirit of your statement in the 1990 Report that the Delta cannot become a full partner in America's future without “an honest assessment of where we are in the emerging global economy and what we have to do to increase the capacity of all our people to succeed in it.”

As noted above, the Federal government is only one actor in the Delta. An entire section of this Report is devoted to the proposed solutions and goals presented by people who live and work in the Delta, including several grassroots organizations; nonprofit foundations; transportation groups like the Interstate 69 Initiative; the Delta Race Relations Consortium, interfaith organizations, labor and other groups and individuals focusing on diversity issues; private business and industry leaders; 600 participants in a series of listening sessions conducted in the fall of 1999; representatives of your 21st Century Commission on American Agriculture who live in the region; as well as other voices. Their concepts, in tandem with the recommendations submitted by the Federal departments and agencies, all contribute to this Report and share a commitment toward advancing the social and economic progress of the Delta and that of our American family who call this region home.

This Report analyzes an immense number of issues and problems. Considering the myriad specific issues examined in detail, I would like to highlight a few recurring, fundamental themes:

- **A permanent regional planning and development entity:** Through our extensive consultations with the people of the Delta as well as with Federal officials, we found strong support for a regional planning and development organization. As the 1990 Report advocated, such a commission or authority would monitor progress in the region, ensure implementation of the Commission's recommendations, avoid duplication, provide for cooperative participation by Federal, State, local, private sector, and other grassroots organizations, and address funding issues.
- **Regional technical assistance and fair access to funding:** One of the great challenges of the poorest and smallest communities in the Delta flows from their lack of staff and other resources to become informed about and make appropriate applications for all the Federal, State, nonprofit foundation funding opportunities available to them. Through the use of circuit riders to provide technical assistance and other outreach activities, the Delta Initiative supports a major expansion of efforts to enable these disadvantaged communities to gain equitable access to these resources.
- **An increase in resources devoted to the region:** The goals and recommendations are fiscally responsible, as we maintain the budget discipline that you and the Vice President have championed and that has enabled the Federal government to move from soaring deficits in 1993 to an unprecedented surplus by 1999. Any proposed

increases in funding have followed two basic principles. First, they respected the fiscal discipline that has helped make the nation's economic prosperity possible. Secondly, they pursued policies that have been demonstrated to be sound investments that create jobs, promote economic development and improve the quality of life in the new markets of the Delta region. The Delta 2000 Initiative does propose an increase in Federal funding for the region from fiscal years 2001 to 2005. Given the persistent poverty and economic distress still present in many Delta areas, such an investment in its people is not only appropriate but also needed and richly deserved.

The Delta today still faces many challenges—from empowering the economies of the most depressed rural areas and inner city neighborhoods, to enhancing health care and housing for all residents, regardless of racial, ethnic and economic status, to advancing beyond the gradual progress made during the 1990s in such areas as education, transportation, conservation of natural resources, and community development. It has many strengths on which to build. These strengths are its history, its families, its natural resources, its culture—all cultivated through community institutions such as churches, schools, and universities, including its Historically Black Colleges and Universities. We have benefited profoundly by listening carefully to the ideas and counsel of our partners at the State and local levels, the private sector, nonprofit foundations, and grassroots organizations of the region. In that spirit of partnership, the recommendations and goals presented herein build upon the “handbook for action” that you inspired as Chair of the Commission in 1990. We call upon all people devoted to the progress of the region lying at America's heart to join us, as we expand upon the work of revitalization begun in 1990 and bring it forward into the new century and the new millennium.

Respectfully,

Secretary Rodney E. Slater, United States Department of Transportation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Structure of This Report

This Report has taken its guidance from a single overriding goal: To recognize the enormous natural, capital, and cultural resources of the Delta, and to enable all of the Delta's citizens to participate as full and successful partners in America's social and economic growth. All work and recommendations have flowed from that goal, articulated by President Clinton to Secretary Slater when asking him to spearhead this Delta Initiative. This Report's Federal section is organized on four key themes:

- To improve the quality of life,
- To revitalize the regional economy,
- To protect and restore the natural resources and the environment and enhance tourism, and
- To promote regional planning and development.

Success stories/vignettes: In this Report, a number of vignettes summarizing success and meaningful action in the Delta serve to demonstrate the strides made and the commitment of the Delta's citizens to their future. These vignettes go into some detail examining specific projects that have proven effective, in order to illustrate the fundamental policy objectives described in condensed form on each issue. Most importantly, the focus of this Report is on the Delta's future and harnessing the resources necessary to advance the region's development at this moment in time.

Background—the Delta in the 1990s

Although the Report is focused on the future, there will be brief summaries of recent developments in the region on a series of major issues. People interested in in-depth analysis and data on each of these issues should consult the Department of Transportation's Delta website at <http://www.dot.gov/delta>.

Job growth: The annual average unemployment for the entire 219-county region declined from 7.5 percent in 1993 to 4.2 percent in December 1999. From 1993 to the beginning of 1999, 184 of the 219 counties experienced job growth. There were some substantial success stories by the end of 1999, such as declining unemployment rates for the major regional urban areas such as Pulaski County, Arkansas; Jackson County, Illinois; Jefferson Parish, Louisiana; Memphis and Shelby County, Tennessee; Cape Girardeau, Missouri and Hinds County, Mississippi, that were similar to or slightly lower than the historically low national unemployment averages of the 1990s. A few rural areas witnessed improvement, such as Madison Parish, Louisiana, where the unemployment rate fell from 14 percent in 1990 to 7.5 percent in June 1999.

President Clinton signed the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 and the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, two major pieces of legislation designed to dramatically help people in making the transition from welfare to work. Virtually all of the participating agencies in the Delta 2000 Initiative pursued policies directly or indirectly related to job growth, such as welfare-to-work, transportation, small business promotion, Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities, and other economic development initiatives.

Persistent unemployment dilemmas in rural areas and inner cities: However, some inner city neighborhoods did not participate in the overall urban prosperity, and rural areas in general still lagged far behind the national unemployment rate. In fact, some

rural counties still suffered from unemployment rates two and three times as high as the national average. For example, the unemployment rate for St. Francis County, Arkansas, declined from 13.4 percent in 1993, but in December 1999 its rate—though a substantial improvement—still remained at a relatively high 6.9 percent. The continuing unemployment problems in many rural areas pose the greatest remaining challenge in the region’s employment horizons.

Education: Nearly a decade after the 1990 Commission’s recommendation to target resources to “low-income, rural students” in the Delta, the Department of Education allocated over \$350 million in fiscal year 1998 alone to high-poverty school districts in the Delta. Under President Clinton’s Class Size Reduction Initiative, the Department provided more than \$50 million to this region in fiscal 1999 to hire approximately 1,500 new teachers in the early grades. A series of initiatives such as the Technology Literacy Challenge Fund (TLCF), Star School and the “E-rate” program targeted funding for improving technology to high-poverty regions. For example, the Delta districts in Louisiana received \$4.6 million under TLCF in FY98.

While continued investment in public education is needed to increase student academic achievement in the region, many Delta schools and districts have recently demonstrated significant gains in student test scores. For example, third grade students at the Portland Elementary School in Ashley, Arkansas improved their reading scores on the Stanford Achievement Test from the 25th percentile in 1993 to the 46th percentile in 1999. The percentage of eleventh graders in the Memphis City Public Schools scoring ‘proficient’ on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) Writing Assessment increased from 19 percent in 1994 to 56 percent in 1999. “We still have a long way to go, but we believe our progress is largely a result of our school wide approach to reform and the initiation of extended learning opportunities, both of which are facilitated by Federal program funding and flexibility reforms,” States Memphis City Schools Superintendent—and American Association of School Administrators (AASA) 1998-99 Superintendent of the Year—Dr. Gerry House.

Housing: Under the leadership of Secretary Andrew Cuomo, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has promoted more equitable housing opportunities for moderate- and low-income people, both in homeownership and rental housing. HUD has vigorously enforced the Fair Housing Act to attack the problem of discrimination in housing. Funding for HUD’s homelessness assistance programs more than tripled from 1992 to 1999, although the 1990 Commission’s ambitious goal of eradicating homelessness entirely in the Delta remains elusive. HUD has pursued innovative housing policies to expand opportunities in inner city areas; one example is the renovation of the Farish Street district in Jackson, Mississippi.

Rural housing: Under Secretary Dan Glickman’s leadership, USDA’s Rural Housing Service assisted approximately 43,000 Delta households to buy or improve their homes; loans for single-family housing in the region from fiscal years 1993 through 1999 came to a total of \$2.236 billion. In rental housing, more than \$254 million was provided for more than 10,000 rental units in the region. Despite these achievements, many senior citizens and minorities in the region still suffer from inadequate housing. Fifty eight percent of rural elderly renters in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi are “cost-burdened” in housing, meaning that they pay greater than 30 percent of monthly income for shelter costs. Rural African-Americans in the Delta have a 51 percent poverty rate in

Arkansas, a 54 percent rate in Louisiana, and a 52 percent rate in Mississippi. While some areas have experienced some advances in housing, large sectors of the population have not participated in these gains, especially low-income senior citizens and African-Americans in rural areas.

Health care: The health of rural residents is a particular concern to the Administration. In this Report, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), led by Secretary Donna Shalala, reviews Medicare, Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and the special needs of rural hospitals and inadequate access to health care in rural areas. HHS also pursues programs aimed at improving health care for senior citizens, minorities, and HIV/AIDS patients in the Delta. A division of the Centers for Disease Control has worked on an initiative for health education, training, research and environmental health in the region through the Mississippi Delta Health and Environment Project, a partnership among Federal, State and local governments, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), faith-based organizations, community organizations, and environmental advocacy groups in the region.

Childcare and youth issues: HHS takes the lead in a series of childcare initiatives. The early childhood education program, Head Start, expanded its enrollment in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi from 41,996 in 1990 to 55,248 in 1998. The Child Care Development Fund, Healthy Child Care America Campaign, and other childcare efforts are active in the Delta. A network of Family Youth Services Bureau Program centers operate in the region to prevent youth from dropping out of school, provide temporary shelter to runaways and reunite them with their families when possible, and help teenage parents make the transition from unemployment to self-sufficiency. Teen pregnancy declined in Arkansas by 7.9 percent from 1991 to 1995, while in that period Louisiana reduced its rate by 8.2 percent and Mississippi by 5.9 percent. The national reduction was 6.5 percent. Despite these gains, teen pregnancy in the region is still too high.

Hunger, nutrition and food security: The Food and Nutrition Service of USDA reviews issues in the school lunch, food stamp, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Cooperative Extension nutrition programs, food recovery and gleaning, and other initiatives that form the hunger safety net for low-income Americans. Although these bedrock anti-hunger programs have eliminated the most grievous cases of malnutrition that Martin Luther King Jr. and Senator Robert F. Kennedy dramatized in the Delta in the late 1960s, low-income people in the Delta still suffer from inadequate access to good nutrition.

Two innovative models of anti-hunger efforts are the Lower Mississippi Delta Nutrition Intervention Research Initiative and the Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE) anti-hunger partnership. The Research Initiative is a coalition of community leaders, nutrition experts, and USDA officials that evaluates nutritional health in the Delta and develops strategies for addressing health problems. The MACE anti-hunger efforts include food stamp outreach, nutrition education, support for local food pantries, and increasing School Breakfast and summer feeding programs. For example, during 1994 and 1995, MACE sponsored and administered a demonstration food stamp outreach program through a grant sponsored by USDA. MACE was instrumental in identifying and enrolling thousands of low-income and/or elderly people living in rural areas of the Mississippi Delta region who were eligible for but not receiving food stamps. This

project also supports efforts to expand summer feeding and School Breakfast programs in rural school districts.

Disaster assistance: The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), under Director James Lee Witt, spent more than \$600 million in disaster assistance for the Delta during the 1990s to help victims of flooding, tornadoes, hurricanes and other natural disasters. FEMA devoted almost \$300 million to flood mitigation projects in recognition of the widespread devastation that natural disasters such as the 1993 floods can create. The Small Business Administration worked with FEMA in helping families and businesses recover from disasters.

Community law enforcement: Attorney General Janet Reno's Department of Justice pursued a variety of initiatives in the Delta, including vigorous enforcement of Federal civil rights and environmental statutes. The Department pursued strategic partnerships with State and local law enforcement agencies, provided funding and technical aid, and supported innovations in crime fighting and prevention. These efforts helped drive crime rates down for seven consecutive years to the lowest levels in nearly 30 years.

Transportation: The Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission's 10-year goal envisioned an improved network of limited access highways, airports, and rail and port facilities to promote economic growth. The great majority of the nearly 70 specific transportation recommendations in *The Delta Initiatives* have either been completely or substantially fulfilled. The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century of 1998 (TEA-21) dramatically increased Highway Trust Fund investment in highways, transit, and other transportation programs in the region. Delta States have used the flexibility established in ISTEA to fund improvements to the Great River Road, as well as for scenic easements, historic preservation and other projects.

For example, in Arkansas during the 1990s approximately \$140 million was used to complete about 120 miles of highway reconstruction, surfacing, widening and other projects in Delta counties. A number of rail service improvements were made throughout the Delta. In November 1998, the Gulf Coast High Speed Rail Corridor linking New Orleans with Baton Rouge and other cities in the South was designated, with about \$2 million in funding for high-speed rail development and grade crossings being provided. Numerous maritime transportation projects were completed throughout the region, and from 1993 to 1999, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) provided more than \$400 million to the region for airport improvements in the region. Such transportation improvements constitute a powerful engine for economic growth and a better quality of life in the Delta.

Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities (EZ/EC) and Champion

Communities: The EZ/EC program is the major Clinton-Gore Administration innovation in the field of community development, which Vice President Gore has played a leading role in advancing. In Round I of the EZ/EC program announced in 1994, there were eight rural and five urban EZs and ECs in the Delta, with another rural Delta EZ (in southern Illinois) being added in Round II of the program in 1999.

A new initiative that developed in tandem with the EZ/EC program within USDA's Rural Development was that of Champion Communities. In order to be considered for EZ/ECs, communities organized and completed the valuable strategic planning process as part of their application for Round I EZ/ECs. To assure that this effort produced continuing

benefits to these communities, USDA designated them as “Champion Communities” and provided continuing assistance to them.

(SIDEBAR)

Some Representative Results of EZ/EC Activities

The following includes results in a number of important categories for the eight rural EZs and ECs in the Delta from 1994 up to early 1998:

- Number of jobs created or retained: 2,133
- Number of job training programs created: 34
- Number of people trained: 5,387
- Youth development programs created: 65
- Youth served by development programs: 6,425
- Educational facilities built or upgraded: 21
- Health care facilities built or upgraded: 6
- Computer learning centers established or upgraded: 29
- Number of computers donated to organizations through federal surplus: 2,193
- Revolving loan funds or micro-lending funds created: 21
- Housing units built or rehabilitated: 162
- Water and waste projects under construction: 28

The program has expanded since 1998, and the above data is intended only to demonstrate the wide range of activities pursued by the EZ/EC program.

(END SIDEBAR)

The EZ/EC program is based upon the principles of sustainable development, leadership from the local grassroots level, economic opportunity, long-range strategic planning, and community-based partnerships. This Report summarizes the Federal funding and tax incentives offered by the EZs and ECs; however, the grassroots leadership and strategic planning phases of the program are more important, ultimately, than the Federal funding amounts. One of the great successes of the program has been the communities’ successes in “leveraging” funds. For example, the rural communities drew \$10.225 million from their EZ/EC funding from 1994 to the beginning of 1999, while their total funding—including State, local, private business, and nonprofit foundation sources—amounted to ten times that much, or approximately \$107.4 million. The EZs and ECs provide a model for grassroots community leadership and sustainable development. EZs and ECs in the Delta successfully parlayed their EZ/EC resources and experience into a variety of community development activities, such as transportation services connecting low-income people to jobs.

Agriculture: Agriculture remains an economic juggernaut in the Delta. This region is one of America’s most prolific producers of cotton, rice, soybeans, and other major agricultural products. USDA pursued policies to promote the economic viability of the traditional major producers, as well as new initiatives intended to promote, domestically and internationally, direct marketing, sustainable agriculture, alternative products such as aquaculture, and other policies aimed at preserving marketing and credit opportunities for small and minority farmers. In the late 1990s, farmers faced one of the most severe depressions in American history. Emergency Federal relief for agriculture was developed

in the summer of 1999. Proposals for agricultural policy reform are presented in both the Federal agency section and the “Voices of the Delta” section of this Report.

Infrastructure: The Departments of Commerce, HUD, EPA, Energy, and USDA’s Rural Development have brought numerous local infrastructure projects to the region, such as adequate water and sewer systems, telecommunications, electricity and natural gas lines, rural health care, public safety and other projects needed for economic development and improved quality of life. For example, the Department of Commerce programs provided more than 370 grants totaling over \$114 million in the Delta from 1993 to mid-1999. The total funding for the 219-county area from Rural Development’s Community Facilities, Rural Business Programs, and Water & Waste programs amounted to approximately \$858,224,000 from 1993 to mid-1999. The Rural Utilities Service provided first-time telephone service to more than 8,200 rural residents, while more than 77,000 residents received improved telecommunications. In addition to traditional infrastructure, Rural Development’s Distance Learning and Telemedicine program combined improvements in access to health care and educational opportunities in the health care field for approximately 800,000 rural residents in the region. The Commerce Department will provide \$10 million through targeted Economic Development Administration funding for public works and economic adjustment assistance. These programs require a State or local match, except in extremely distressed communities.

Natural resources and the environment: The Clinton-Gore Administration has dealt with major natural resource and environment issues facing the Delta, including wetlands protection and restoration, air and water quality protection, wildlife and natural resource conservation, and environmental justice. In 1993, the Administration developed a fair, flexible, and effective wetlands policy that increased regulatory certainty for private landowners while protecting wetlands. Approximately 300,000 acres of wetlands have been protected, restored or enhanced through a variety of programs, including the Wetlands Reserve Program. In addition, by the end of the 1990s a total of two million acres were enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program, which had begun before the 1990s but expanded during the decade. This Program encourages voluntary enrollment of highly erodible land, croppable wetlands, wildlife habitat, and wetland restoration acres to ensure protection from erosion while improving water quality and wildlife habitat. The Administration is working to empower States and localities to prevent, assess, safely clean up, and sustainably reuse brownfields and other waste sites. It is also providing stronger public health protections by establishing new safety standards for all pesticides used on foods under the Food Quality Protection Act, and by providing new tools and resources for cleaner, safer water under the 1996 Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments and the 1998 Clean Water Action Plan. In addition, the Administration is focusing attention on the environmental and human health conditions plaguing minority and low-income communities in the Delta. The designation of the Lower Mississippi River as an American Heritage River by President Clinton in 1998 is helping to focus these and other Federal efforts to strengthen historic and cultural preservation, natural resource protection, and economic revitalization.

Tourism: The natural splendors of the Delta, as well as its historical and cultural sites, are among its major tourist attractions. Thus, initiatives related to preserving natural resources and the environment support efforts to promote the region’s tourist industry. Tourist revenue brought almost \$13 billion to the Delta in 1998. Millions of visitors come

to enjoy the natural beauty, culture, food, and deep historical, musical and literary heritage of the region. The President's designation of the Lower Mississippi River as an American Heritage River in 1998 (as mentioned above) will help preserve and enhance the great river's appeal for tourism. In 2000 the Clinton-Gore Administration will announce community trails across the nation. Together with the 16 national Millennium Trails and 50 Legacy Trails that have already been designated, these trails will help connect people to our culture, natural resources and neighborhoods. The National Park Service, Department of Transportation, Department of Commerce and other agencies will pursue a series of initiatives designed to promote tourism for the region, starting with the development of a regional tourism marketing plan that will enhance tourism industries. This plan will seek to build upon the Civil War and civil rights experiences, recreation and wildlife preservation areas, and other assets that can attract visitors from around the world.

THE DELTA IN THE YEARS BEYOND 2000

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE

Diversity

Improving the quality of life in the Delta begins with celebrating one of its greatest strengths—its rich ethnic, cultural and racial diversity—and attacking its greatest flaw—the blight of racism. A series of policies—all of which are undertaken in the basic spirit of the President's "One America" Race Initiative—are reviewed as successes, and these are recommended for continuing support and expansion in the future:

- **Educational opportunity:** The Report contains a series of recommendations supporting Magnet Schools; Title I funding targeted toward schools with high percentages of low-income students; support for the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); bilingual and minority education programs; assistance for migrant worker families; and other policies aimed at enhancing minority educational opportunities.
- **Housing:** HUD's policies of attacking housing discrimination should be expanded. USDA's Rural Housing Service funded the Migrant Farm Labor Center in Arkansas, which provides housing as well as other social services for migrant workers, and similar complexes should be built in other parts of the region.
- **Minority business:** The Report contains a series of recommendations for supporting HUBZones, Small Business Administration, Department of Defense, Rural Development and other policies aimed at enhancing the ability of minority businesses to succeed.
- **Federal enforcement:** This Report summarizes the Department of Justice's efforts to attack discrimination and promote equal opportunity in the fields of disability rights, education, employment, fair housing, and voting rights.

Education

Fundamentally, the major innovations pursued during the Clinton-Gore Administration should be continued and expanded. These include the following basic initiatives:

- Title I and programs aimed at targeting improvements for low-income, rural students;
- the President's Class Size Reduction Initiative;

- family literacy programs targeted to migrant workers and other disadvantaged groups;
- policies aimed at enhancing the ability of teachers to provide an educational experience enhanced by computers and other advanced technology, including the Technology Literacy Fund, Technology Innovations Challenge Grants, Star Schools, and the E-rate;
- the greater flexibility given to States and schools under the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and the Ed-Flex program;
- projects for improving mathematics scores, such as the Algebra Project in Jackson; and
- America-Reads Program and other innovations encouraging reading skills.

Safe and Drug-Free Schools: The Department will disseminate information on funding opportunities from the Federal government aimed at promoting safe, disciplined, and drug-free learning environments. The National Resource Center for Safe Schools will provide training in a technical assistance conference in 2000 that will be tailored to the needs of Delta communities.

In addition to these basic program innovations, the Department of Education proposes a series of outreach conferences and technical assistance in the Delta for community colleges, Charter Schools, migrant education, and educational standards.

AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps pursues a broad spectrum of activities in the fields of hunger, nutrition, work with the EZ/EC program, tutoring in the America Reads program, disaster relief, and other meritorious activities—and all for a relatively tiny cost. In 1999, with funding of \$4.5 million from the Corporation for National Service, more than 2,000 AmeriCorps members served in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi, and more than 1,500 residents of the Delta have completed their service with AmeriCorps and qualified for education awards valued at more than \$9 million. It is essential that Congress, the Administration and State and local authorities preserve and expand the funding and all other support for this superb program that has brought so much energy and idealism to the region.

Housing

This Report explores in-depth the various housing initiatives of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Housing Service in promoting homeownership, combating homelessness, and fighting discrimination in housing.

- **Homeownership:** Fundamentally, in the years after 2000 the Federal government should persist in its commitment to the President's National Homeownership Strategy in promoting more equitable housing opportunities for moderate, low, and extremely low-income people. The Department of Housing and Urban Development should continue to pursue the policies adopted during the 1990s in reducing the financial, informational, and systemic barriers to homeownership in the Delta. Policies for assisting low- and moderate-income people include: escrow accounts of a percentage of monthly rent for high-end paying tenants to be used later for down payments on homes; Community Development Block grant funding; assistance with loans; assistance for the elderly and disabled; and a variety of policies aimed at eradicating racial and other forms of discrimination in housing.
- **Rural housing and community facilities:** USDA's Rural Development mission area offers a suite of programs to address the housing and community facilities needs of

rural Americans. Rural Development provides subsidized rental housing, subsidized homeownership loans and guarantees, and home repair loans and grants. It also offers rental housing for farm workers as well as a self-help housing program that allows participants to earn “sweat equity” by building their own homes. Finally, Rural Development offers subsidized loans, loan guarantees, and grants to public bodies and nonprofit organizations to build essential community facilities such as health care clinics, childcare centers, assisted-living facilities, teacher housing, and fire stations. These programs serve people with very low incomes. Because of its extensive network of field offices, Rural Development has succeeded in improving the quality of life in some of the most rural areas of the Delta.

Between 1993 and 1999, Rural Development provided more than \$2.2 billion in direct loans and guarantees to allow 43,000 Delta families to become homeowners, most for the first time. In addition, Rural Development provided \$254 million to build more than 10,000 new rental units in the region. The average annual income of tenants in these rental units is slightly more than \$7,000. In general, USDA’s Rural Housing Service (RHS) will continue its policies of assisting Delta families in housing opportunities. In spite of these achievements, many rural areas still lack adequate housing, and greater support for RHS’s constructive programs will be seriously needed in the years beyond 2000. There is a critical need for affordable rental housing in the Delta. USDA’s rental housing programs serve families and elderly people with very low incomes, as well as moderate-income people such as teachers and police officers. Funding for these rental programs should be expanded.

- **Assistance for rural homeownership:** The Department of Agriculture’s direct and guaranteed loan programs should continue to receive funding increases (as proposed in the President’s fiscal year 2001 budget) to assist families whom the private sector cannot: very low- and low-income people of color, single parents, people with disabilities, and elderly people.
- **Home repair:** In addition, USDA’s Rural Housing Repair loan and grant programs, of which elderly women are the primary users, should also continue to receive strong funding. These programs are slated for increases in the President’s FY 2001 budget as well. These programs make essential home repairs as well as modifications to accommodate disabilities and thus allow seniors to remain at home as long as they are able. Most able-bodied seniors prefer to live in their own homes and to stay out of nursing homes.
- **Self-Help Housing:** In addition, the USDA’s Mutual Self-Help Housing program should continue to be expanded. The Clinton-Gore Administration doubled this program from \$13 million to \$26 million a few years ago and is calling for a program level of \$40 million in the FY 2001 budget. The program brings homeownership within the reach of families with very low incomes by allowing them to earn “sweat equity” by building their own homes. In this program, a technical assistance organization receives a grant to supervise groups of 6-12 families in the construction of their own homes. Each family works on every other family’s home until all the homes are completed. The families typically finance their homes through a USDA direct loan. Because the families work together to build each other’s homes, they develop not only home maintenance skills but also a strong sense of community.

- **Targeted assistance for the Delta:** HUD will allocate special population points for applicants proposing to do work in the Delta. HUD would seek to provide additional Community Development Block Grant funding to States and entitlement communities in the Delta that would be awarded on a discretionary basis to grantees as rewards and incentives for progress in addressing chronic problems. In addition, housing counseling, training for nonprofits and Historically Black Colleges and Universities would be enhanced.
- **Farm labor housing:** Migrant workers are one of the most disadvantaged groups in the Delta. Many of them are Hispanic or other minorities. One of the successful programs in housing during the 1990s was the Hope, Arkansas Migrant Farm Labor Center, funded by the Rural Housing Service. This project provides housing, job referral and other social service assistance to farm worker families who are passing through this migrant stream. At least two additional migrant farm labor centers need to be established in other areas of the Delta, patterned after the center in Arkansas.

Infrastructure

The Departments of Commerce, HUD, EPA, Energy, Transportation and USDA's Rural Development have brought vital local infrastructure projects to the region, such as adequate water and sewer systems, transportation, telecommunications, electricity and natural gas, rural health care, public safety and other projects needed for economic development and improved quality of life. These projects are discussed in the Report. Yet, in spite of these accomplishments, many areas of the Delta still suffer from inadequate infrastructure. These infrastructure programs need to be steadfastly supported and broadened in the new century.

Health Care

Medicaid, Medicare, and other fundamental health care programs: This Report summarizes a series of Clinton-Gore Administration activities regarding Medicare; Medicaid; HIV/AIDS; child care; youth services; efforts to reduce teen pregnancy; efforts to eliminate infant mortality; and rural health care issues. The tremendously important and complex issues in the field of health care are explored in detail. These health care innovations and activities should be supported and broadened in the coming years. In addition to these fundamentals, a number of specific activities are proposed, including the following:

- **State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP)** is intended to maximize health care coverage, including behavioral health. Delta States have close to \$450 million available to them in SCHIP allotments secured through FY 1999. State governments are in charge of reviewing eligibility standards, policies, procedures and points-of-entry and improving outreach activities.
- **Rural health:** States and the Health Care Financing Administration should investigate inequities in funding rural health care delivery systems in Medicaid and Medicare. HCFA is conducting a Rural Health Workgroup to investigate these issues and identify areas for improvement. HCFA will help ensure that all health care delivery systems are adequately and equitably funded and will continue to take into consideration the unique and pressing needs of rural areas in the Delta.
- **Increase Federal funding for child care to assist low-income working families and child care education:** Congress should pass bipartisan legislation to increase

funding for child care subsidies, and to expand the Dependent Care Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit as requested in the President's budget.

- **Teen pregnancy:** A youth development fund to support community-based adolescent pregnancy prevention activities is needed. Each State should partner with local action teams to create an interagency State-local fund to support youth development programs that include job skills courses, childcare cooperatives and adult mentoring. School-based health clinics are supported through funding in the bureaus of Primary Health Care and Maternal and Child health in the HHS Health Resources and Services Administration.
- **Health and the environment:** States could create environmental research centers in institutions of higher education; they should focus on environmental research, including solid and hazardous waste research. These centers should become part of a larger Delta consortium to assure technology transfer and share research and technical information, both regionally and nationally. Through the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), The Mississippi Delta Health and Environment Project is a multi-phase initiative designed to identify and address environmental factors that may harm human health.
- **Rural Development's Community Facilities health care activities:** This program has provided extensive funding in the Delta for health care clinics, hospitals, elder care facilities, and emergency services equipment such as ambulances and fire engines. USDA will continue to finance the construction of essential health care facilities such as clinics and hospitals and the purchase of emergency rescue equipment. The Community Facilities (CF) program can provide funding for childcare centers, including Head Start facilities and teen centers. These meritorious programs should be continued and expanded.

Hunger and Food Security

The goal of eliminating hunger in the Delta is and must continue to be a high priority of the Federal government, and it must be pursued through a series of aggressive policies:

- **Expansion of Food Stamps use:** The Delta has historically suffered from the scourge of hunger more seriously than any other region. The Food Stamp program is the cornerstone of the nation's safety net against hunger. The President recently announced that bonus awards to States for excellence in welfare reform will be based, in part, on their success in enrolling eligible families in Food Stamps. USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has engaged in a major campaign to publicize and expand the use of Food Stamps among eligible people in the Delta. USDA should continue to pursue an aggressive campaign of disseminating information about the food stamp law's access requirements and the best ways to gain access to the program.
- **Expansion and improvement of the WIC program:** In collaboration with Congressman Bennie Thompson of Mississippi, FNS is expanding the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program to more eligible women, infants and children in the region. FNS is also working to expand the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program to include more States and to cover larger areas of currently participating States. Five of the seven Delta States—Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Kentucky, and Illinois—are in the program. Louisiana and Tennessee would certainly be welcomed into the program. The participants are given vouchers to enjoy fresh, wholesome produce that

they otherwise would not get, while small local farmers gain financially by expanding their markets to the WIC population.

In addition to the fundamental cornerstones of the hunger safety net such as Food Stamps, WIC, and school lunch and breakfast, the after-school program should be expanded to improve access to nutrition after school through the National School Lunch Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Methods should be developed for food stamp use to continue at farmers' markets after the development of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) payments; farm-to-school programs for local farmers to sell directly to school lunch programs should be expanded; and the Delta Nutrition Research Initiative (discussed in the Report) should be continued.

- **Recognition of continuing pressing needs regarding health, human services and hunger in the region:** Despite the progress, problems persist in health and human services, particularly in providing appropriate services to low-income and minority Delta residents. HHS, USDA, other Federal agencies and their State, local, and private partners are committed to building upon the accomplishments made thus far in the 1990s to bring equal opportunities in health and human services to the people of the Delta.

REVITALIZING THE REGIONAL ECONOMY

Transportation

The majority of the Commission's recommendations have been fulfilled, and landmark legislation of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) aided the Delta's transportation system. However, much more remains to be done:

- **The President's budget proposals for increasing funds for transportation improvements:** The Transportation Department will provide a total of \$69 million in funding targeted to the Delta region for fiscal year 2001, including \$48 million for new bridge and highway infrastructure in the Delta. Of the latter amount, \$25 million would be dedicated specifically to I-69 and the Great River Bridge; \$20 million would be provided for transit funds, consisting of \$15 million from the Federal Transit Administration's Capital Investment Grants program for public transit buses and bus facilities to provide affordable transportation and \$5 million from FTA's Access to Jobs and Reverse Commute Grants to promote vanpools, new bus routes, and transportation alternatives; and \$1 million would be allocated from Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) administrative funds for technical assistance, including training on Federal programs and developing a tourism marketing plan.
- **Development of a regional transportation plan:** Delta leaders have expressed great interest in the formation of a Delta regional transportation plan. Such a plan could be aimed at coordinating activities among States and localities, as well as technical assistance. It would highlight interstate intermodal facilities. The Department of Transportation would provide funds to bring States and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) together to jointly develop the plan, and then provide technical assistance in its development. The regional transportation plan could be an enterprise of the proposed permanent regional commission, working in concert with State departments of transportation and MPOs, as well as their national associations. Its

development would be funded from FHWA funds and other money that the States and metropolitan planning organizations in the region may allocate.

- **Access:** Residents of the vast rural areas and numerous small towns of the Delta suffer from disproportionate isolation and diminished access to jobs, education, health care and other necessities of life.
- **Transportation industry jobs:** The transportation industry presents enormous opportunity for future job growth. A model project is now beginning at Mid-South Community College in West Memphis, Arkansas that could open the door to transportation careers for many of the Delta's young people. This initiative would benefit area youth who are often under-trained and under-employed, as well as assisting the affected industries that suffer from a labor shortage, and point the way toward other such education programs in other parts of the Delta. Mid-South's proposal would link the college with high schools and other institutions of higher learning through a network of facilities, specialized curricula and technology. A crucial part of the program would be participation of State and business interests that could assist the program financially in light of their interests in the success of such an enterprise. The Department of Transportation would assist with educational materials, while the Departments of Labor, Education, and Commerce would determine their capacity and authority to provide appropriate financial support for facilities and other program elements.
- **Transportation development:** Transportation development, particularly intermodal connections and elimination of bottlenecks, is critical to the economic advancement of the region. A number of high-priority projects—such as Interstate-69 and the Great River Bridge—should receive the required funding from State and local governments to make them become a reality.
- **Training:** People from the Delta who attended the many Delta 2000 meetings held in the region made it clear that a great need exists for information on the programs, activities and related funding of the Federal government and how to gain access to them. DOT proposes a continuing set of training/information sessions for stakeholders, including local government officials, private nonprofit groups, and other interested parties to improve familiarity with the programs of DOT and the process for using them. This project would coordinate with other agencies and departments that will be providing their own training and education programs.

Community Development

- **EZ/EC expansion:** The Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities should be expanded. Funding for the Round II communities should be placed on the same sound, 10-year footing as Round I, instead of having to struggle for the funding each year. There should be a Round III that would further expand the network of EZ/ECs in the Delta. Nationally, the President's FY 2001 budget requested ten Round III Empowerment Zones (eight urban and two rural).
- **Champion Communities** should gain greater preference points for their funding applications, planning grants, and other benefits to enhance their Champion status.
- **Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI):** In addition to expanding the EZ/EC program, funding should be increased to a number of community

development innovations that have demonstrated success in recent years, particularly CDFIs and the Community Adjustment and Investment Program.

Welfare-to-Work, Job Training, and Workforce Investment

The following programs and policies have proven to be constructive in recent years regarding the issues of welfare-to-work, job training and workforce investment activities in the Mississippi Delta region. These policies should continue to be supported and expanded in the years beyond 2000.

- **The Balanced Budget Act of 1997** provides welfare-to-work (WtW) grants to States and local communities in the Delta (and throughout the country) to help hard-to-employ welfare recipients move into lasting, unsubsidized jobs. The national funding level for WtW grants was \$3 billion, \$1.5 billion each in fiscal years 1998 and 1999. There are two types of grants: formula grants to States and competitive grants to local communities. 75% of the WtW funds are distributed as grants to States according to a formula and the remaining 25% of the WtW funds are distributed through a competitive process to various entities.
- **The Workforce Investment Act of 1998**, (effective July 1, 2000), provides the framework for a unique workforce preparation and employment system designed to meet both the needs of the nation's businesses and the needs of job seekers and those who want to further their careers. Key components of the Act will enable customers to easily access the information and services they need through the "One-Stop" system; empower adults to obtain the training they find most appropriate through Individual Training Accounts; and ensure that all State and local programs meet customer expectations.

The Workforce Investment Act specifies three funding streams to the States and local areas: adults, dislocated workers, and youth. Each State will establish both State and local workforce investment boards. The local board shall promote the participation of private sector employers in the statewide workforce investment system. A majority of members shall be local and distant owners of business concerns, chief executives or chief operating officers of non-governmental employers, or other private sector employers. The State board will help the Governor develop a five-year strategic plan describing statewide workforce development activities.

A variety of benefits and reemployment services are available to unemployed workers. They are as follows: (1) rapid response assistance, (2) coordination, integration, and deliverance of basic readjustment services, (3) retraining services, (4) needs-related payments, and (5) coordination with the unemployment compensation system and cross-referral for resources provided by other agencies.

- **Job Corps:** Funded by Congress and administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, Job Corps is the leading residential employment-training program in the Delta and has been training young adults for meaningful work since 1964. There are 16 Job Corps Centers located in the States encompassing the Delta region.
- **The Youth Opportunity Movement (YOM)** is a partnership with the private sector to invest in young people. In conjunction with the Workforce Investment Act, the U.S. Department of Labor awards Youth Opportunity grants to qualifying communities. The underlying principle is to reduce poverty and unemployment among youth aged 14-21 in specific communities by concentrating resources in those areas with greatest need.

- **Temporary Assistance to Needy Families programs:** There should be an increase in education, training and employment programs for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) clients in order to ensure that low-income families have access to programs to improve their skills and move up the career ladder. There should also be an expansion in training programs for welfare workers.

Small Business Development, Access to Capital and Economic Empowerment

- **The New Markets Initiative:** This is a broad Presidential initiative that seeks to develop the untapped markets in regions that have not participated fully in the great prosperity of the 1990s, such as the Delta, the Southwest Border, Appalachia, and Native American reservations. Although “New Markets” is of course much broader than the Delta, its principles were embodied in the 1990 Commission—where Governor Clinton explicitly referred to the need to “expand into new markets.” President Clinton’s fiscal year 2000 balanced budget provides funding for this new initiative designed to create the conditions for economic success by prompting approximately \$22 billion over the next 10 years in new investment in rural and urban areas.
- **Small business access to credit:** There should be an expansion of various Small Business Administration programs such as microloans, surety bond guarantees, investment capital financing, export loans, Section 7(a) general small business loans, and other policies for enhancing new small business markets.
- **Enhancing entrepreneurial development:** SBA will expand technical assistance to small business through its Business Information Centers, Women’s Business Centers, Small Business Development Centers, the Mid-Delta One Stop Capital Shop, on-line courses and its virtual Small Business Classroom.
- **Rural economic development:** The Rural Business Service has pursued a number of initiatives for promoting business and industrial development in the poorest and smallest communities in the Delta. The Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program, Intermediary Lending Program, and Rural Business Enterprise Program have been highly effective in promoting economic development in the region, and these programs should be enhanced and broadened in the years after 2000. In particular, the Rural Business Opportunity Program (RBOG) should have a percentage of its funding allocated to help build capacity in distressed areas like the Delta. Similarly, a percentage of the Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) should be allocated to support efforts in the Delta to develop the capacity of grassroots organizations to undertake projects for improved housing, community facilities and economic development.
- **Economic Development Administration (EDA):** For many years, EDA has enjoyed an impressive reputation for promoting a wide variety of infrastructure, economic development and other activities. EDA continues to earn support both from Congress and from communities and local and State governments that it partners with to develop local solutions to addressing economic deterioration. As the country continues to reap the benefits of a surging economy, now is the time to focus resources toward areas of the country that have not benefited from this new economy.
- **Economic adjustment to base closures:** In 1999, the President signed legislation enabling DOD to convey surplus base closure property to communities at no cost in

order to stimulate economic revitalization. In the years after 2000, the Federal government should continue to support DOD's Economic Adjustment Program and other policies designed to help communities make transitions after base closures and military downsizing.

- **The farm economy:** In 1999, there was an almost \$9 billion Federal emergency package for farmers across the country. Agriculture remains a vital economic activity in the Delta, which ranks among the nation's most prolific producers of cotton, rice, soybeans and many other agricultural products. However, rather than having to pass major bailout legislation whenever the farm economy is rocked by periodic price crashes, farm legislation should be reformed to provide an adequate safety net for farmers, especially small- and medium-sized producers.
- **Trade:** The Administration firmly supports the expansion of exports as a critical element of the Federal government's response to the farm crisis. Further energizing our export expansion activities will help us bring markets into balance sooner, thus hastening the recovery of the farm economy. Therefore, the Administration is renewing its request for authority to roll forward the Export Enhancement Program balances to future years or use some of those funds for food aid or other export assistance activities.
- **Export assistance for small and minority farmers:** Small and minority farmers have historically suffered from disadvantages in export trade, and in order to help address this problem, USDA plans to conduct pilot programs in Mississippi and perhaps other Delta States to train small and minority producers in export marketing. The Export Readiness Training (ERT) pilot program is developed under the aegis and with the funding support of the Emerging Markets Program of USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS). Additional funding is being provided by SUSTA (Southern United States Trade Association) and the international Small Business Development Centers in Mississippi (the program will also be conducted in Alabama and Georgia). The program will be conducted in partnership with the State departments of agriculture; the international Small Business Development Centers; Alcorn State University, one of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which will conduct the training; SUSTA; and FAS's Emerging Markets Office. (Details are provided in the agriculture section of the Report.)
- **Research, education, and extension, and assistance for small- and medium-sized farmers:** This Report outlines a series of policy initiatives for advancing alternative agriculture; direct marketing for small farmers; research, education and extension programs; small farmer cooperatives; and sustainable agriculture.

PROTECTING AND RESTORING NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENHANCING TOURISM

Natural Resources

Progress has been made on many of the 1990 Delta Commission recommendations in areas from wetland restoration to navigation. Building on these activities and the partnerships, great strides can be made in protecting and restoring the Delta's natural resources in the next five to ten years.

- **Wetland Restoration:** Protection and restoration of coastal and freshwater wetlands

has consistently been a priority in the Delta. Wetlands provide critical habitat for many species and help to improve water quality by filtering out pollutants before they reach the water supply. Continued and increased support of regional and local partnerships could accelerate wetland protection to at least 45,000 acres/year and slow coastal land loss by 25 percent, providing human health, fish, wildlife, recreation and tourism benefits.

- **Water quality and quantity:** Inadequate supply of high-quality water is a growing problem in the Delta. State and Federal agencies could increase their water quality monitoring and act to protect communities from water pollution and fish consumption advisories by encouraging local governments and individuals to adopt Best Management Practices and other voluntary programs. They can also develop water use and availability plans to ensure adequate water supplies would protect the future needs of the local communities and an expanding economy in the Delta.
- **Flood Control and floodplain management:** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers funds a number of water resources projects, including a major flood control project along the main stem of the Mississippi River and in the watershed of one of its two principal outlets, Louisiana's Atchafalaya River basin. In the Delta region, as elsewhere in the Nation, the Corps also seeks to identify ways through which local communities can reduce the risk of flood damage while enhancing the natural values of their waters.
- **Assistance to flooding victims—Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA):** FEMA has achieved an exemplary record of providing expeditious aid for victims of floods and other disasters in the region. The Report goes beyond the impressive disaster relief assistance to discuss FEMA's flood mitigation projects in the region. As part of the new proposed regional commission, FEMA proposes the creation of a Mississippi Delta Project Impact Commission, comprised of States and communities in the region. The Commission's goal would be to develop a regional approach toward mitigation planning and project implementation to protect communities, enhance the environment, help manage growth and promote economic development.
- **Protecting wildlife:** Protecting wildlife should continue through public land protection, increased support for voluntary private land restoration, and invasive species eradication using programs such as Land and Water Conservation Fund and Conservation Reserve Program. Wildlife lands also provide the benefit of enhancing recreation and tourism.
- **Access to Information:** By increasing public access to information about fish, wildlife, water quality, toxins, and other information, local communities can enhance their planning and decision-making processes. Partnerships with communities and academic institutions could be developed to increase the collection and distribution of information through the Internet, pamphlets, and other methods.

Environment

The 1990 Delta Commission identified protecting the environment as a key area of emphasis. Continuing the ongoing improvements in water and air quality, waste clean-up, and other pollution abatement activities is integral to revitalizing the economy and improving the quality of life in the Delta.

- **Air and water quality:** Emphasis should be placed on ensuring that air and water quality meet health-based standards. By providing technical assistance and partnering with local communities, monitoring of air and water quality will be increased; efforts will continue to assure that people in the Delta will have safe drinking water; and contamination in fishing and recreational waters should be reduced to safe levels.
- **Site cleanup and redevelopment:** Delta communities have increasingly focused on cleaning up and redeveloping contaminated sites to protect the health of local communities and provide tangible economic benefit. Increased focus should be placed on the Brownfields Program and other collaborative efforts. In addition, construction at all Superfund sites on the January 1, 2000 National Priority List should be completed.
- **Reducing harmful chemical exposure:** The risk to public health and the environment from pesticide use is becoming an area of concern for the Delta. Through training and outreach this risk can be decreased by 50 percent through reduced application, buffer zones, and other methods to protect ground and surface water from runoff. In addition, new and safer pesticides could be reviewed and made available more quickly.
- **Public's right to know:** Across the nation there has been interest in improving the public's right to know about issues that affect their communities. Access to information on public health, safety, and environmental quality, including water quality, toxic releases, and fish consumption advisories, could be increased through the Internet, public outreach, and other tools.

Tourism

Tourism was recognized by the 1990 Delta Commission as an area of vast opportunity for economic growth. Despite this recognition, the Delta area lags behind the rest of the nation in tourism opportunities and awareness.

- **Delta Heritage:** Through the American Heritage Rivers Commissions and building on the ideas of the Lower Mississippi Delta Heritage Study, a network of nationally significant sites could be developed to support tourism development. Technical and other assistance could be provided to help plan, develop, and implement educational and tourism opportunities, with emphasis on Civil War, African-American, civil rights, and Native American sites, history, and culture.
- **Tourism planning and development:** Tourism opportunities could be greatly enhanced by the development of a regional plan, encompassing State and local tourism organizations. The plan could help increase awareness of the Delta's assets, strengthen marketing efforts, and coordinate activities between the Delta States.
- **Outdoor recreation and open space:** Recreation continues to be an important aspect of the quality of life in the Delta. Increasing the recreation opportunities offered on public land can benefit the local communities and provide tourism sites. In addition, technical assistance could be provided to develop urban and rural parks, trails, and river corridors.

REGIONAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

(PULL QUOTE)

“I offer my support for the Delta Initiatives and the creation of the Delta Regional Authority. It is my hope that we can work together to realize the enormous potential of the Delta and its people.” Governor Don Sundquist, Tennessee

A Permanent Regional Planning and Development Entity

Communities throughout the country have found that working together within a regional development context can yield a variety of benefits for economic and community development. They can speak with a united, regional voice. They can use their resources more effectively and wisely. Working collaboratively, they can enhance efforts to attract Federal resources and ensure accountability while allowing residents and entrepreneurs to gain access to capital resources for the creation and expansion of business.

Regional infrastructure funds can create opportunities for capitalizing innovative public/private projects. The cooperative, regional approach provides a sharing of information and expertise across communities throughout a region that faces common social and economic challenges.

Many regions throughout America have seen the wisdom in developing a unified regional approach to developmental issues; this has proven effective in areas including Appalachia, the Pacific Northwest, the Great Plains, and other regions. The Southwest Border region is beginning a similar regional initiative. Indeed, Federal statutes, such as TEA-21, which guides all Federal surface transportation funding, require regional planning bodies.

Delta Regional Authority

Legislation similar to that previously proposed by the Administration during the last Congress has been introduced with bi-partisan support in both the Senate and the House, respectively, by Senator Blanche Lincoln and Congressman Marion Berry. The Authority would undertake a set of activities in support of Delta priorities, in partnership with States, localities, and the private sector. In addition to its coordinating and administering functions, the commission would also provide a modest program of grants to encourage a broad range of economic and related activities.

“Voices of the Delta”

In this section, the Delta voices are speaking for themselves. Therefore, we will not attempt to characterize their positions here, except to briefly note the basic categories of the “Voices.” The Delta 2000 Initiative stresses that these comments are part of the ongoing dialogue regarding the future of the region. We would greatly appreciate any and all further comments, either through the Department of Transportation’s new Delta Website (www.dot.gov/delta) or through the Delta 2000 Initiative address. The “Voices” published in this Report include:

- Grassroots regional organizations, such as the Delta Caucus, Southern EZ/EC Forum, Delta Compact, and others;
- Governors of the Delta States;
- Members of Congress from the region representing both parties;

- Private business leaders, including BusinessLinc, Entergy, the Delta Council, and others;
- Organizations and leaders interested in diversity issues, such as the Delta Race Relations Consortium and other groups;
- Summaries of Delta listening sessions in the fall of 1999;
- Groups and individuals interested in transportation issues, such as the Interstate-69 Initiative and the Great River Bridge project supporters;
- Agricultural groups and experts, including Delta representatives of the President's Commission on 21st Century Agriculture and others;
- Other voices expressing opinions on a variety of other issues regarding the region's future.

(PULL QUOTE)

“I've asked 12 Arkansans to serve on the Governor's Arkansas Delta Development Initiative work group. This work group will join key State agency directors and legislators in recommending legislation needed to address the social and economic needs of the Arkansas Delta. The main goal of the work group is to develop legislation for the 2001 legislative session that will improve the quality of life and eliminate poverty in the 42 Arkansas counties that were part of the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Act... The ADDI work group will be the first State legislative effort addressing significant issues in the Delta, and it will be designed to complement Federal initiatives.”

GOVERNOR MIKE HUCKABEE, ARKANSAS

One purpose of this section is to underscore the importance of strong partnerships in the Delta to deal with the issues facing its population, and the Federal government's commitment to helping forge those alliances. The second purpose is to foster the nature of this Report as an ongoing dialogue to which this Administration is committed and to which it has provided leadership.

The Future of the Delta

The Mississippi Delta 2000 Initiative calls for the formation of a dynamic coalition to move the region forward: Federal, State and local governments, private business, faith-based organizations and nonprofit foundations must all play energetic roles. The Federal government can provide technical assistance and resources, but ultimately empowerment and lasting change flow from leadership at the grassroots level. As Bill Clinton expressed the empowering nature of broad-based grassroots participation in 1990, “Being in the vanguard of change need not be a distinction limited to the freedom-hungry citizens of Eastern Europe or Poland or the aggressive business people of Singapore or Korea. The people of the Delta belong in that vanguard. They want to be there, and they can be, if each of us will do our part.”

**PASSAGE FROM PRESIDENT CLINTON'S 2000 STATE OF THE UNION
ADDRESS
REGARDING THE NEW MARKETS INITIATIVE, THE DELTA, AND
RELATED ISSUES**

"Now, to keep our historic economic expansion going, I believe we need a 21st century revolution to open new markets, start new businesses, hire new workers right here in America—in our inner cities, poor rural areas, and Native American reservations. Our nation's prosperity hasn't yet reached these places. Over the last six months, I've traveled to a lot of them, joined by many of you, and many far-sighted business people, to shine a spotlight on the enormous potential in communities from Appalachia to the Mississippi Delta, from Watts to the Pine Ridge Reservation. Everywhere I go, I meet talented people eager for opportunity, and able to work. Tonight I ask you, let's put them to work. For business, it's the smart thing to do. For America, it's the right thing to do. And let me ask you something—if we don't do this now, when in the wide world will we ever get around to it?

So I ask Congress to give businesses the same incentives to invest in America's new markets they now have to invest in markets overseas. Tonight, I propose a large New Markets tax credit and other incentives to spur \$22 billion in private-sector capital to create new businesses and new investments in our inner cities and rural areas.

Because empowerment zones have been creating these opportunities for five years now, I also ask you to increase incentives to invest in them and to create more of them.

And let me say to all of you again what I have tried to say at every turn—this is not a Democratic or a Republican issue. Giving people a chance to live their dreams is an American issue.

Mr. Speaker, it was a powerful moment last November when you joined Reverend Jesse Jackson and me in your home State of Illinois, and committed to working toward our common goal, by combining the best ideas from both sides of the aisle. I want to thank you again, and to tell you, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to working with you. This is a worthy, joint endeavor. Thank you.

I also ask you to make special efforts to address the areas of our nation with the highest rates of poverty—our Native American reservations and the Mississippi Delta. My budget includes a \$110-million initiative (*NOTE: the amount was later increased to more than \$159 million*) to promote economic development in the Delta, and a billion dollars to increase economic opportunity, health care, education and law enforcement for our Native American communities. In this new century—we should begin this new century by honoring our historic responsibility to empower the first Americans. And I want to thank tonight the leaders and the members from both parties who've expressed to me an interest in working with us on these efforts. They are profoundly important.

There's another part of our American community in trouble tonight—our family farmers. When I signed the Farm Bill in 1996, I said there was great danger it would work well in good times, but not in bad. Well, droughts, floods, and historically low prices have made these times very bad for the farmers. We must work together to strengthen the farm safety net, invest in land conservation, and create some new markets for them by expanding our programs for bio-based fuels and products. Please, they need help—let's do it together.

Opportunity for all requires something else today—having access to a computer and knowing how to use it. That means we must close the digital divide between those who've got the tools and those who don't."

(PULL QUOTE) "America can't ignore the people who have been left behind."
Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, Dennis Hastert, Illinois

CLINTON-GORE ADMINISTRATION BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR THE DELTA

Fostering Economic Development in the Mississippi Delta

President Clinton and Vice President Gore are committed to bringing economic prosperity to the Mississippi Delta region and other areas of the country which have not benefited from the Nation's soaring economy. In the Delta region, poverty remains at 175 percent of the national average and over half of the counties have had poverty rates over 20 percent for the past four decades. The per capita income in the Delta's distressed communities is only 53 percent of the U.S. average. To address these problems, the President's budget proposes \$159 million to increase specifically economic opportunities in the Mississippi Delta region, including \$30 million to create a new Delta Regional Authority to bring the resources of a Federal-State partnership to the fight for economic growth in the region. This partnership will help provide the infrastructure and job training needed to make prosperity a reality in the Delta.

Establishing a Delta Regional Authority

Targeting Distressed Areas: The Delta Regional Authority's funding will be targeted to the counties with the highest poverty and unemployment rates, and lowest per capita income. The DRA will include:

- \$25 million for area development such as distressed counties programs, physical infrastructure and job training;
- \$3 million for assistance to participating State and local economic development entities; and
- \$2 million for technical assistance and administrative expenses.

Fostering a Coordinated Effort: The Delta Regional Authority will foster close coordination between State and local officials and the Federal government, led by the Federal Co-Chair appointed by the President. The Governors of the seven member States will serve as DRA members, with one Governor elected to serve as the States' Co-Chair. This can be accomplished through authorizing legislation that has been introduced in the House and Senate.

Providing \$107 Million in Targeted Economic Development Assistance for the Delta Region

Supporting Rural Housing and Economic Development: The Department of Housing and Urban Development will provide \$22 million in Community Development Block Grants to support rural housing and economic development. Funding will be awarded through a competitive process for economic revitalization and community development initiatives in the Delta region.

Improving Public Works and Infrastructure: The Commerce Department will provide \$10 million through targeted Economic Development Administration funding for public works and infrastructure grants. These grants require a State or local match, except in extremely distressed communities.

Increasing Funds for Transportation Improvements: The Transportation Department will provide a total of \$69 million in funding targeted to the Delta region, including:

- \$48 million for new bridge and highway infrastructure in the Delta, including \$25 million specifically for I-69 and the Great River Bridge;

- \$20 million in transit funds, consisting of \$15 million from the Federal Transit Administration's Capital Investment Grants program for public transit buses and bus facilities to provide affordable transportation and \$5 million from FTA's Access to Jobs and Reverse Commute Grants to promote vanpools, new bus routes, and other transportation alternatives; and
- \$1 million from Federal Highway Administration administrative funds for technical assistance, including training on Federal programs and developing a tourism marketing plan and a regional transportation plan—with efforts toward these goals to begin this year.

Supporting Rural Business: The Department of Agriculture will provide \$6 million in funding to support rural businesses, including:

- \$4 million for the Intermediary Relending Program, which finances loans to intermediary borrowers who in turn re-lend the funds to rural businesses, community development corporations, and others for the purpose of improving rural economic opportunity—the \$4 million represents loan subsidy costs and would support a loan level of \$8 million; and
- \$2 million for Partnership Technical Assistance grants, to help underserved communities create strategic plans, better use USDA's Rural Development grant and loan programs, create jobs, improve the quality of life, and build strong, sustained economic growth. These grants will be run through the Rural Business Opportunity Grant Program.

Investing \$22 Million in the People of the Delta Region

Providing Training for Dislocated Workers: The Department of Labor will provide resources through the Dislocated Worker Employment and Training Program, which provides core services, intensive services, training and support to help dislocated workers return to work as quickly as possible. The Labor Department will partner with the Departments of Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, Education, and Health and Human Services to support the Delta Regional Authority activities by providing as much as \$5 million in dislocated worker grants for qualified applications from the seven States and 219 counties comprising the Mississippi Delta region.

Providing Technology Training for Teachers: The Education Department will provide \$10 million for a targeted demonstration project to provide technology training to middle school teachers in the seven-State Mississippi Delta region. Research suggests that middle school is an especially critical time for students to learn the technology-related skills they will need to succeed in today's economy. The program will use a "train-the-trainers" approach by training a small number of teachers from each school who can then be technology leaders, serve as resident experts, and assist other teachers in their schools or districts.

Increasing Access to Quality Health Services: The Department of Health and Human Services will provide \$7 million through the Health Resources and Services Administration's Rural Health Outreach program for grants to fund rural health clinics in the Mississippi Delta region. This request will fund up to 30 new Rural Health Outreach grants, and will support a wide range of services in the Delta region including primary care, dental care, mental health services and emergency care. Each grant will require participation by a consortium of three or more providers, which will encourage the development of shared services arrangements among providers and new networks of care in the Delta region.

“This is a time in which to build...not a time to rest.”

President William Jefferson Clinton-Comments during trip to the Delta in 1999

OPENING ESSAY BY JOHN BARRY

*Author of *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America**

The Valley of the Mississippi River stretches north into Canada and south into the Gulf of Mexico, east from New York and North Carolina and west to Idaho and New Mexico. Including all or part of 31 States, it exceeds by 20% the valley of China’s Yellow River, is double that of Africa’s Nile and India’s Ganges, and is fifteen times that of Europe’s Rhine. If smaller than the valley of the Amazon, the Mississippi Valley dwarfs even that basin—along with all others—in its agricultural and industrial productivity. It is quite simply the most important river valley in the world.

The river itself rivals its valley in import. The Mississippi and its tributaries directed the nation’s expansion across the continent, created vast fortunes in agriculture, commerce, and transportation, and spurred technological developments in fields as diverse—and seemingly unrelated to rivers—as architecture, experimental physics, and even metallurgy. And the Mississippi is a force equal to its history, roiling its way south in layers and whorls, like an uncoiling rope made up of a multitude of discrete fibers, each one following an independent and unpredictable path, each one separately and together capable of snapping like a whip. A nineteenth century European observer noted, “It is not like most rivers, beautiful to the sight, not one that the eye loves to dwell upon as it sweeps along, nor can you wander along the bank, or trust yourself without danger to its stream. It is a furious, rapid, desolating torrent, loaded with alluvial soil. Pouring its impetuous waters through wild tracts, it sweeps down whole forests in its course, which disappear in tumultuous confusion, whirled away by the stream now loaded with the masses of soil which nourished their roots, often blocking up and changing the channel of the river, which, as if in anger at its being opposed, inundates and devastates the whole country round.”

Yet the river has always created more than it destroyed. Indeed, it quite literally created all the land from Cape Girardeau, Missouri, to the sea. The Gulf of Mexico once reached north to Cape Girardeau, but, as sea level dropped, the river over thousands of years deposited its enormous load of sediment and made the land from there south, made what is the Mississippi’s Delta.

The entire nation owes much to this Delta area, not only because of the past but also because of the present. Economics aside, through the birth of the blues and jazz, through literature from Mark Twain to Richard Wright and William Faulkner, the Mississippi also helped create America’s soul. As St. Louis-born T.S. Eliot wrote, “The sea is all about us.../The river is within us.”

Today, the river continues to determine the economic and demographic future of much of the nation, yet the Delta region is the one part of the United States whose economy has consistently lagged behind. It is not a coincidence. For all the wealth the river created, it and the flow of history placed a unique burden on this region and on those who live here. The time is long past that this region gets special attention. More than a century ago, a Kansas congressman declared that improvement in this area was the single most

important issue to his constituents, while a Massachusetts congressman demanded the development of the resources within it. The question is what form any special attention should take.

In this, too, the river offers a model. As Mark Twain wrote of the river long ago, “ten thousand River Commissions... cannot tame that lawless stream, cannot curb it or confine it, cannot say to it, Go here, or Go there, and make it obey.” And yet we have worked out a kind of accommodation with the river which, if imperfect, has allowed man to take advantage of what the river offers. Similarly, ten thousand government commissions cannot successfully dictate to the people who live within range of the river what to do. The direction must come from them.

But in conjunction with members of both parties in the Congress, with officials from State and local government, and—most importantly—with the people in the region, the Delta Initiative can help crystallize ideas, precipitating possibilities out of solution, and then focus energies and resources and communicate what works. The Delta initiative can help make ideas real.

PREFACE

“If we cannot fully develop the Delta now when we have the strongest economy in our lifetime, when will we ever get around to it? The story needs to go out across America. This is a good investment....America needs to...recognize that the best new market for American products and for American investment is right here in the U.S. of A.”

President William Jefferson (Bill) Clinton

Clarksdale, Mississippi

July 6, 1999

William Faulkner once wrote of the Delta, *“The past is never dead. It is not even past.”* Yet, the Delta is as much about the future as about the past. It is about promise—and challenge. It is about the unexplored potential of its citizens who want a future that enables them to share in the country’s growth and prosperity. It is about what President Clinton calls the need “to widen the circle of opportunity and ensure that people throughout the Delta region have a full partnership in America’s future.”

As President Clinton has repeated forcefully in seeking to provide assistance to the Delta “the citizens of this region have not participated fairly and fully in the unprecedented prosperity we have enjoyed as a nation.” The region has suffered from persistent poverty, a “sluggish” economy, and a legacy of racial segregation. While real progress is recognized—as this Report will discuss—the focus of *Delta Vision, Delta Voices* is to address the agenda that remains unfinished and to suggest, plan for and implement the important next steps—such as fulfilling the Administration’s efforts to expand funding for the region and support creation of a permanent regional commission.

Claiming its place in the tide of economic progress is the key challenge and opportunity for the people of the Delta and for America’s public, private and non-profit sectors within and beyond the Delta. As Speaker of the House of Representatives Dennis Hastert stated recently in Chicago with President Clinton, “America can’t ignore the people who have been left behind.”

Background for New Action (The Decade of the 1990s)

The global revolution of the last decade has created possibilities for economic growth and social change that simply did not exist before. As Gutenberg revolutionized access to the written word through the printing press in the 1400s, once again the world has been revolutionized in our lifetime through the incredible reach and potential of the Internet and the impact of globalization and open borders. We must seize the moment and take full advantage of this extraordinary telecommunications and social revolution to reach those in America for whom access to improved communications and economic tools has not been adequately realized. Taking part in the information revolution is essential to new business development, education, and quality of life. In America, nowhere is this truer than in the Delta. Understanding this, President Clinton and Vice President Gore have set a national goal—with special attention to the country’s poorest schools—of ensuring that every child is technologically literate and every classroom and library connected to the Internet.

As then Administrator Slater Stated in *Linking the Delta Region with the Nation and the World* in 1995, the President’s 1990 Commission goals for the Delta helped foretell and mark this Administration’s signature policy actions: investing in education, training and

the environment; targeting tax relief to working families; protecting the essential Medicare and Medicaid programs; and tighter and more focused coordination of Federal programs for local purposes. Other major Clinton-Gore initiatives have had a direct impact on the Delta as well. The following highlights three initiatives of special national and regional significance in addition to the new Empowerment Zones, Enterprise Communities and Champion Communities and a range of other innovative community-focused programs essential to the Delta's economic life, which will be discussed in the body of the Report.

The New Markets Initiative

President Clinton's FY 2001 balanced budget provides funding for this new initiative designed to create the conditions for economic success by prompting approximately \$22 billion over the next 10 years in new investment in rural and urban areas. This will be accomplished through: new tax credits; the recently created American Private Investment Companies (similar to the Overseas Private Investment Corporation) encouraging private investment and community development in untapped, needy and promising regions of the country; new venture capital and small business investment initiatives; micro-enterprise lending and technical assistance; and the expansion of a range of ongoing initiatives designed to create more attractive conditions for new economic investment in the Delta. The New Markets initiative is designed to bring both jobs and opportunity to struggling areas and dedicated to leveling the playing field by first raising it. President Clinton has traveled to these untapped "New Markets" accompanied by CEOs, Cabinet members, local officials and community leaders. In July 1999, he visited Clarksdale, Mississippi where he announced an additional \$15 million in new community development grants for the Delta. In Chicago, he was joined by U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert to announce the joining of the President's "New Markets" initiative and the Republican's "Renewable Communities" proposal to focus on steering investment to America's neediest communities. As the President stated in Hermitage, Arkansas, in early November, we are working "to try and get a common approach to bringing economic opportunity to poor communities." As the President continues his New Markets tour in the Delta and elsewhere, the Administration seeks a bipartisan effort to help move along the policy recommendations and funding requested for the Delta region and contained in this Report.

One America Race Initiative

"One America" is the President's initiative on race designed to create diverse, value-based communities in America in which differences are respected and celebrated, by involving community leaders in a thoughtful, respectful dialogue of trust and idea sharing. In June 1997, President Clinton announced the "One America in the 21st Century" initiative designed to help shape an America based on "opportunity for all, responsibility from all, and one community of all Americans." Having recognized that in areas of our country the legacy of racism can be especially destructive to forming the community linkages necessary for building cooperation and prosperity, the President has pursued eliminating the "opportunity gaps" that continue to exist in the Delta and elsewhere.

Millennium Trails Initiative

Celebrating America's rich history and exciting future, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Rodney Slater and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton designated 16 National Millennium

Trails in June 1999. These trails are part of the White House Millennium Council's efforts to stimulate national and local activities to "honor the past and imagine the future." These trails connect our nation's rich history with its resources, its people, and its culture and open the prospect of economic renaissance in the future. A number of these trails are in the South and located throughout areas of the Delta. Two of special significance for the Delta are: The Mississippi River Trail, which follows the nation's longest river from New Orleans to Minneapolis with a bike path that will touch upon the historic, cultural, natural and habitat richness of the Mississippi River Valley; and The Civil War Discovery Trail, which identifies and thematically connects the battlefields, military routes and sites of historic significance in our country's most tragic period of domestic struggle. This trail provides an important historic lens for understanding and healing through which Americans today and tomorrow can understand the message of redeeming by charity, and rejecting malice in both victory and defeat.

Grassroots regional initiatives: In April 1998, various key Delta organizations formed the Southern EZ/EC Forum Delta Regional Initiative, an outgrowth of the Empowerment Zones, Enterprise Communities, and USDA Champion Communities that are designed to create innovative solutions to persistent community problems of endemic poverty, high unemployment and general economic distress. The Forum pledged its cooperation to focus on economic revitalization in the Delta and to work together to coordinate government-wide action to raise the quality of life along the lower Mississippi. Vice President Albert Gore, Secretary of Transportation Rodney Slater and Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman witnessed the signing of the unprecedented Delta cooperation pact. Shortly thereafter, Secretary Slater convened the conference in Memphis in which the Delta MOU was signed by 10 Federal agencies, with nine more joining the process the following year.

The Delta Compact is a collaborative, capacity-building public/private sector initiative that grew out of the 1990 Commission recommendations and was initiated in August 1998 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Housing Assistance Council. This compact initially focused on the Delta's southernmost areas of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas, but has now expanded to include all seven Delta States. The 50 Delta organizations have been active in seeking to improve non-profit community-based organizations' capacity to promote housing and economic development, increase the technological capacity of Delta institutions, deliver financing and improve access to credit, and encourage better and more communication and collaboration among Delta constituencies.

Mississippi Delta Region Heritage Study: Also in 1998, the Mississippi Delta region Heritage Study was presented to Congress. The study identified important Civil War and Civil Rights sites, explored the historical and cultural impact of American Indians, African-Americans, early European explorers, and many others, and suggested opportunities to enhance tourism through the development of trails and museums as well as site interpretation and protection. This study, a product of a joint effort by Federal, State, local and tribal governments and communities, non-profits and private organizations, examined the region's natural, cultural and recreational resources.

National Underground Network to Freedom Act: With strong bipartisan support, the Administration and Congress agreed to pass a program within the National Park Service designed to link all the Underground Railroad sites in the nation to commemorate this

first broad effort to free slaves in America. This program raises awareness and understanding of this courageous social movement, while creating new tourist development opportunities. Many sites exist throughout the Delta.

Delta Voices

Direct participation by citizens of the Delta has been a consistent theme—welcomed, encouraged and facilitated as we have moved to update and broaden our research and outreach. It is a theme that will continue throughout all our efforts. This Report is a “living document” to which the Delta’s citizens can continue to contribute their thoughts and ideas through written contributions, as well as through participation in the **Delta Website and the new Delta “800” Number**. The new “user-friendly” Department of Transportation Delta website (www.dot.gov/delta) and the toll free Delta number (888-273-4117) hold great potential, especially for intra-Delta and citizen/Federal-local communication. The website provides a map and listing of the Delta-region counties, reports and information, as well as useful links for identifying grant programs and other Delta-related resources. It must be stressed that the website was created in the fall of 1999 and is in its infancy, but significant expansion of the website is envisaged as a key information and resource tool.

The Clinton-Gore Administration also has held a series of conferences and listening sessions in the region since 1993. Several notable examples have been discussed already: the meeting in New Orleans in April, 1998 in which Vice President Gore, Secretary Slater and Secretary Dan Glickman witnessed the signing of the Southern EZ/EC Forum pact of cooperation with the Delta EZ/ECs and a coalition of grassroots organizations; Secretary Slater’s July, 1998 conference in Memphis, where the Delta MOU was signed; and the President’s frequent conferences in the region, such as his trips to Clarksdale, Mississippi as well as Helena, Hermitage and West Memphis, Arkansas and many other conferences.

Listening sessions: To continue these efforts, the Department of Transportation held public listening sessions in the Delta during the fall of 1999 to provide input and data for *Delta Vision, Delta Voices*. Day-long listening sessions were organized and publicized around the Delta: West Memphis, Arkansas on September 25; Baton Rouge, Louisiana on October 1; Vicksburg, Mississippi on October 2; and Cape Girardeau, Missouri on October 4. These sessions were designed around the “open space” concept, which enabled dynamic participation of approximately 600 participants who attended these sessions. The focus was on information-sharing, finding common ground, and identifying opportunities for action and change. Federal officials from the region and from Washington participated in all sessions and many individuals who were not able to participate have also submitted and offered their comments. In addition to these listening sessions, many other smaller meetings were held throughout the region.

The “Voices of the Delta” section includes a concise statement summarizing the reflections gleaned from these sessions. The majority of this section of this Report includes a series of other contributions from grassroots organizations; private business; Governors; Members of Congress from the region; Delta representatives from the President’s Commission on 21st Century Agriculture; groups focusing on transportation issues such as “The I-69 Initiative”; the Delta Race Relations Consortium and other groups interested in diversity issues; and other voices from the region.

(PULL QUOTE)

“The government can provide a helping hand to assist these areas in growing their economy and moving toward prosperity. That’s why I’ve joined Senator Blanche Lincoln, Congressman Marion Berry and other members from affected States in introducing legislation that will create a Federal-State organization to promote economic growth in the Mississippi Delta region.”

U.S. Senator Tim Hutchinson, Arkansas

Outreach to grassroots organizations: Further outreach has included the crucial regional grassroots organizations of the Delta. To name just a few examples, these organizations include the Southern EZ/EC Forum, the Delta Compact, the Delta Caucus, the Delta Council, the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Center, the Mid-South Delta Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), and many others. The Mid-South Delta LISC sponsors an array of initiatives for supporting housing, job creation and community development in the Delta. LISC channels private resources from corporations and foundations to community development corporations for these projects. During the fall of 1999, it held a major conference in Tunica, Mississippi attended by Federal and local officials from throughout the region, providing another source of information for the Administration.

The Delta Caucus is a grassroots movement of legislators, city, town, county and parish officials and citizens from the Delta seeking to build public awareness of the region and its unique needs. The Caucus organized a visit to Washington in early October 1999 and 150 concerned Delta citizens met with high-level White House officials and went to Capitol Hill to meet with Members of Congress and staff to discuss the program needs of the Delta and funding. In its early stages the Caucus was focused primarily in Arkansas, but is now expanding its efforts in all seven States in the region. As Arkansas State Legislator Kevin Smith has stated, the poverty statistics in the Delta continue to “cry out for national attention.”

These are only a few of the many grassroots organizations consulted by the Delta 2000 Initiative, and these organizations are discussed throughout this Report. All of this input provides essential material and insight into the ideas, recommendations and emphases included in this Report and to close what Reverend Jesse Jackson calls “the resource gap” that exists in the Delta today.

The “Voices of the Delta” section presents the views of private citizens, business leaders, officials and observers keenly interested or intimately involved in the Delta—past, present and future—who have provided their reactions, insights, concerns and reflections on the region’s promise, challenges, disappointments, and even action priorities. Success stories and meaningful action in the Delta also serve to demonstrate the commitment of the Delta’s citizens to their future.

The Future

As President Clinton stated in July, 1999 during his trip to Clarksdale, Mississippi, “everybody...has a selfish interest now in developing the Delta...because as most economists believe...if we’re going to keep our economic recovery going without inflation, the only way we can possibly do it is to find more customers for our products and then add more workers at home. [In the Delta]...you get both in the same place,” said

the President. “You get more workers and more consumers. So it’s good for the rest of America as well.”

Specific Delta actions have been taken in the 1990s and are being planned and recommended for implementation over the next five years and beyond, as this Report will describe. It is clear these actions will require concerted action and funding by both the private and the public sectors at all levels. Yet, to be fully realized, much more must be done. To get to where we need to go will require the imposing talents and energy not only of the Delta’s citizens, but the vision and commitment of our regional and national leaders—now and in the future.

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE

“At the age of twelve, I had an attitude toward life that was to endure, that was to make me see those areas of living that would keep it alive, that was to make me skeptical of everything while seeking everything, tolerant of all yet critical.”

Richard Wright, *Black Boy*

DIVERSITY

Improving the quality of life in the Delta must begin with the celebration of one of its greatest strengths—its rich ethnic, cultural and racial diversity—while attacking its greatest flaw: the blight of racism. A fundamental theme running throughout this Report is the need to ameliorate race relations in the Delta. Racism has been one of the most destructive forces in preventing the people of the Delta from making joint progress in attacking the region's social, political, and economic problems. In many areas—community development, educational opportunities, small business assistance, and others—there have been important strides made in the 1990's for African-Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and other minorities in the Delta. Yet much remains to be done. Minorities in the Delta have not participated freely in the economic boom of the 1990s. Since approximately 40 percent of the Delta's people are African-American and the relatively small number of Hispanics in the region is rapidly growing, this is a vital issue.

This Report addresses a multitude of issues that deal in part or entirely with race relations. Several examples below illustrate some of the important activities underway.

Magnet schools: The Magnet School Assistance Program (MSAP) has assisted school districts in planning and developing such schools as part of that district's approved desegregation plan to reduce, eliminate or prevent minority group isolation. For example, the Monroe City School District in Louisiana will receive up to \$3,730,659 over three years for its MSAP project to establish technology-based magnet schools at Carroll Junior High School and Carroll Senior High School. The program will foster partnerships with business, technical colleges, and universities to create a strong link between school-based and real-world learning.

Minority education at elementary, secondary and college levels: Through the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), additional Federal resources through the Title I program were directed to schools with high percentages of students living in poverty. A substantial majority of elementary and secondary schools in the Delta receive Title I funding. At the college and university level, a number of initiatives have been pursued, including assistance for the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) program, which makes up another major component of the effort to assist minorities in obtaining opportunities for educational advancement. Many Departments—including USDA, Education, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and others—are committed to strengthening their active partnership agreements with the association of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) to provide college students training and job opportunities.

Bilingual and migrant education programs: The Department of Education's Bilingual Education program assists students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), including many Latino children, learn English and achieve the same high academic standards as other students. The Migrant Education Program reaches out to migrant farm workers' children who suffer from the combined effects of poverty, inadequate mobility, and limited English proficiency, characteristic of many migrant children. For example, the Orleans Parish School District in Louisiana received \$463,676 in Federal funding in FY98 through a Bilingual Education Comprehensive School grant to restructure, upgrade,

and reform the current program for over 1,300 LEP students speaking more than 20 languages.

Minorities in the agricultural sector: The U.S. Department of Agriculture has pursued a number of policies for assisting small farmers and farm workers, many of whom are minorities. Expansion of marketing opportunities, greater access to credit, and other policies for the disadvantaged have been advanced, although much remains to be done to correct the historic discrimination that has been inflicted upon minority farmers. Efforts have been made to provide aid for farm laborers, many of whom are African-American and Hispanic. In addition to the education programs cited above, housing is a major issue for migrant workers. Farm labor housing in the Delta region has traditionally consisted of single-family dwellings located on private lands, which the agricultural producer funded. But, with changes in the agricultural economy of the Delta, there has been a shift away from such housing. In the 1990's, USDA Rural Development provided assistance for farm labor housing programs in the Delta. Mississippi built 26 on-farm labor housing units totaling \$1.23 million, and western Tennessee built two units at a cost of over \$100,000. In Arkansas, however, construction of new, on-farm units has continued at a more significant rate, and an innovative, overnight housing and referral facility for migrant farm workers was developed in Hope, Arkansas. During the 1990's, Rural Development in Arkansas provided 47 domestic Farm Labor Housing loans to finance 62 on-farm units totaling approximately \$2,610,000. Moreover, Rural Development in Arkansas also granted \$2.5 million to construct the new Hope Migrant Complex.

The Hope Migrant Farm Labor Center was constructed to assist families and individuals as they travel through a "migrant stream"—workers who travel to points north and south, anticipating work opportunities along certain routes. Each year, thousands of families following the midwestern migrant stream travel through Hope, Arkansas, and many families stop to rest at the Labor Center. They are provided with housing, job referrals and social services assistance. Farm workers have historically been among the most socially and economically distressed groups in the region, despite their essential contribution in producing the food Americans eat every day. USDA's Rural Development and the U.S. Department of Labor are working on this and other projects to assist farm workers throughout the region.

Fair housing opportunity: The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has vigorously invoked its authority under the Fair Housing Act to prosecute cases of housing discrimination. HUD has funded the Fair Housing Initiatives Program, which aids private nonprofit organizations, State and local governments and other entities committed to enhancing compliance with the nation's fair housing laws. Furthermore, HUD launched a rigorous independent study of racial and ethnic discrimination in housing and rental sales in order to enhance its continuing effort to enforce fair housing opportunities.

Minority small businesses: The Small Business Administration's (SBA) Micro Loan program has assisted small businesses throughout the region, with over half of the loans going to African-Americans. SBA's Section 7(a) Loan Guaranty Program provides loans to eligible, credit-worthy small businesses that cannot obtain financing on reasonable terms through normal lending channels. This program has steadily increased its loan activity for minorities. In fiscal year 1992, 15 percent of the loans were made to

minorities and 14 percent to women, while in fiscal year 1998, that percentage had risen to 24 percent to minorities as well as 24 percent to women. In fiscal year 1999, SBA guaranteed 4,052 loans in the region, amounting to more than \$755 million, and almost half of the loans were to minorities and women. Similarly, the Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund has provided opportunities for small businesses, including many African-American businesses, working with community development organizations such as the Enterprise Corporation for the Delta and many others.

Minority government contracts: The Federal government has made a concerted effort to provide minorities with opportunities to increase involvement with Federal contracting. The 1990 Commission explicitly recommended such assistance. The Department of Defense gives attention to minority defense contract awards, and SBA's Section 8(a) program is a set-aside for small disadvantaged businesses. African-Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans and Asian Pacific Americans are included among those designated as disadvantaged under the Small Business Act. To date, there are 683 companies taking part in Section 8(a) in the Delta region. To cite just a few examples of the benefits: in four Delta counties in Arkansas in 1998, \$18.5 million in Federal contracting dollars were awarded to small and disadvantaged businesses, while three Louisiana Delta counties received almost \$32 million.

HUBZones: Similarly, the Historically Underutilized Business Zone (HUBZones) program provides Federal contracting opportunities for qualified and certified individually owned small businesses located in areas with high unemployment, low-income residents, or on Native American reservations. Almost every county along the Mississippi River is included among the more than 7,500 HUBZones across the nation. SBA pursues a number of other policies aimed at providing fair opportunities for minorities (and all small, disadvantaged businesses) through its Small Business Development Centers and other initiatives.

Minority health: In 1998, President Clinton instructed Federal agencies to pursue a major initiative to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health. The U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services is leading this effort to focus attention on minority health issues. One example of this attention is the Mississippi Delta Environmental Health Project, supported by HHS through a cooperative agreement with the Minority Health Professions Foundation. This project identifies environmental and other problems that affect the health of Delta minorities, addresses demographics, identification of health care providers and environmental services in the region, and implements strategies to address these problems.

Environmental justice for minorities: Pursuant to the Clinton Administration's Executive Order 12898, "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations," the Environmental Protection Agency has funded a variety of low-income and minority communities through its Environmental Justice Program, including grants to Delta institutions of higher learning to study hazardous waste, health and the environment in the region. The Department of Transportation also has made environmental justice a cornerstone of its relationship with its stakeholders, working to ensure that the public participation process which underlies all State and metropolitan plans is fully open to access by minorities who would be affected by proposed transportation projects.

Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities: As discussed earlier, this major Clinton-Gore Administration innovation in community development has designated 15 rural and urban EZs and ECs in the Delta located in economically distressed areas with large minority populations.

Civil Rights Division, Justice Department actions: The Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice (DOJ) has done extensive work to ensure equal rights and equal opportunity for all residents of the region, regardless of race, ethnicity, color, gender, or disability. Numerous Federal criminal civil rights cases have been filed during the past seven years. These prosecutions include hate crime violations as well as acts of official misconduct and criminal violations of the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (FACE). In addition, DOJ has promoted educational opportunities by enforcing extant desegregation decrees in longstanding school cases to which the United States is a party. Fair housing, employment discrimination, and voters' rights remain top priorities in the Mississippi Delta, and DOJ has been very active in these areas. For example, DOJ has brought cases under the Voting Rights Act to ensure that minority voters have an equal opportunity to elect their candidates of choice, and extensive work has been done in defending State and local redistricting plans challenged under the 14th Amendment as unlawful racial gerrymanders.

The Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, established in 1957 following enactment of the first civil rights statutes since Reconstruction, is the primary Federal institution responsible for enforcing Federal statutes prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, sex, handicap, religion, and national origin. The following includes some highlights in key areas:

- **Disability rights:** In the area of enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Civil Rights Division has been quite active in the Delta. The Department of Justice has entered into a consent decree with the Louisiana Department of Corrections, for example, to resolve a complaint regarding the denial of reasonable accommodations to applicants for corrections officer positions. Also, DOJ has reached settlements with various Delta cities and counties including the City of Gonzalez, Louisiana; Hickman County, Kentucky; and Marshall County, Mississippi, to resolve allegations that they failed to complete self-evaluation or transition plans—a requirement for providing access to government programs. DOJ has also reached settlement agreements under Title III of the ADA (ensuring access to public accommodations) against several hotels in the region.
- **Educational opportunities:** Since 1993 the Educational Opportunities Litigation Section has had case-related activity in 37 counties/parishes in three States of the region: 19 in Louisiana (Ascension, Avoyelles, Catahoula, Concordia, E. Baton Rouge, Evangeline, Franklin, Iberville, Livingston, Ouachita, Pointe Coupee, Rapides, St. Bernard, St. Helena, St. Johns, St. Landry, Tenesas, W. Carroll, W. Feliciana); 13 in Mississippi (Benton, Bolivar, Copiah, Covington, DeSoto, Lafayette, LeFlore, Madison, Rankin, Simpson, Tunica, Wilkinson, Yazoo); and 5 in Tennessee (Fayette, Hardeman, Madison, Shelby, Tipton).

With minor exceptions, activity in this region has involved enforcement of extant desegregation decrees in longstanding school cases to which the United States is a party. Typically, the range of issues includes student assignment, course offerings, faculty/staff hiring and assignment, facilities, and extra-curricular activities. Outreach

to the community, by way of telephone interviews, community meetings, and site visits, is a regular part of our compliance review and litigation preparation activity. In Evangeline Parish, Louisiana, the Department of Justice is working with the school district to explore alternative ways to address concerns regarding disparate facilities conditions between majority black and majority white schools. An exploration of these alternatives was necessitated by the failure of a bond election, which would have funded a new school in a predominantly black community. Also, in Jackson-Madison County, Tennessee, at the urging of DOJ, the school district has agreed to implement a pilot reading improvement program for at-risk students at two elementary schools that have fallen outside student desegregation guidelines. DOJ also is working to have defendants identify other educational improvement programs to address minority student achievement disparities in the school system.

- **Employment discrimination:** The Employment Litigation Section initiated nine employment discrimination investigations and filed ten lawsuits in the region during the past seven years. Of the ten cases filed, nine were resolved by consent decree. Five of these consent decrees continue to be monitored by the Section and four have expired. In addition, during this period DOJ has monitored and ensured compliance with nine consent decrees entered in previous cases.

In August 1996, the Civil Rights Division filed a complaint and tendered a consent decree to the court in a case alleging that the State of Louisiana had engaged in a pattern and practice of discrimination against African-American applicants for the position of state police cadet. In particular, DOJ alleged that the written examination used between August 1991 and May 1996 in the processing of state police cadet candidates had an adverse impact against African-Americans and did not meet the requirements of Title VII.

The consent decree enjoins the State from discriminating against any individual with respect to the hiring, selection, promotion, or terms and conditions of employment within the Louisiana State Police (LSP) in violation of Title VII; requires the LSP to recruit individuals from all groups protected by Title VII in numbers approximating their interest in the position of state police cadet; and requires it to discontinue the use of any written examination or other selection criteria that violate Title VII. The Louisiana State Police, with DOJ's agreement, contracted with an outside consultant to develop a new examination that has significantly less adverse impact on black candidates. The decree also established a \$1 million back pay fund for victims and provided for up to 18 qualified victims to be hired on a priority basis as state police cadets, with retroactive seniority and pension credits. Finally, the decree provided for remedial seniority and pension credit for eligible African-American incumbents whose hiring was delayed as a result of the written examination.

- **Fair housing:** The Justice Department's Housing and Civil Enforcement section has been active in enforcing the Fair Housing Act (FHA) in the region. For example, this section recently filed a pattern or practice case against the Deposit Guaranty National Bank alleging that one of the largest banking institutions in Mississippi violated the Fair Housing Act and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act by discriminating on the basis of race against African-Americans in the provision of home improvement loans. A complaint and settlement agreement were filed on September 29, 1999. Under the agreement, among other things, the bank will pay \$3 million in monetary damages to

250 victims of discrimination.

In January 1994, the Department filed its complaint and reached an agreement with the First National Bank of Vicksburg, Mississippi, to resolve allegations that it allegedly charged African-Americans higher interest rates on unsecured home improvement loans than equally qualified non-minorities. Under the agreement, the bank agreed to pay about \$750,000 to compensate victims, pay \$50,000 in civil penalties, and take a variety of corrective measures.

- **Voting rights:** The Civil Rights Division has been very active in bringing cases under the Voting Rights Act to ensure that minority voters have an equal opportunity to elect their candidates of choice. DOJ also has done extensive work defending State and local redistricting plans challenged under the 14th Amendment as unlawful racial gerrymanders.

For example, between 1993 and 1997, the Voting Section continued to litigate its case against the City of Memphis, Tennessee in which local practices were alleged to have diluted minority voting strength in violation of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. The case challenged the use of at-large elections for six of the thirteen city council seats and the use of a majority-vote requirement for all citywide elections. The district court issued preliminary injunctions against the use of the citywide majority-vote requirement for the city's 1991 and 1995 elections. After the city modified its method of election by referendum to remedy the Section 2 violation, and the district court issued a permanent injunction against the majority-vote requirement on the grounds that it violated Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, DOJ agreed to dismiss its remaining claims.

In 1995 the United States intervened as a defendant in **Theriot v. Jefferson Parish**, Louisiana, a lawsuit that challenged the redistricting plan for the Jefferson Parish Council, which originally had been ordered into effect as a remedy for a Section 2 vote dilution violation, as an unconstitutional racial gerrymander. In 1997 the District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana agreed with the United States that the plan was constitutional and ruled against the plaintiff. In August 1999 the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit affirmed the decision of the district court.

The President's One America Race Initiative: "One America" is the President's initiative on race designed to create diverse, value-based communities in America in which differences are respected and celebrated, by involving community leaders in a thoughtful, respectful dialogue of trust and idea sharing. In June 1997, President Clinton announced the "One America in the 21st Century" initiative designed to help shape an America based on "opportunity for all, responsibility from all, and one community of all Americans." Having recognized that in areas of our country the legacy of racism can be especially destructive to forming the community linkages necessary for building cooperation and prosperity, the President has pursued eliminating the "opportunity gaps" that continue to exist in the Delta and elsewhere.

HOUSING

HUD has worked with local communities throughout the Delta in promoting more equitable housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income citizens. HUD consistently pursues policies aimed at reducing the financial, informational, and systemic barriers to homeownership as a part of President Clinton's National Homeownership

Strategy. A basic goal in the new century should be a continuation and broadening of the promising housing policies pursued in the 1990's.

HUD supports a range of initiatives for assisting moderate- and low-income people, such as escrow accounts containing a percentage of monthly rent for high-end rent paying tenants to be used later for down payments on homes; Community Development Block Grant funding projects; mortgage assistance; assistance for the elderly and disabled; and a variety of policies aimed at eradicating racial, religious or other forms of discrimination in housing. The Commission in 1990 had recommended that an additional 400,000 units of decent, affordable rental housing be provided for low-income Delta residents by 2001, and HUD reported that building permits for an estimated 310,000 such units had already been issued by 1998.

Homelessness issues: An array of initiatives has been aimed at eliminating homelessness from the Delta. While acknowledging that this ambitious goal has not yet been achieved, addressing homelessness is one of the Clinton Administration's priorities. Nationally, funding for HUD's homelessness assistance programs grew dramatically from \$284 million in 1992 to \$975 million in 1999. An innovative approach called Continuum of Care involves comprehensive and cooperative local planning to ensure the availability of a range of services—from emergency shelter to permanent housing—needed to meet the complex needs of the homeless. However, the 1990 Commission set the highly ambitious goal of eradicating homelessness by 2001. That goal has not been met. In the years beyond 2000, there should be a continuation and expansion of this effort to eliminate homelessness.

Housing discrimination issues: HUD has greatly expanded efforts to enforce the Fair Housing Act. From the early 1990s to 1998, HUD secured more than \$3.2 million to compensate people who had suffered discrimination in violation of housing laws. Using its authority under the Fair Housing Act, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, HUD has investigated, settled, and when necessary prosecuted cases of housing discrimination.

Rural housing: In addressing housing problems for rural areas, USDA's Rural Housing Service assisted nearly 43,000 Delta households to buy or improve their homes. These loans for single-family housing in the region from fiscal years 1993 through 1999 came to a total of \$2.236 billion. Regarding rental housing, the 1990 Report recommended that Section 515 Rural Renting Housing and Section 521 Rental Assistance programs be expanded. Through these programs, RHS provided more than \$254 million in low-interest loans for more than 10,000 rental units in the rural areas of the Delta.

Housing Goals and Recommendations

In looking to the future development of the Delta region, it is essential to take a candid look at those areas that have suffered the most. As the distressed rural counties of the Delta suffer many of the worst unemployment rates, these areas also experience many of the worst housing problems. The Housing Assistance Council reported in 1997 that people in rural areas of the Delta are more likely to live below the poverty line: 24 percent of Arkansas rural residents lived below the level, 29 percent of Louisiana residents, and 31 percent of Mississippi rural residents lived below the poverty line. The Housing Assistance Council stressed that these poverty rates obviously pose serious housing problems for the region. About 6 percent of African-American households in Arkansas lack plumbing, 4 percent in Louisiana, and 6 percent in Mississippi. The

averages of the population as a whole are almost three times superior to that rate. People in the Delta also have a higher housing cost burden—defined as paying greater than 30 percent of monthly income for shelter costs. In Arkansas 42 percent of the rural households and 39 percent of the urban are cost-burdened, 47 percent of the rural households and 44 percent of the urban in Louisiana, and 44 percent of rural households and 43 percent of the urban in Mississippi. Senior citizens are especially vulnerable: 58 percent of rural elderly renters in Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi as a whole are cost-burdened. Thus, while some areas of the Delta have experienced some advances in housing, major populations have been left behind, especially the low-income elderly and African-Americans in rural areas.

In general, HUD, USDA's Rural Housing Service and other Federal agencies have developed a strong collaboration with major nonprofit organizations in the Delta such as the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and many other community development organizations. The major HUD initiatives aimed at expanding homeownership, fighting homelessness, improving housing, and opposing discrimination in housing should be continued and broadened.

(SIDEBAR)

Housing Efforts Help Revitalize Downtown Jackson, Mississippi District

Forty years ago, Jackson, Mississippi's Farish Street district was a thriving commercial and residential area where African-American businesses and blues clubs flourished. The 125-block district traces its roots to a settlement founded by freed slaves in the 1860s. "From the 1920s through the era of Jim Crow, Farish Street was really in its heyday," says Michael Hervey, Executive Director of the Farish Street Historic District Neighborhood Foundation. "It was a self-contained community because African-Americans had no place else to go. After integration, though, many residents elected to move out and look for the American Dream in the suburbs."

Like other inner cities neighborhoods across the country, the Farish Street district experienced its share of disinvestment during the 1960s and 1970s. However, Farish Street was luckier than other inner-city neighborhoods that watched urban renewal change their unique characters. Historic buildings along Farish Street remain standing and intact. When the area received a historic district designation in 1994, its downward spiral began to reverse.

The first sign of that reversal was the Farish Street Housing Project, a \$2.5 million, foundation-initiated project that renovated 35 historic shotgun houses during 1998. The housing project, completed in March 1999, involved a host of partners. The National Equity Fund provided \$1.6 million from the sale of Historic Preservation Tax Credits. A consortium of local banks furnished \$600,000 and the City of Jackson gave \$175,000 from its Community Development Block Grant allocation from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The shotgun homes, built between 1930 and 1950, were completely gutted inside and their outside structures were retained and restored. Each home required new plumbing, electrical wiring, fixtures, and appliances. Eligible residents who qualify for Section 8 rental subsidies will be able to rent the one-, two-, and three-bedroom bungalows. After the 15-year tax credit compliance period ends, the homes will be sold to qualified buyers. For now, tenants won't pay more than 30 percent of their incomes for rent.

The project will provide much-needed housing in an area where more than half of the residential stock is vacant, substandard, or abandoned. In addition, the project already has helped the local economy by providing construction jobs for almost 60 local workers. Minority-owned firms received 80 percent of the project's business.

(END SIDEBAR)

Rural Housing: In general, USDA's Rural Housing Service (RHS) will continue its policies of assisting Delta families in housing opportunities. These policies led to a number of constructive results from 1993 to 1999, such as helping nearly 43,000 households buy or improve their homes, as well as low-interest loans for more than 10,000 rental units over that period.

Multi-Family Rural Housing: The 1990 Commission urged an increase in units of decent, affordable housing for low-income Delta residents. In particular, the Report singled out the need for expanding USDA's rural housing programs: the Section 515 Rural Renting Housing and Section 521 Rental Assistance programs.

Through its Section 515 Rural Rental Housing and Section 521 Rental Assistance programs, RHS employs a private-public partnership by providing subsidized loans to developers to construct or renovate affordable housing complexes in rural areas. By combining low interest loans, rents are affordable to low-income tenants. With rental assistance, tenants pay 30% of their income towards their rent (including utilities). RHS maintains an active Rural Rental Housing program enabling 397 projects to build or improve rental units that provide decent, safe living conditions for lower income Delta families and elderly. The following table shows the number of RHS Section 515 loans and Section 521 Rental Assistance units provided in the Delta counties, 1990 to mid-1999.

**Section 515 Rural Rental Housing in Lower Mississippi Delta Counties
Projects Assisted 1990—mid-1999**

STATE	# Projects	# Units	# RA Units	Loan Obligations (in millions)
AR	89	2,322	1,356	\$55.9
IL	16	342	143	\$5.5
KY	18	326	262	\$10.9
LA	108	3,086	1,790	\$73.8
MS	91	2,633	1,377	\$59.3
MO	52	1,030	734	\$28.7
TN	23	737	462	\$20.2
	397	10,476	6,124	\$254.3

Farm Labor Housing: One of the successful programs in housing during the 1990s is the Hope, Arkansas Migrant Farm Labor Center, funded by USDA. As discussed in the "Diversity" section of this Report, this project provides housing, job referral and other social service assistance to farm worker families who are passing through this migrant

stream. RHS recommends expansion of this successful model to other States in the region. At least two additional migrant farm labor centers need to be established in other areas of the Delta, patterned after the project in Arkansas.

HUD proposes the development of Specialized Notices of Funding Availability (NOFAs) in the Delta: HUD would allocate special population points within selected NOFA areas to applicants proposing to do work in the seven-State, 219-county MS Delta region. All competitions would be conducted in conformity with section 103 of the HUD Reform Act. A "NOFA" is the formal Federal Register notification that funds for a particular program are available for eligible applicants to apply. This has already been done with HUD's Rural Housing and Economic Development Program. The FY 2000 NOFA for that program allocates several points for applicants who propose to serve the Delta (as well as selected other areas with very high need.)

(SIDEBAR)

Jerome G. Little Housing for Senior Citizens in the Delta

This HUD-funded Section 202 Elderly Housing facility is located in Webb, Mississippi, a city with a population of just over 600 people. The Tallahatchie County area, in which Webb is located, is one of the poorest parts of the State. Tallahatchie County's annual median per capita income is just over \$13,000.

The Jerome G. Little complex has 33 units, reserved for low-income elderly residents. It consists of 17 one-story buildings, each of which contains two units. It has an outdoor gazebo, a community center, and a management office on site. As with most other multi-family complexes built in the Delta region, the infrastructure to support the development was not in place before the construction began. Adequate plumbing and sewer lines, streets, sidewalks and other amenities did not exist and were included as part of the development cost. Therefore, many partners came together with HUD to make this project a success, including Tallahatchie Housing, Inc. a local non-profit housing provider; the local LISC office, which helped to prepare the application and funded the pre-development costs; the USDA Rural Development program, which extended water and sewer lines to the project; and the Federal Home Loan Bank, which provided a grant to pay for enhancements to the project.

Jerome G. Little has been complete for nearly four years, and is fully occupied, with a waiting list of eligible people wanting to move in. In a recent visit to the site, Patricia Hoban-Moore, Senior Community Builder for the Mississippi HUD office, sat with several of the residents. One of the families, a husband and wife, were living with Social Security checks as their only income. They felt fortunate to have a decent, clean and well-kept home in the area they had grown up in. As an additional benefit, the wife's father was also a tenant at the apartments. At 86 years old and wheelchair bound, he was not able to get in and out of the shotgun shack that had been his home. The wheels of the wheelchair were getting caught in the rotted floorboards of the home, and it became time for him to find a new place to live. At Jerome G. Little apartments, he told Ms. Hoban-Moore, "This is the first house I ever lived in with indoor plumbing."

(END SIDEBAR)

Fund housing counseling in the seven-state, 219-county Delta region: HUD would, in conformity with relevant parts of the HUD Reform Act, target funding to housing counseling activities in the seven-state, 219-county Mississippi Delta region through its

discretionary account. The Atlanta regional HUD office in conjunction with local HUD offices would conduct outreach and training.

Promote the 203(k) Rehabilitation Mortgage Insurance Program in the Delta region: The 203(k) Rehabilitation Mortgage Insurance Program is HUD's primary program for the rehabilitation and repair of single-family properties. As such, it is an important tool for community and neighborhood revitalization and for expanding homeownership opportunities. HUD will work with Delta non-profits to build their capacity in accessing and using this program. Related outreach activities to Delta communities could include providing information on ensuring contractor performance and the satisfactory completion of work. Outreach and training would be conducted by the Atlanta regional HUD office in conjunction with local HUD offices.

Promotion of Real Estate Owned (REO) sales to non-profits: HUD would promote Real Estate Owned sales to non-profits and conduct outreach and training. These sales would be conducted in accordance with FHA property disposition regulations or through appropriate waiver of a regulation.

Designation of 7 HUD Delta Community Builders: HUD will designate a Community Builder in each Delta State to promote the region's future development. These Delta Community Builders will work with Delta communities to develop innovative strategies and solutions to problems facing local communities. Activities will range from Homeownership Educational events to SuperNOFA conferences to regional development consultations.

EDUCATION

Nearly a decade after the 1990 Commission's recommendation to target resources to "low-income, rural students" in the Delta, the Department of Education provided over \$350 million in fiscal year 1998 to high-poverty school districts in the Delta. While continued investment in public education is absolutely necessary to increase student academic achievement in the region, many Delta schools and districts have recently demonstrated some significant gains in student test scores. For example, third grade students at the Portland Elementary School in Ashley, Arkansas improved their reading scores on the Stanford Achievement Test from the 25th percentile in 1993 to the 46th percentile in 1999. The percentage of eleventh graders in the Memphis City Public Schools scoring 'proficient' on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) Writing Assessment increased from 19 percent in 1994 to 56 percent in 1999. "We still have a long way to go, but we believe our progress is largely a result of our school-wide approach to reform and the initiation of extended learning opportunities, both of which are facilitated by Federal program funding and flexibility reforms," states Memphis City Schools Superintendent—and American Association of School Administrators (AASA) 1998-99 Superintendent of the Year—Dr. Gerry House. While education, of course, is primarily a responsibility of State and local governments, improving K-12 education is a major priority of the Clinton-Gore Administration. The U.S. Department of Education worked in partnership with the State and local level to help increase levels of student achievement, create greater regulatory freedom, and expand targeted funding in the Mississippi Delta region.

Targeting of funds to poor communities: The Clinton-Gore Administration has met the Commission's 1990 goal of providing "targeted services to low-income, rural students"

in the Mississippi Delta. The Department of Education—through its Title I program—provided over \$350 million in FY98 alone to high-poverty school districts in the Delta to help improve student achievement. Under the Administration’s Class Size Reduction Initiative, Delta school districts received over \$50 million in FY99 to hire up to 1,500 new teachers in the early grades. The Project Star study conducted in Tennessee demonstrates the positive impact of smaller classes of 13-17 students in the early grades on student achievement, especially among poor students.

COMPENSATORY EDUCATION (TITLE I - PART A) DISTRICT FUNDING FOR THE DELTA: FY99

DELTA REGION WITHIN STATE	1998-99 BASIC GRANT ALLOCATION	1998-99 CONCENTRATION GRANT ALLOCATION	TOTAL 1998-99 TITLE I, PART A ALLOCATION
Arkansas	\$42,668,265	\$7,692,325	\$50,360,590
Illinois	\$10,094,876	\$1,692,705	\$11,787,582
Kentucky	\$11,551,917	\$2,144,517	\$13,696,434
Louisiana	\$114,427,929	\$20,880,116	\$135,308,045
Mississippi	\$65,587,684	\$11,189,176	\$76,776,860
Missouri	\$21,412,872	\$3,697,051	\$25,109,926
Tennessee	\$38,383,623	\$7,202,205	\$45,585,828
TOTAL	\$304,127,166	\$54,498,095	\$358,625,261

ESTIMATED ALLOCATIONS FOR DELTA DISTRICTS – CLASS SIZE REDUCTION: FY99

<u>ESTIMATED DELTA DISTRICTS CLASS SIZE ALLOCATION</u>	FY99 FUNDING
Arkansas	\$7,283,009
Illinois	\$1,591,380
Kentucky	\$2,134,411
Louisiana	\$20,690,057
Mississippi	\$11,135,475
Missouri	\$3,489,667
Tennessee	\$6,878,930
TOTAL	\$53,202,929

Migrant farmworker education: Migrant farmworkers and their children living in the Delta also have benefited from Federal funding. During the 1998-99 school year, 91 percent of the 135 migrant students who participated in a University of Tennessee

Program—supported by a \$350,000 Federal grant in FY99—completed their G.E.D. A \$270,000 Federal grant in FY99 provides family literacy services to 120 migrant families residing in the Kentucky Delta through the Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative (OVEC). Native-American students living on reservations in the region also have received additional Federal funding. The Department of Education awarded \$177,097 in FY99 to the Mississippi Band of Choctaws to implement a tutorial program aimed at improving student academic achievement.

Office of Migrant Education (OME) officials met with State officials in all States—including the Delta—during the National Association of State Title I Directors conference in San Antonio, Texas, in early 2000. Delta State and local Migrant Education directors took part in a technical assistance workshop to discuss the opportunity to apply for collaborative discretionary grants. Topics included strengthening services for migrant students through coordinated Federal Education programs.

Access to technology: The Delta region has received millions of dollars in Federal funding during the 1990s to help insure that teachers have the skills and resources to provide students with a rich educational experience enhanced by advanced technology. Four Federal programs—the Technology Literacy Challenge Fund (TLCF), Technology Innovation Challenge Grants (TICG), Star Schools and the E-rate—all target funding for technology to high-poverty regions. In FY98 alone, Delta districts in Louisiana received \$4,600,000 of the \$5,900,000 in TLCF funding allocated by the State in subgrants directly to districts. For example, St. Barnard, Plaquemines, St. Charles, and Jefferson Parishes in Louisiana received a \$425,000 TLCF grant in FY98 to provide teacher-training initiatives focused on technology-connected lessons in mathematics and language. Between FY98 and FY99, Concordia and Catahoula Parish Schools in Louisiana received over \$2,600,000 in Federal TICG funding to expand the successful Trainer of Teachers program to poor, rural school districts in order to help teachers use technology to improve student learning in core academic subjects, such as English, mathematics, and science.

(SIDEBAR)

MCI WORLD.COM—INTERNET TRAINING FOR THE DELTA’S FUTURE

EARLE, ARKANSAS: On December 10, 1999, President Clinton announced an initiative from the MCI WorldCom Foundation to provide Internet training to kindergarten through 12th grade teachers throughout the Mississippi Delta region. The President and Secretary of Education Richard Riley recognized the MarcoPolo program, run by the MCI WorldCom Foundation and its partners for helping to better prepare K-12 teachers to integrate Internet content effectively into the classroom. This is a free educational program at website www.mciworldcom/marcopolo.

At a high school dedication ceremony in Earle, Arkansas, the President announced MarcoPolo, “a generous new initiative coming not from government, but from the MCI WorldCom Foundation, to give the teachers at Earle High School and across the Delta region unprecedented access to the kind of world-class educational materials that in the past only the wealthiest school districts could afford... [MarcoPolo] contains lesson plans and resource materials on everything from history to math to art. These lesson plans for

teachers have been developed by some of our finest teachers and academics. And they're now available absolutely free over the Internet, thanks to MCI WorldCom."

The Foundation will train—free of charge—as many as 4,500 district curriculum specialists throughout the seven-State Delta region. These specialists, in turn, will train over 100,000 teachers in the region on how to effectively incorporate the high quality MarcoPolo content into their day-to-day teaching.

Along with the President and Secretary Riley, the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities Bill Ferris, as well as the chief education officers from the seven Delta States, attended the Earle event. The President and Secretary Riley toured the Earle High School computer lab with students and Foundation staff and looked at MarcoPolo websites.

Secretary Riley said that the MarcoPolo Internet "Content for the Classroom" program builds upon the multi-billion dollar investment the Administration has made in technology over the past seven years. Thousands of schools across America have used Federal resources to purchase computers and to get connected to the Internet. Through this program, teachers can receive free training and resources to help bring high standards to the classroom."

The Executive Director of the Foundation, Caleb Schutz, said, "This training, offered at no charge, is intended to impact every classroom in every school in all seven Delta States. MarcoPolo Internet training materials are standards-based and approved by panels of classroom teachers and content experts from around the country."

The MarcoPolo program is a partnership among the Foundation and seven leading educational organizations, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Council of Great City Schools, Kennedy Center, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, National Council of Economic Education, National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Geographic Society.

The following are examples of materials provided by the MarcoPolo Foundation site:

- The **EDSITEment** website was developed by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Council of Great City Schools. EDSITEment provides teachers with roughly 50 content-based websites approved by a panel of peer reviewers and content experts.
- The Codie Award-winning **Xpeditions** site, prepared in partnership with the National Geographic Society, features an interactive geography museum, standards-based lesson plans, and a global atlas of 1,800 maps (including every country in the world) which teachers can print for classroom use.
- **ArtsEdge**, a site developed by the Kennedy Center in the early 1990s, is now undergoing numerous enhancements in preparation for a February 2000 launch as the newest MarcoPolo partner. ArtsEdge will provide online resources and lesson plans for K-12.

Update: On March 3, Ray Simon—Chief State School Officer for the Arkansas Department of Education—signed the agreement to roll out MarcoPolo throughout Arkansas. The MCI WorldCom Foundation will provide professional staff development training to 300 technology trainers, teachers and administrators who in turn are charged with delivering the training to every school district in Arkansas. The Foundation's training will take place between May and July 2000 and will include 14 separate sessions. The State of Arkansas has an aggressive plan to impact every teacher by the end of the

2000-2001 school year. Their statewide training will be provided in a number of ways including: regional training sessions for teacher trainers, inter-school video conferencing, and summer professional development workshops.

(END SIDEBAR)

Increased flexibility for states and schools: The increased flexibility provided to States and schools by the Department of Education has helped bring about improved student achievement. The Commission recommended in 1990 that Congress allow “States and/or school districts to employ innovative pilot projects to educate low-income, at-risk students.” Schools and districts were given greater authority to create their own reforms through the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Due in great part to the implementation of a research-based school-wide reform supported by Federal legislation and funding, the percentage of fourth graders in the Memphis City Public Schools scoring ‘proficient’ on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) Writing Assessment increased from 20 percent in 1996 to 34 percent in 1997. According to the Memphis City School Superintendent, Dr. Gerry House, “the increased funding and flexibility in Federal programs support our goal of improving student achievement by focusing resources in a coordinated way to meet the diverse educational needs of our urban, poor children.”

In 1997, a pilot program called Ed-Flex granted 12 States (including Illinois) increased flexibility in decision-making on the use of Federal funds in exchange for increased accountability for improved student achievement. President Clinton signed legislation in 1999 expanding Ed-Flex eligibility to all 50 States.

Mathematics achievement: During the 1990's, students in the Mississippi Delta have made the greatest achievement gains in mathematics. The Commission called for all Delta students to demonstrate “competency” in mathematics and science at “grades four, eight and twelve.” Results from the voluntary National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) demonstrate that mathematics scores have improved this decade in the three States where a majority of the population resides in the Delta region. NAEP test scores for fourth and eighth grade students in these States—Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi—improved by significant amounts between 1992 and 1996. For example, fourth grade students at the Glen Oaks Park Elementary School in East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, have improved their median national percentile rank on the mathematics section of the California Achievement Test (CAT) from the 29th percentile in 1993 to the 75th percentile in 1997. The Federally funded Eisenhower Math/Science Educational Consortium has provided numerous teachers in the Delta with training aimed at improving teaching and learning. The Consortium recently funded Algebra Project training sessions for teachers in Jackson, Mississippi. Studies have demonstrated that the Algebra Project has had a beneficial impact in Jackson on student motivation and problem-solving skills.

Literacy levels: The LMDDC in 1990 called for an increase in “literacy” for children and adults in the Delta. Under the Clinton-Gore Administration’s America Reads Work-Study Program, the Federal government pays 100 percent of the wages of work-study students who tutor children or adults in literacy programs. Numerous colleges located in and near the Delta region take part in the America Reads program in order to help reach the President’s goal of ensuring that all children can read by the end of the third grade.

Federal funding has supported efforts in the Delta to improve literacy levels for both children and adults. Since instituting an innovative reading program through a \$60,000 Department of Education grant in 1994, the Portland Elementary School in Ashley, Arkansas saw average third grade reading scores on the Stanford Achievement Test increase from the 25th percentile in 1993 to the 46th percentile in 1999. Over 1,400 adult learners in five Mississippi Delta counties in Louisiana—East Carroll, Madison, Tensas, Catahoula, and Concordia—are provided literacy training and life skills by a \$330,000 matching Federal-State Adult Education grant.

(SIDEBAR)

Test Scores Improve at Newberry Elementary School

Memphis City School District

(Photo of kids with computers)

The Newberry Elementary School in Memphis, Tennessee enrolls over 850 students in kindergarten through the fifth grade. Over fifty-five percent of the students at Newberry are eligible to receive free or reduced-price school lunches. Supported by Federal legislation passed in 1994 that expanded opportunities for school wide reforms, Newberry implemented a research-based reform model through New American Schools known as Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB). Through adopting the ELOB model, educators at Newberry have instituted a school wide curriculum that centers on the purposeful, in-depth study of two or three projects each year from an interdisciplinary perspective. School projects usually take students outside the school and bring the community inside the school.

Students at Newberry have demonstrated dramatic improvements in writing. The number of fourth grade students scoring ‘proficient’ on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) Writing Assessment increased from 13 percent in 1994 to 79 percent in 1999. Teachers at Newberry foster a ‘culture of revision’ by maintaining writing portfolios for all students and providing real-life writing exercises. For example, during the 1998-99 school years, students were asked to write letters to local businesses requesting supplies to create a school garden. “When students write to business people in their own community requesting products, they are motivated by a desire to express themselves clearly and accurately,” explains Newberry fourth grade teacher Kelly Douglas.

Technology has helped students at Newberry improve their writing skills. Federal funding has allowed the Newberry school and similar schools across the country to substantially increase their number of computers and Internet hook-ups. “The Internet pushed the roof off the building and collapsed the walls. Now the whole world is our classroom,” explains Newberry Principal Marilyn Ingram.

Education Goals and Recommendations

Fundamentally, the major innovations pursued during the Clinton-Gore Administration need to be continued and expanded. These include the basic initiatives discussed above:

- *Title I* and the various programs aimed at targeting improvements for low-income, rural students;
- *The President’s Class Size Reduction Initiative*;

- *programs for supporting family literacy* targeted to migrant workers and other disadvantaged groups;
- *policies aimed at enhancing the ability of teachers to provide an educational experience enhanced by computers and other advanced technology*, including the Technology Literacy Fund, Technology Innovations Challenge Grants, Star Schools, and the E-rate;
- *the greater flexibility given to States and schools* under the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and the Ed-Flex program;
- *the various projects aimed at improving mathematics scores* summarized above, such as the Algebra Project in Jackson; and
- *The America-Reads Work-Study Program* and the other innovations encouraging reading skills.

In addition to the continuation and expansion of these policies, the following specific actions are proposed.

Technical assistance: The U.S. Department of Education will hold five comprehensive technical assistance workshops in Arkansas in the year 2000 for educators and community leaders from the 219 counties in the greater Mississippi Delta region. These technical Assistance training sessions are designed to assist educators in the Delta region to utilize Federal funding more efficiently, in applying for additional funds through competitive grants and in meeting specific requirements under Federal law.

Computers for Delta schools: The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) recommends a government-wide technology transfer in the region. As the Federal government moves into the new millennium, many Federal agencies are undergoing major upgrades or replacements in personal computer hardware and software. Although the computers being replaced might no longer be useful for the agencies' purposes, they still have value for other programs. These computers could make a major investment in the Delta's human capital. Executive Order 12999 authorizes the transfer of surplus Federal computer equipment to America's classrooms. These computers could be used by schools for computer training, reading and math skills proficiency, computer labs, and web access.

OPM has committed to contribute a percentage of the workstations that will be available after the "Y2K" upgrades, and in fact on March 1, 2000 donated ten computers to the Delta region. All of the signatories of the Delta 2000 Initiative should assist in this effort. There is no cost of implementing this recommendation. In accordance with the Department of Energy's "Computers for Learning Partnership," transportation to the Delta will be provided by shipping companies that are affiliated with the program.

This computer transfer effort, combined with the Department of Education's policies for enhancing technology in the classroom, will help the region's trek into the information age. The gulf that precludes the Delta from realizing the dream and fulfilling the promise will only widen and deepen if access to the information age does not become a reality.

Safe and Drug Free schools: On March 9-10, 2000, more than one hundred educators from the seven Delta States gathered at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, Arkansas for the Delta Safe Schools Conference. Arkansas State University President Les Wyatt opened the conference, while Safe and Drug Free School Program Director Bill Modzeleski gave the keynote address on school safety. The National Resource Center for Safe Schools provided the training sessions and the Department of Education provided

presentations on available Federal resources. The Department of Education staff will provide information on funding opportunities from the Federal government aimed at promoting safe, disciplined, and drug-free learning environments. The National Center for Safe Schools will also provide follow-up technical assistance to participating schools.

Community colleges: The Office of Community College Liaison will coordinate rural community college technical assistance workshops open to all rural community colleges in the seven-State Delta region. This grant information workshop is part of a multi-agency series that has been coordinated by the Community College Liaison Office. A workshop took place at Phillips Community College in Helena, Arkansas on March 13-14, 2000. Community colleges in the seven-State Delta region brought staff to this workshop to attend training sessions that will strengthen their skills in seeking competitive grants, and heard presentations on existing program models that can be replicated in this region.

Standards: The Education Department's Standards Team will convene a two-day technical assistance meeting during 2000 in the Delta region on assessments and accountability for Delta States involving national experts, State colleague trainers, and Department officials. This training workshop will be tailored to the needs of the area and include the opportunity for follow-up assistance from peer consultants. Participants will have the opportunity to learn about different approaches to school accountability and providing technical assistance to small and remote schools in need of improvement.

(SIDEBAR)

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS PROJECT FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

In 1999, Shawnee Community College, one of the partners in the Southernmost Illinois Delta Empowerment Zone (SIDEZ), received a 5-year \$1.7 million U.S. Department of Education GEAR UP grant. Life-long learning and education is one of the zone's seven priority goals, and the empowerment zone supported the GEAR UP application. The GEAR UP program is encouraging young people in the empowerment zone to have high expectations, stay in school, study hard and take the right courses to go to college.

Four local schools in the Southern Illinois empowerment zone are participating. Other partners include the Regional Office of Education 02, Illinois GEAR UP Alliance, Southern Illinois Collegiate Common Market, Southern Seven Health Department and Alexander and Pulaski County Housing Authorities.

During the 1999-2000 school year, 235 seventh graders are participating. The GEAR UP program will work with these students for five years, adding a new class of seventh graders each year. The program anticipates working with 1165 students during the five-year grant period. Sixty-five to ninety-three percent of the students attending the four target schools are eligible for free or reduced price lunches. The percentage of minority students ranges from 24.5 percent to 88.5 percent in each district. Truancy ranges from two percent to 13.9 percent in the four target districts. Attrition is 12 percent in one school and 21.3 to 31.3 percent in the other three schools. Unemployment for Pulaski and Alexander Counties, where the schools are located, is more than double the State and national average.

The students have gone to plays and visited Southern Illinois University's museum and aviation program. They have gone to St. Louis, Missouri to tour museums and a science center. All trips include instruction preceding and following the activities. In addition the

students are receiving individual and small group counseling. They are encouraged to “think college early” with on-site visits from the GEAR UP coordinator. Career Days have been organized at several schools. Parents are involved. A summer academy is being planned.

The empowerment zone, Shawnee Development Council, (a local community action agency) and GEAR UP are working together to acquire funds to establish individual development accounts for each student to pay educational costs once they have graduated from high school.

The GEAR UP program is a powerful tool in improving educational achievement in the Southernmost Illinois Delta Empowerment Zone. It is through mutual support and partnerships that the zone anticipates achieving many of the strategies in its strategic plan.

(END SIDEBAR)

Charter Schools: The Department of Education will hold a regional Charter School meeting in the Delta for State department of education officials and key educational leaders to discuss charter school programs and how best to administer these programs. During this two-day conference in 2000, the Charter School Program Office will also provide assistance to leaders in States that do not have charter schools (Tennessee and Kentucky) that will demonstrate the potential and opportunity that charter schools represent. Officials from Delta States with charter school legislation will share ideas and interact with experts in order to think about ways to expand the pool of charter schools.

(SIDEBAR)

The Brightest Youth of the Delta Ponder their Future

Marlon Henderson and Conn Davis are two of the brightest and most dynamic young people of today in the Mississippi Delta. Armed with excellent academic records, athletic accomplishments, and an impressive array of extracurricular activities, they can look forward to bright professional opportunities after they graduate from high school in the years beyond 2000.

Yet, like many of their classmates in the region, they face the dilemma that career opportunities appear brighter outside the region than within it, and they may not be able to fulfill their greatest professional aspirations if they stay at home after graduation.

Davis and Henderson poignantly addressed this issue in their closing speeches at two of the Delta 2000 listening sessions held at Cape Girardeau, Missouri and West Memphis, Arkansas in the fall of 1999.

Conn Q. Davis is a senior at East Prairie High School in southeast Missouri’s Delta. He is a football player, concerned about community issues, and is a superb student who plans to attend the University of Missouri-Columbia to major in computer engineering and then enter medical school. Davis spoke movingly at Cape Girardeau of the benefits of growing up in the small town of East Prairie (population—approximately 3,500):

“Because I am from a small town, I have felt safe and protected from many of the problems that face larger communities and urban areas. I have been able to develop close-knit friendships with virtually everyone in my community.... These factors have made me very secure and helped build my self-confidence. Growing up in a rural area, I have learned what a dollar is worth and to respect the hard-working people around me.”

Despite these benefits from growing up in the rural Delta, Davis also faces the social and economic problems of the region: the standard of living is much lower than in most urban areas, there are fewer opportunities to be influenced by the arts, and the career opportunities in a small town are far fewer than those in more populated areas. He acknowledged that the public school system in his town is excellent, yet he cannot afford to have a wide selection of classes. He can enroll in “just the bare necessities.”

Davis said he thought he had been able “to overcome some of the shortcomings of my community” largely through the support of his family. Considering the implications of those shortcomings for his children, however, he had a sobering conclusion: although growing up in the Missouri Delta positively influenced his life, “I am very doubtful that I will return to East Prairie after medical school. As much as I want to raise my family in a safe and caring community, I also want my children to be exposed to more cultural, educational, and career opportunities than myself. I feel that this will be a necessary element for success in our growing global market.”

Marlon Henderson faces a similar challenge growing up in northeast Arkansas. A junior in Jonesboro’s Nettleton High School, Henderson excels academically, in basketball and in extracurricular activities. He is considering a career in law. He, too, spoke with deep feeling about his ties to east Arkansas in his speech introducing his mentor—another native of east Arkansas—Secretary Rodney Slater at the West Memphis listening session on September 25, 1999. The Secretary knows Henderson personally and has taken an interest in encouraging the young man’s educational and professional development. “The Delta region is not merely an artifact defined by legislation; it has a binding cultural perspective and a sense of place, where history is increasingly felt and vividly remembered.”

Henderson spoke of the opportunities represented in transportation—“highways are about more than concrete, asphalt, and steel—they are the tie that binds. Highways are the access to opportunity.” Yet he went on to reflect, “Unfortunately, that opportunity most often lies outside of the Delta. As a junior in high school expecting to be entering the work force in the year 2005 in the corporate world, unless there are significant changes in the Delta I may have to leave the Delta to find employment.” He said he hoped the Delta 2000 initiative would be able to “advance economic opportunity in the Delta region.... I hope it will make the difference in the future of the graduates beyond 2000.”

The speeches by Henderson and Davis represented two of the most poignant moments in the entire series of Clinton Administration meetings in the Delta. They were articulate young people who spoke movingly of both their respect for their home area as well as the realities that greater career opportunities may lie elsewhere. The “brain drain” of the Delta’s best and brightest youth poses one of the greatest challenges to its future development.

Many other youths in the region face the same difficult decisions as do Conn Davis and Marlon Henderson. In a series on the Mississippi Delta published in December, 1999, the Jackson, Mississippi *Clarion-Ledger* addressed the problem of “brain drain.” Most of the young people interviewed by the *Clarion-Ledger* expressed views similar to those of Davis and Henderson. For example, Mississippi Valley State University senior Tamika James of Indianola, Mississippi plans to leave for Houston, Texas, when she graduates. “Here, they don’t pay enough. I’d stay if the pay was better,” she said.

Similarly, Preston Nailor of Vicksburg, a freshman at Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi, said, “It’s nice up here, but I’m looking for more job opportunities.” He plans to move on to the University of Tennessee Medical School in Memphis.

Of course, not all young people in the region plan to leave. The *Clarion-Ledger* quoted Anitra Joiner of Greenville, a Delta State freshman, who said, “There are big needs in health care in the Delta. I could come back in later years.”

Another Delta State freshman, Kabesha Morgan of Senatobia, has dreams of being a part of the solution to Mississippi’s critical shortage of teachers. She plans on a career in teaching at a Cleveland, Mississippi elementary school. Ms. Morgan speaks of intangibles other than money: “I like the area—it’s friendly. I like the scenery. It’s not about the money at all. It is giving back to the community. I’m optimistic the economy will improve and people will be coming here.”

Whether they stay at home or pursue opportunities elsewhere, no one can deny that the Delta has created sons and daughters who are as talented and dynamic as those of any region in America. For now, they harbor the hope—as eloquently expressed by Marlon Henderson in east Arkansas—that current initiatives for advancing future opportunities will make the vital difference for today’s generation of the Mississippi Delta.

(END SIDEBAR)

INFRASTRUCTURE

The Departments of Commerce, HUD, EPA, Energy, Transportation and USDA’s Rural Development have brought vital local infrastructure projects to the region, such as adequate water and sewer systems, telecommunications, electricity and natural gas, rural health care, public safety and other projects needed for economic development and improved quality of life. For example, the Department of Commerce programs provided more than 370 grants totaling over \$114 million in the Delta from 1993 to mid-1999. The total funding for the 219-county area from Rural Development’s Community Facilities, Rural Business Programs, and Water & Waste programs amounted to approximately \$858,224,000 from 1993 to mid-1999. The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) provided first-time telephone service to more than 8,200 rural residents, while more than 77,000 residents received improved telecommunications due to \$153,858,750 in RUS financing. In addition to traditional infrastructure, the RUS Distance Learning and Telemedicine program combined improvements in access to health care and educational opportunities in the health care field for approximately 800,000 residents in the region by providing \$9,840,161 in grant and loan funds.

Infrastructure Goals and Recommendations

Electric: The Electric Program General Field Representatives that cover the Delta region will conduct a survey to determine areas that are not served or are underserved with electric power. The Electric Program will give special consideration to rural electric cooperatives serving counties in the Delta region that qualify for the Hardship (5%) Program. The Administrator also will use his authority to make all or part of an application eligible for the hardship loan program if the situation warrants the change.

Loan funds cannot be set aside for one region or area under the program authorization and regulations.

Telecommunications: The Telecommunications Program General Field Representatives that cover the Delta region will conduct a survey to determine areas that are not served or are underserved with modern, affordable telecommunications services. Loans that come in from those areas will be given as much priority as possible under the law.

In addition, the Telecommunications Program will work with colleges, schools, and medical centers in the region to conduct seminars to explain both what can be done in a community with the Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Loan and Grant program and how applications should be prepared and submitted. At least two seminars at different locations in the Delta will be held. This will improve the capacity building of communities in the region and enable them to apply for the loans and grants to improve education and health care opportunities. USDA's 2001 proposed budget nationally includes \$325 million in loans and grants for the Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) program, an increase of \$104 million over the 2000 program level. This increased budget is for the national program, but predominantly rural areas such as the Delta will be the beneficiaries of the increases. The proposed budget will increase the opportunities for Delta residents to gain financing in order to access information for educational and health care needs. Additionally, using the DLT program as a model, the 2001 budget includes \$2 million in grants and \$100 million in loans for a pilot program focused on financing the installation of broadband transmission capacity and local dial-up Internet services in underserved rural areas.

Water and waste programs: EPA's Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (CWSRF and DWSRF) provide substantial funding for low-interest loans for a broad range of infrastructure projects, including the construction or improvement of wastewater treatment plants, management of stormwater and sewer overflows, and implementation of polluted runoff control projects. In addition, the DWSRF is providing financing for the installation, upgrading, or replacement of water infrastructure to ensure that systems provide drinking water that meets all public health standards. In recognition of the special needs facing small systems, a minimum of 15% of the funds available through the DWSRF must go to systems serving fewer than 10,000 persons. Also, to assist rural communities where even a low-interest loan may not be affordable, States have the option of providing additional subsidies to disadvantaged systems through their DWSRF, including forgiveness of principal and extended loan repayment terms.

The Rural Utilities Service funds water and waste projects on a year-round basis, with project selection based on a priority scoring system. Included in the priority system are discretionary points. State Directors can award discretionary points to high priority areas for funds allocated to the States by formula. The National Office can award such points for requests to use National Reserve funds. The RUS will continue to use discretionary points at both the State and National levels; Delta projects would become one of the high priority categories for receiving formula and National Reserve funds.

Technical assistance and training grants: The RUS awards grants on a competitive basis after January 1 for applications submitted from October through December. The program supports technical assistance and training related to water and wastewater project development, operations and maintenance. The providers are local, regional and national non-profit organizations. RUS is in a position to give special consideration to

applicants that would serve targeted geographic areas. RUS would make special efforts to encourage and invite applications for projects that specifically target technical assistance and training efforts to Delta communities.

Solid Waste Management Grants: The Rural Utilities Service uses Solid Waste Management Grants to fund projects to reduce or eliminate pollution of water resources and improve planning and management of solid waste sites. Project prioritization can include special consideration for targeted geographic areas. The RUS would make special efforts to encourage applications for projects that specifically address the solid waste needs of the Delta region.

National Rural Water Association (NRWA) contract: Each year the RUS contracts with the NRWA to provide technical assistance to eligible water systems, using funds earmarked by Congress. NRWA circuit riders work with system owners and operators in addressing operational and maintenance issues. The RUS would ask the NRWA to provide additional circuit rider assistance to the Delta, to meet system operation and maintenance needs.

Energy supply and delivery: Assuring an adequate, reliable supply of electric power to the Delta is crucial for the economy. Industry will not locate new businesses and factories without reliable power. The Department of Energy (DOE) and the Rural Utilities Service pursue a variety of programs for supporting electric infrastructure. DOE conducts numerous research and grant programs that support this critical infrastructure, benefiting public and private utilities, universities, small businesses, farms and families. Three modern nuclear power plants are located in the region: Riverbend in West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, Waterford in St. Charles Parish, Louisiana, and Grand Gulf in Claiborne County, Mississippi. These plants produce large amounts of electric power—over a third of the region’s entire electricity supply—without emitting noxious fumes displacing tons of greenhouse gas emissions. The emissions associated with acid rain and global climate change are not emitted from the region’s nuclear power plants, thereby maintaining economic development without damaging air quality.

Beginning in fiscal year 2000, the Department of Energy’s Nuclear Energy Plant Optimization (NEPO) program will work with utilities in the Delta and elsewhere to develop new technologies to assure that these economically vital power plants continue supporting sustainable, environmentally responsible economic growth well into the 21st century. The Department of Energy also works with the region’s universities, in cooperation with local electric utilities, to provide research and technology development. This year a new grant was awarded to Louisiana State University. DOE’s nuclear technology program provides substantial support to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (such as Southern University and Xavier University in Louisiana, Tennessee State University, and others) including grants and scholarships.

The constructive energy policies summarized above should continue to be supported in the years beyond 2000.

(Note: Issues related to infrastructure are discussed throughout many of the sections of this Report; see the sections on revitalizing the region’s economy, especially the material on the Department of Commerce activities; community development; transportation; telemedicine and housing.)

HEALTH CARE

In reviewing and revising the goals and recommendations from the original 1990 LMDDC Report, it is readily apparent that many changes have occurred during the past decade. For example, the relationship of the Federal government to State governments has evolved from that of grantor/grantee to more of a partnership seeking to accomplish mutual goals and objectives. Welfare reform and changes in the delivery system for health care have opened unexpected doors of opportunity, leading some providers to seek new funding sources, such as contractual health care arrangements for veterans and military personnel. Overall, there is recognition at the Federal level that successful programs require local community involvement. When setting the agenda, it is important to include those to be served, and such inclusion requires a recognition and acknowledgment of geographic and cultural differences. Accountability requirements at all levels of government are calling for common benchmark setting, performance measurement and evaluation of programs. Innovative partnerships have emerged, putting government agencies and community-based organizations (traditional partners) in coalitions and collaborations with faith-based organizations, foundations and other non-traditional partners.

Medicaid: Through HHS' review and revision of Medicaid plans, HHS and the Delta States have been working in partnership to maximize Medicaid coverage for eligible recipients and increase coverage to the working poor not previously covered through State plans. Title XXI (the State Children's Health Insurance Program, or SCHIP) has allowed States to expand access to health care coverage through Medicaid and new State-designed insurance programs. The Department has exercised its authority under the Social Security Act to expand health care coverage.

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) now partners with Medicaid to assure that transitional Medicaid services are available to TANF recipients as they move from public assistance to self-sufficiency. Moreover, in March 1999, HHS issued a guide to States that in part sets out opportunities the States have under the law to expand coverage under Medicaid to low-income working families. HHS will be contacting all States about these opportunities as well as reviewing how effectively they coordinate Medicaid and TANF.

Other health programs: The HHS guide also reviews a series of programs for improving health care access for senior citizens, minorities, and HIV/AIDS treatment and services in the Delta. The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (called ASTDR, this is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) has been working through the Mississippi Delta Project: Health and Environment, a partnership among Federal, State and local governments, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), faith-based organizations, community organizations, and environmental advocacy groups in 219 counties in the Delta. This initiative includes health education, training and research. The research projects are designed as models for developing partnerships regarding environmental and public health-related concerns in the region. For example, the ASTDR has developed an Assessment Protocol for Excellence in Environmental Health that has been used in pilot projects in Arkansas and Mississippi to identify environmental hazards. In fiscal year 1999, the ASTDR implemented this protocol in Memphis, Tennessee, in collaboration with the Memphis-Shelby County Health Department and local community groups. ASTDR is also working with EPA as well as State and local health officials and environmental justice advocates on an

initiative based in Memphis and other Delta areas focusing on environmental justice issues. This effort primarily involves minority and low-income people regarding environmental health issues.

HIV/AIDS: The HIV/AIDS Bureau of HHS Health Resources and Services Administration targets medical services for unserved or underserved populations. This program involves formula grants awarded to States to improve the quality, availability, and organization of health care and support services for people living with HIV. The AIDS Drug Assistance Program provides assistance in providing HIV/AIDS medical therapies to uninsured or underinsured people. A Special Projects of National Significance Program provides funding to public and private nonprofit entities to assist in the development of innovative models of HIV care. For example, a project at the University of Mississippi Medical Center is enhancing the capacity of health care providers in rural clinics to diagnose and treat HIV by expanding the Delta AIDS Education and Training Center's capacity to provide clinical training. In particular, this project gives training for rural health care providers with a computer-based distance learning system. For areas of the highest HIV incidence, the Center makes available updated medical references, means for interactive training, and access to sources of additional HIV funding.

Childcare: The Head Start program provides early childhood education to young people throughout the nation, and the Delta in particular enjoyed substantial increases in the number of children enrolled from 1990 to 1998. In Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi, the number of children enrolled in Head Start expanded from 41,996 in 1990 to 55,248 in 1998. Head Start in the Delta in recent years has increasingly placed emphasis on full-day, full-year models that meet childcare needs of working parents.

The Child Care Development Fund, which is the primary source of Federal funds to States, Indian Tribal Organizations and territories to assist low-income families to pay for childcare, has had a major impact in the Delta. A series of initiatives for improving childcare are now underway. The Child Care and Head Start bureaus have launched a new training and technical assistance initiative, Quality in Linking Together: Early Education Partnerships (QUILT), which will work with State, tribal, and regional leaders to develop a strategic approach to support early education partnerships at the local level. A Head Start/Child Care Workgroup has been established to address the need for full-day, full-year services to children and families. Members from central as well as regional offices of Head Start, Child Care and QUILT are developing strategies for combining resources, sharing information on training and technical assistance. The Healthy Child Care America Campaign is a collaborative effort of health professionals, child care providers, and families that has developed a *Blueprint for Action*, which identifies goals for child care and suggests specific ways of achieving these goals. The Delta Website (<http://www.dot.gov/delta>) discusses in detail a series of other childcare initiatives on childhood immunization, dissemination of childcare information, and related issues.

Youth services: The Family Youth Services Bureau provides programs that serve vulnerable youth in the Delta. The Basic Center Program provides temporary shelter to runaway youth while working to reunite them with their families when possible. The Transitional Living Program provides long-term residential, educational and vocational resources to homeless youth. This program works to keep youth from dropping out of school, and it especially focuses on helping teenage parents make the transition to work

and self-sufficiency, thereby preventing them from becoming dependent on public assistance. There are two Basic Center shelters and a Transitional Living Program in Jackson, Mississippi, and a Basic Center shelter in Vicksburg, Mississippi. There are four Basic Centers in Arkansas, five in Louisiana, three in Kentucky, and Tennessee has several Centers, including one in Memphis.

Teen pregnancy: Teen pregnancy decreased in the years from 1991 to the mid-1990s in the Delta, but is still too high. Arkansas and Louisiana reduced their rates of teen pregnancies by a higher percentage than the nation as a whole between 1991 and 1995: Arkansas' reduction was by 7.9 percent and Louisiana reduced its rate by 8.2 percent, as compared to the national reduction of 6.5 percent. Mississippi's rate decreased by 5.9 percent. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, a private nonprofit organization, was formed in response to the President's 1995 State of the Union address, and in 1997 the President announced the National Strategy to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Through these efforts, HHS has developed partnerships with national, State and local organizations, private business, faith-based organizations, tribal organizations, parents and other family members, and adolescents.

Infant mortality: Infant mortality declined overall in the 219 Delta counties during the last decade. Those counties experienced a 16.6 percent reduction in infant mortality between the aggregated average calculated for the four-year period 1986 through 1989 and the period 1994 through 1997; for those same periods, the national infant mortality rate declined by 25 percent.

For the densely populated counties of Pulaski, Arkansas; Hinds, Mississippi; Shelby, Mississippi; and East Baton Rouge, Jefferson, Orleans, Ouachita, Rapides, and St. Tammany Parishes in Louisiana, there were 12.42 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990. That number gradually declined in the 1990s, falling to 10.71 in 1997 (the most recent year for which statistics are available). Thus, infant mortality rates declined by approximately 14 percent from 1990 to 1997 in these eight Delta counties.

These major population centers in the Delta still lag behind the national average, however, which declined from 9.22 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 7.23 in 1997, a decrease of 22 percent. Even more disturbing was the plight of minority infant mortality rates compared to whites in the Delta. For example, in Mississippi, African-Americans' infant death rates fell from 15.5 to 14.7 per 1,000 live births from 1989 to 1996; similar statistics for Arkansas showed a decline from 15.5 to 13.8, and in Louisiana a decline from 15.6 to 14.7. But these rates are approximately double those of whites in these three States. The rates for people of all ethnic backgrounds declined from 11.7 to 10.8 in Mississippi, 9.9 to 9.1 in Arkansas, and 11.0 to 9.8 in Louisiana.

Rural health care: The 1990 LMDDC recommended a careful review of Medicare/Medicaid reimbursements to investigate inequities in payments to rural hospitals. The Medicaid program now provides the following options:

- *Add-on Payment:* States currently have considerable latitude in determining rates of payment in the Medicaid program. Rural hospitals receive Medicaid funding as described in their State plans. One way for a State to take into account the unique position of rural hospitals is to establish within that State's Medicaid plan a methodology that specifically targets rural hospitals. Through a State Plan Amendment, a State could elect to institute a special add-on payment for rural hospitals in addition to their regular reimbursement.

- *Disproportionate Share Hospital Program:* Another avenue of flexibility currently open to States is the Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) program. Within certain Federal limits, States can designate any group of hospitals as qualifying for DSH payments, including rural hospitals. States can amend their State plans to implement a DSH payment that would be geared toward their rural hospitals: the qualifications for this DSH payment can be crafted in such a way that any uncompensated care costs incurred by rural hospitals could be met through the State's DSH program. Such an option would be feasible to the extent that these hospitals have incurred uncompensated free care and Medicaid costs, and provided that the State's DSH methodology overall does not cause the State to exceed the hospital-specific DSH payment limits or the State's statutorily-defined DSH allotment.

The Medicare program provides:

- ***Rural Referral Centers:*** Rural Referral Centers (RRCs) were first identified for special consideration in the 1983 Prospective Payment System (PPS) legislation. Congressional intent was to recognize that, within rural areas, there were hospitals that provided care in a volume and with the sophistication of hospitals in urban areas. These hospitals serve as "referral" sites for rural physicians and other community hospitals that may lack the resources or expertise to handle cases outside the norm. Any hospital that was classified as a RRC in 1991 and had since lost that status was grandfathered back into the RRC program by the Balanced Budget Act in 1997. In addition, the BBA made it easier for RRCs to get a higher wage index under PPS.
- ***Medicare-Dependent Hospitals:*** The Medicare-Dependent Hospital (MDH) program was reinstated by the Balanced Budget Act of 1997. The Medicare-Dependent Hospital designation was originally created under the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1989. It provided extra financial assistance to rural hospitals with fewer than 100 beds that had 60% or more of inpatient days or discharges attributable to Medicare patients. Originally, the Medicare Dependent Hospital designation was set to expire for cost reporting periods ending on or before March 31, 1993. The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 extended the designation until September 30, 1994 with a smaller financial benefit for MDH status. The Balanced Budget Act reinstated the MDH program for cost reporting periods beginning on or after October 1, 1997 and before October 1, 2001.

In 1998, the Balanced Budget Act provided funding to States to help stabilize small rural hospitals, develop networks and integrate emergency medical services in rural areas. These development grants are being made under the State Rural Hospital Flexibility Program, authorized at \$125 million through fiscal year 2002. With a \$25 million appropriation for fiscal year 1999, this new grant program will help stabilize rural hospitals and improve access to health services in rural communities. Grants will be awarded to States for: (1) developing and implementing rural health plans with broad collaboration; (2) stabilizing rural hospitals by helping them consider, plan for, and obtain designation as "Critical Access Hospitals" (CAH); (3) supporting CAHs, providers and communities as they develop networks of care; and (4) helping improve and integrate emergency medical services.

Hospitals designated as Critical Access Hospitals will receive cost-based payments from the Medicare program. Medicare payments to all other hospitals will not change. Delta States have the option of participating in this program.

Health Care Goals and Recommendations

The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) maximizes health care coverage, including behavioral health. For example, Delta States had close to \$450 million available to them in SCHIP allotments secured through FY 1999. To ensure optimal use of available dollars and enroll more eligible families, States should review eligibility standards, policies, procedures and points-of-entry and improve outreach activities. Potential costs for these efforts would be supported through activities within the Department, which include the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) SCHIP program, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Maternal and Child Health Block Grant (MCHBG) and the Indian Health Service (IHS) funds for the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians health program under a Self Governance Compact.

Telehealth: A Delta-specific model should be developed to assess current and predict future demand for health service personnel. "Telehealth" is the use of electronic information and telecommunications technologies to support long-distance clinical health care, patient and professional health-related education, public health and health administration. The use of "telehealth" technologies and mid-level practitioners or alternative providers (including youth development workers, consumers and family members providing peer support and outreach services) offers great potential to improve health care access in the Delta. In fiscal year 2000, HRSA's funding was roughly \$20 million for telehealth grants through its Office for the Advancement of Telehealth.

Health surveillance: The Federal government should pursue, with Tribal, State and local governments, universities and voluntary organizations, the development of an effective public health surveillance system for the Delta. To target disease prevention/health promotion programs and services for improving environmental quality, an effective monitoring system containing the following is needed: 1) information on cases of disease, injuries, and environmental exposures; 2) analysis of the data; 3) dissemination of organized data to workers, health care providers, governmental agencies and the public; and 4) interventions to reduce health problems and risk factors. Funding to support improvements in public health capacity for surveillance through the Health Alert Network Program at Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) can be utilized to support this recommendation. In addition, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians participates in active disease surveillance through the use of public health nurses and community outreach workers (community health representatives) through the assistance of both IHS and CDC.

Rural health: The Delta States and Health Care Finance Administration (HCFA) should investigate inequities in funding rural health care delivery systems in the Medicaid and Medicare programs. HCFA is committed to helping ensure that all health care delivery systems are adequately and equitably funded and will continue to specifically take into consideration the unique needs of rural areas. HCFA is currently conducting a Rural Health Workgroup that is investigating these issues and identifying areas for improvement.

Veterans issues: Nearly 30 percent of the Delta’s adult male population are veterans eligible for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) services and benefits ranging from medical care to home loan guarantees. The efficient delivery of these services and benefits to veterans and their families will continue to play an important role in the region’s economic development and quality of life—sending citizens to school to improve job skills, making homeownership affordable, and maintaining the health and vigor of a significant portion of the working population.

VA is and will continue to be a leader in meeting the health care needs of older Americans. Compared to the general population, the veteran population is more elderly, with much greater percentages in the oldest age groups. For example, three-quarters of Delta males age 70-74 are veterans. Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), hospital-based home care programs and mobile medical clinics will deliver health care to older veterans who find travel increasingly difficult. VA will also continue to play a key role in meeting the long-term health care needs of the region through support of State veterans nursing homes and close cooperation with the private sector nursing home industry.

VA’s commitment to the Delta’s progress is manifest through its commitment to serving the region’s veterans, as this following list of VA regional goals and recommendations illustrates:

- Placement of more Community Based Outpatient Clinics throughout the region;
- Operating mobile health screening clinics and home-care programs;
- Expanding and strengthening VA medical center teaching and research affiliations with academic institutions to develop and retain home-grown health care resources within the region;
- Providing pharmaceutical support for residents of State veterans homes to stretch each Delta State’s long-term health care resources; and
- Increasing awareness and participation in VA’s homeless grants programs in Delta communities and encouraging VA partnerships with community providers of services for the homeless.

Comprehensive services: Technical assistance should be provided to create a seamless integrated system of comprehensive services. Practitioners and providers who serve uninsured, underserved and/or rural populations should have assistance from categorical Federal and local funding streams to create a “one-stop” system of care. Communities in the Delta region may be eligible to compete for grants under the Health Care Access for the Uninsured Initiative. In FY 1999, HRSA launched a \$300,000 pilot project entitled the “Delta Health Venture,” to serve 10 counties in the Northwest corner of Mississippi to coordinate and target HRSA resources through convening key stakeholders to better address the health needs in these ten counties. In addition, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) will continue to provide technical assistance on the screening and treatment for mental health and substance abuse disorders in primary care settings and other settings through the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant set-aside and the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant set-aside in the amount of \$16.6 million in FY 1999.

Health care professionals: Through mentoring and support in the public schools for health careers, there should be an increase in the number of health care professionals willing to serve in the Delta. Through HRSA, the National Health Service Corps (NHSC)

works with local communities to develop locally sponsored scholars to enter medical school and return to serve their community.

Increase federal funding for child care to assist low-income working families: As requested in the President's FY 2001 budget, Congress should pass bipartisan legislation to increase funding for child care subsidies, and to expand child and dependent care tax credits. The President has requested an increase of \$817 million in childcare subsidies over the fiscal year 2000 amounts, for a fiscal year 2001 total of \$4.6 billion. He has also requested that child and dependent care tax credits be expanded by \$7.5 billion over the next five years. This program will assist low-income families and those transitioning off welfare to obtain childcare so they can work or attend training/education. A total of \$436.6 million was made available to the seven Mississippi Delta region States in FY 1999. This does not include State share of matching funds and maintenance of efforts. The proposed commitment of Federal Block Grant funds for these seven States total \$490.5 million.

Childcare education: Through consumer education, we should increase parents' awareness for the importance of developmentally appropriate, quality childcare. ACF's Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) stipulates that a minimum of four percent of CCDBG funds be used to improve the quality of child care and offer additional services to parents, such as resource and referral counseling regarding the selection of appropriate child care providers to meet their child's needs.

Substance abuse prevention: Delta communities should increase their use of broad-based coalitions in their substance abuse prevention efforts and in their efforts to provide adequate treatment resources by involving parents and families, the entire range of governmental entities (Tribes, States and local agencies), schools, police, other health and human service providers, the faith community and advocacy groups. In 1999, HHS launched the activities of the National Tobacco Control Program (NTCP). The NTCP funds all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Territories, receiving on average \$1 million per State. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has supported \$179.2 million in prevention and treatment services in the Delta States in FY 1999. In fiscal year 2000, SAMHSA will fund an estimated \$185 million in prevention and treatment services through the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant.

Teen pregnancy: A youth development fund to support community-based adolescent pregnancy prevention activities is needed. Each State should partner with local action teams to create an interagency State-local fund to support youth development programs that include job skills courses, childcare cooperatives and adult mentoring. School-based health clinics are supported through funding in HRSA's bureaus of Primary Health Care and Maternal and Child Health.

Environment: States could create environmental research centers in institutions of higher education that should focus on environmental research, including solid and hazardous waste research. These centers should become part of a larger Delta consortium to assure technology transfer and share research and technical information, both regionally and nationally. Through the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), The Mississippi Delta Project: Health and the Environment, is a multi-phase initiative designed to identify and address environmental and other factors that negatively impact upon human health status. During Phase I, four profiles were developed: Health and

Demographics, Environmental Health Hazards, Health Professions, and Educational Resources. The purpose of Phase II is to develop demonstration projects to respond to recommendations from the profiles. In FY 2000, through the Minority Health Professions Foundation, \$350,000 will be awarded to up to seven community-based organizations through the Lower Mississippi Delta region to support these demonstration projects.

HUNGER, NUTRITION AND FOOD SECURITY

“We can’t let that kind of poverty exist...I don’t think people really know that little school children are slowly starving in the United States of America. I didn’t know it.”
Martin Luther King, Jr., after a trip to Marks, Mississippi where he visited African-American school children in 1966

“There are others from whom we avert our sight. Some of them ... are on the back roads of Mississippi, where thousands of children slowly starve their lives away, their minds damaged beyond repair by the age of four or five.”

Senator Robert F. Kennedy, speaking in 1967 about hunger and poverty in the rural Mississippi Delta

In 1966 and 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Senator Robert F. Kennedy riveted the nation’s attention on the terrible plight of hunger in the Mississippi Delta. Dr. King was shocked by the hunger he saw when visiting schools in Marks and other Mississippi Delta towns, and he began the process of focusing the nation’s attention upon the dilemma of hungry children in the midst of a prosperous nation. During 1967, Senator Kennedy toured the Delta and afterward wrote to President Lyndon Johnson of the “shocking and widespread” hunger he saw in the region. As a member of the Senate Labor Committee’s Subcommittee on Poverty, Kennedy went with Marian Wright Edelman, now head of the Children’s Defense Fund, civil rights leader Charles Evers, and others to the poorest places in the Delta. Edelman recalled Kennedy holding children with bellies swollen from malnutrition and lamenting, “How can a country like this allow it? Maybe they just don’t know.” Partly as a result of the national outcry generated by King, Kennedy and others in that era, the hunger safety net has been strengthened for the Delta and other depressed areas of America: food stamps; school lunch; the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and the Cooperative Extension nutrition programs have become bulwarks in the fight against hunger in America. While, happily, it is no longer easy to find the flagrant instances of hunger and malnutrition that existed in the 1960’s, there are still too many people in the Delta who do not have secure access at all times to a high-quality, reasonably affordable food supply. One is too many.

The more subtle, but nonetheless serious problem of hunger and food insecurity in the prosperous world of the year 2000 confronts the basic dilemma Kennedy identified three decades ago—the reality that many prosperous Americans are unaware that so many people, especially children, often go to bed hungry in underdeveloped areas like the Delta. As Robert Kennedy said then, “I believe as long as there is plenty, poverty is evil.”

Food security: Vice President Al Gore, working with U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, convened the 1997 National Summit on Food Security to

awaken public consciousness about this persistent problem. The Vice President emphasized the need to support the bedrock anti-hunger programs such as school lunch, WIC, and food stamps. The Vice President endorsed the efforts of USDA and other Federal agencies to work with private anti-hunger institutions to expand field gleaning activities to provide food for the hungry, and to increase the amount of food rescued from being thrown away and given to food banks and similar organizations. Also, President Clinton signed the Good Samaritan Act, which reduced liability concerns for good faith donors of food to anti-hunger organizations. The Lower Mississippi Delta Nutrition Intervention Research Initiative and other anti-hunger organizations have played an important role in the quest to promote adequate nutrition in the region.

Nutrition education: The 1990 LMDDC specifically recommended that residents of the Delta should have access to health education programs, of which food security and nutrition are vital parts. As an example of research on the food security issue, USDA's Economic Research Service Geographic Information System (GIS) analyzed access to grocery stores in the Delta. The analysis combined data on the location and sales of grocery stores by postal ZIP code with the location of all consumers, as well as consumers with incomes below the poverty level. The analysis demonstrated that substantial areas in the region are underserved by grocery stores, leaving substantial numbers of residents with little access to stores offering a wide variety of food at reasonable distances.

The Delta Nutrition Research Initiative: In response to the nutrition needs of the Delta, USDA joined with community leaders and nutrition experts in the region to form the Lower Mississippi Delta Nutrition Intervention Research Initiative. The mission of this Initiative is to evaluate nutritional health in the Delta, and to help develop successful strategies for addressing nutritional problems on a larger scale. Participating institutions include Alcorn State University, Arkansas Children's Hospital Research Institute, Southern University, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, and the University of Southern Mississippi.

The Delta Nutrition Intervention Research Initiative completed a survey of 36 Delta counties and parishes in Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi on nutrition and health problems, community resources available to address them, and other community-based food security issues. The Initiative completed a "Foods of Our Delta Survey" that studied dietary intake data and conducted pilot projects on food security, health preferences, and food assistance programs. The Initiative continues to pursue ongoing nutritional research projects, as part of the overall effort to expand public awareness of the persistent problem of hunger and inadequate nutrition, and to develop sound models to address those problems.

Despite the progress, problems persist in the health and human services arena, particularly in providing appropriate services to low-income and minority Delta residents. HHS, USDA, other Federal agencies and their State, local, and private partners are committed to building upon the accomplishments made thus far in the 1990s to bring equal opportunities in health and human services to the people of the Delta.

Hunger and Food Security Goals and Recommendations

The goal of eliminating hunger in the Delta continues to be a high priority of the Federal government, and will continue to be addressed in a variety of aggressive ways:

Food Stamps, Child Nutrition, and Women, Infants, and Children Nutrition Program (WIC)

- **Continuing the USDA Food and Nutrition Service's (FNS) food stamp public education campaign:** In support of President Clinton's desire to help working families have better access to the Food Stamp Program, FNS has begun a public education campaign to let the public know about the program's availability to the working poor. The agency will continue to educate working families about food stamps through informational materials and its enhanced toll-free hotline. It will also release a new USDA Food Stamp Toolkit that will provide State, local, and community leaders with clear information about the food stamp law's requirements and the best ways to access the program.
- **Expanding the after-school "snack" program:** FNS is continuing to work with its regional offices to ensure that State and local-level program operators have the information and materials necessary to implement the after-school snack provision of the National School Lunch Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program so that more children have access to healthful meals after school.
- **Improving the Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and expanding it to more eligible areas in Mississippi:** In cooperation with Congressman Bennie Thompson (MS), FNS is finding ways to improve the program and expand it to more eligible women, infants, and children in many Mississippi counties.

Farmers' Markets and Nutrition

- **Expanding the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program:** FNS is working to expand the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program to more States and to wider areas within States where the program now exists. Five of the seven Delta States—Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Kentucky, and Illinois—are in the program. Louisiana and Tennessee certainly would be welcomed into the program. Seventy percent of the funding comes from Federal sources, benefiting both WIC participants as well as small farmers. The participants are able to enjoy fresh, wholesome produce while small local farmers gain financially by expanding their markets to the WIC population.
- **Helping more farmers' markets participate in the Food Stamp Program:** FNS is working on ways to help farmers accept electronic benefit transfer (EBT) payments at their markets so that they will be able to participate in the program.

Food Security Issues

- **Supporting community kitchen and food bank networks by giving them more of the commodities available through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP):** FNS is supporting these networks by targeting many of the bonus commodities that become available to TEFAP. Such efforts help strengthen the infrastructure of these organizations and allow them to support activities such as gleaning and food recovery.
- **Focusing on minority nutrition issues:** FNS is aware that minorities have certain diet-related problems that need to be addressed to improve their nutritional status. At every opportunity FNS is scheduling meetings and other forms of outreach to address this very important issue.

- **Setting up conferences with State governors to discuss initiatives to combat hunger and improve nutrition:** FNS has been making these meetings a priority for its Under Secretary, Deputy Under Secretary, and Agency Administrator.
- **Forming partnerships with both public and private organizations to work on initiatives to fight hunger.** FNS makes it a priority to work with such organizations as the National Urban League, hunger advocates, Congressional staffs, and Federal, State, and local agencies on ways to fight hunger and malnutrition.
- **Promoting good nutrition and healthful eating practices among adolescent African-American males and their families:** FNS has signed an interagency agreement with the Centers for Disease Control to supplement a CDC Conference Support Grant awarded to the 100 Black Men of America, Inc., for the “National Summit on Childhood Obesity.” Next fiscal year the agency will provide the 100 Black Men of America with additional funding to support their development of curriculum material for this target group.

AMERICORPS AND VOLUNTEERISM

In 1999 more than 2,000 representatives from AmeriCorps, the voluntary service corps created by President Clinton in his first term, served throughout Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi. This represents a financial commitment of nearly \$4.5 million in resources from the Corporation for National Service. Over the past five years, more than 1500 residents of the Delta region have completed their service with AmeriCorps and qualified for education awards totaling more than \$9 million.

AmeriCorps members in the Delta serve with more than 15 programs including the American Red Cross, Delta Service Corps, and Teach for America, and other local programs. AmeriCorps members serving in the Delta tutor and mentor children, assist with disaster relief efforts, organize economic development projects, work to increase parental involvement in the schools, and engage in many other constructive activities to help strengthen the region. Examples of their accomplishments include:

- **The Delta Service Corps:** AmeriCorps members in the Delta Service Corps, serving across three States, tutored nearly 3,000 students (K-12) in basic academic skills during and after the school day. More than 75% of the students showed a marked increase in academic performance as a result of the tutoring. These AmeriCorps members also recruited, trained, and supervised more than 9,000 community volunteers to assist with this regional literacy effort.
- **America Reads in Mississippi:** One hundred AmeriCorps members with the America Reads Mississippi program tutored 1,700 children in low-achieving schools in nine Delta counties, and recruited 726 community volunteers to help them. Students gained an average of nine months in grade level in just four months of tutoring. After completing the program, the majority of the AmeriCorps members have gone on to become certified teachers, helping to decrease the critical teacher shortage in the Delta.
- **Tutoring in Louisiana:** Twenty AmeriCorps members serving with Volunteers of America program in Alexandria, Louisiana, tutor and mentor 100 foster and adoptive children in grades K-12 in eight parishes. More than 70% of these students have shown improved academic performance, and attendance rates are at an all time high.

In 1999, none of the students were suspended from school, or had contact with the juvenile court system.

- **Preschool Program in Arkansas:** AmeriCorps members with the Arkansas Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) program teach educationally disadvantaged parents of three to five year-olds how to become the children's primary educators, lead parenting group meetings and develop preschool youth to age-appropriate developmental levels. This year they have seen attendance levels soar 70%, quite an accomplishment for the small rural Delta communities in which they serve.
- **Work with Enterprise Communities:** AmeriCorps members help local economic development organizations like the NE Louisiana Delta Community Development Corporation and the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, and the Forrest City (Arkansas) Workforce Alliance, strengthen communities and create jobs throughout the Delta region.

Volunteerism: The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) supports an expanded effort to encourage both individual and Federal agency volunteerism in the Delta. There are more than 43,000 Federal employees in the region. Employees could establish "Each One Reach One" programs that would match a Federal employee to a child within the region as a mentor or tutor. Likewise the 36 Federal agencies operating in the region could be encouraged to establish Adopt-a-School programs, as well as partnerships with the local governments and chambers of commerce.

There is no cost associated with this program, except for the time of the individuals who volunteer. Developing nurturing relationships between the children of the Delta and Federal employees not only provides value for the child, but also provides Federal employees with opportunities for regional and local ambassadorship for the Federal government. Moreover, Federal agencies can benefit from volunteer activities that improve the job-related skills of students. Local award programs should be established to recognize and encourage volunteerism by Federal employees.

DISASTER ASSISTANCE

The Delta is a land often beset by natural disasters, from the flooding of the Mississippi River, to hurricanes from the Gulf of Mexico, to tornadoes and other calamities. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), in cooperation with other Federal, State and local organizations, has pursued rapid responses to help Delta victims when disaster strikes.

FEMA mitigation activities in the Mississippi Delta region: During the 1990s, FEMA has contributed almost \$300 million toward flood mitigation projects in the seven States comprising the Mississippi Delta under the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). This includes approximately \$260 million for the acquisition, elevation, or relocation of private residential structures. Other projects include stormwater management culverts, diversions, detention/retention basins and flood control berms, levees, or dikes. Beginning in 1996, other flood mitigation projects have been funded under the newly formed Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) Program. Under the FMA Program, FEMA has allocated approximately \$10.5 million to the seven States of the Mississippi Delta

region. This funding was used for acquisition, elevation and relocation of structures that have been repeatedly flooded.

In addition, 10 cities within the Mississippi Delta region have received a total of \$4 million in seed money under the *Project Impact: Building a Disaster Resistant Community* initiative. As part of this initiative, FEMA also offers technical assistance to help communities assess their risk and develop plans to prevent disaster damage before disaster strikes. (Delta counties and cities gaining benefits from this program include Madison, Mississippi; Henderson County, Kentucky; Carbondale, Illinois; Cape Girardeau and Piedmont, Missouri; Piggott, Corning, Rector, Tuckerman and Clay County, Arkansas; Baton Rouge, Mandeville, and Ouachita Parish, Louisiana.)

(SIDEBAR)

Cape Girardeau: Making a Difference with *Project Impact*

Not far from the banks of the Mississippi River in southeastern Missouri sits the town of Cape Girardeau, once a frontier trading post and steamboat port that now, more than 200 years later, is a thriving regional hub of education and commerce.

As with most river towns, Cape Girardeau has enjoyed both the trials and the tribulations of life on a waterway. And as the city has grown over the years, so have problems with flooding.

“We had development in the 1940s and 1950s in the floodplain,” said Ken Eftink, development services coordinator for the city. “Over time, with more building in the floodplain, development upstream and storm runoff, we saw the floods increasing in depth, in the number of floods per year and in the amount of dollars the floods were costing us.”

During 17 of the past 20 years, the Mississippi River has exceeded flood stage, causing backwaters to flood the city. There are four area creeks that often overflow their banks and create localized flooding. In 1993 and 1995, area flooding was so severe that it triggered two presidential disaster declarations.

If that isn't enough, Cape Girardeau sits just 40 miles north of the New Madrid fault, which represents the greatest earthquake risk east of the Rocky Mountains. Some experts predict that there is better than a 40 percent chance that a damaging earthquake (6.0 or greater on the Richter Scale) will hit the region within the next 15 years. A series of earthquakes from this fault in the early 1800s—reportedly felt as far away as Boston—is believed to have created the largest release of seismic energy in the United States. Eager to preserve a better way of life for its citizens and businesses, Cape Girardeau hasn't let the threat of natural disasters stand in the way. Rather, its residents, businesses and local leaders have been taking action that has been reducing or preventing the damage that disasters can cause.

The city became part of a nationwide disaster-prevention initiative called *Project Impact: Building Disaster Resistant Communities*. Through *Project Impact*, individuals, businesses and government partner to determine a community's disaster risks and then take common-sense steps that will lessen the impact of disasters *before* they strike. Launched in 1997 by James Lee Witt, Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), *Project Impact* has spread to hundreds of communities and more than

2,500 businesses throughout the United States and its territories. Cape Girardeau was the first Missouri community to launch its own initiative.

“When we first heard about *Project Impact*, we thought ‘what a fantastic idea,’” said Eftink. “We were already seeing success with our flood control project but we thought ‘why stop with just flooding when we have other risks too?’”

The city had already taken on two important flood-control projects—widening the Cape LeCroix creek channel, which included relocating some residential and commercial properties—and creating a stormwater detention shed. Twice in 1999, heavy rains produced flash flooding in the area. But instead of damaging nearby homes and businesses as had usually occurred, the water was successfully channeled through the city and out into the Mississippi River without impacting structures.

Cape Girardeau’s disaster-prevention efforts haven’t stopped there. City building codes for new construction have been made more stringent. After the devastating 1993 Midwest Floods, more than 100 homes along the Mississippi River were voluntarily removed or relocated—forever stopping repetitive flood damage there. At the city’s wastewater treatment plant, an emergency generator has been installed, and a road leading to the plant has been elevated so that the facility can still be accessed and safely operated during active flooding.

Water intake pumps for Cape’s main water supply have been elevated above the city’s record flood level of 48 feet and an emergency generator has been added to provide a backup power source. By early 2000, the city’s water tanks were equipped with seismic sensors so that in an earthquake, shut-off valves will prevent the tanks from draining out, thereby protecting the city’s firefighting and potable water capabilities.

To address the city’s severe-weather risk, a building trades class from the local vocational school is adding a tornado safe room in each unit of a duplex the class is currently building. The rooms are actually walk-in closets that will be reinforced to withstand a tornado. The duplex will be finished by May 2000.

All of these efforts are paying off, Eftink says, and the long-term result will be a city that can better weather the inevitable next disaster.

To find out more about *Project Impact*, go to www.fema.gov/impact. FEMA recommends that *Project Impact* be continued and expanded in the years beyond 2000. (END SIDEBAR)

FEMA disaster assistance: The Federal Emergency Management Agency has spent more than \$600 million in disaster assistance in the Delta during the 1990s. The region has been affected by 48 disaster declarations and several emergency declarations.

- **Arkansas:** FEMA spent more than \$53 million on six disaster declarations and one emergency declaration that affected all or parts of the Delta area of the State during the 1990s. Severe storms, flooding, and tornadoes caused the devastation.
- **Mississippi:** FEMA spent approximately \$97 million for 10 disaster declarations and one emergency declaration that affected all or parts of the Delta of Mississippi during the 1990s. Flooding, hail, ice, tornadoes, and hurricanes caused the devastation.
- **Louisiana:** FEMA spent more than \$280 million for eight disaster declarations that affected all or parts of the Louisiana Delta. Primarily flooding, tropical storms, hurricanes and tornadoes caused the devastation.

- **Tennessee:** FEMA spent more than \$50 million for nine disaster declarations that affected all or parts of the Tennessee Delta. Primarily severe storms, flooding, and tornadoes caused the devastation.
- **Illinois:** FEMA spent more than \$45 million for six disaster declarations in the southern Illinois Delta. The devastation was caused primarily by tornadoes and flooding.
- **Kentucky:** FEMA spent more than \$20 million for three disaster declarations in the Kentucky Delta. The devastation was caused primarily by tornadoes and flooding.
- **Missouri:** FEMA spent more than \$48 million for six disaster declarations in the Missouri Delta. The devastation was caused primarily by storms, tornadoes and flooding.

Regional planning: FEMA also supports a variety of initiatives based on regional planning, and these are discussed below in the Regional Planning and Development section.

Helping Delta families and businesses recover in times of disaster: The Small Business Administration will continue to help families in the Mississippi Delta in times of disaster. SBA will work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as well as other Federal and State and local agencies throughout the Delta to establish disaster assistance centers when a disaster strikes, provide expedited responses and streamline paperwork requirements.

COMMUNITY LAW ENFORCEMENT

The Department of Justice (DOJ) has been an active force in the Mississippi Delta region over the last seven years, especially through the vigorous enforcement of Federal civil rights and environmental statutes. The Department has pursued strategic partnerships with State and local law enforcement agencies, provided funding and technical assistance, and promoted innovative crime fighting and prevention strategies. The combination of these efforts has helped to drive crime rates down for seven consecutive years to the lowest levels in nearly three decades.

The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS): When the COPS program was enacted in 1994, the Clinton/Gore Administration made a commitment to place 100,000 new community policing officers on the streets of our nation. This program has met its goal ahead of schedule and under budget. Local law enforcement officials credit the additional officers and the community based approach to fighting crime as a major contributing factor for driving down crime rates. Not only has this program been a success nationwide, but also it has substantially benefited communities in the Mississippi Delta region by providing an influx of Federal crime-fighting resources that have helped stimulate local economies by employing additional police officers, while stimulating local community leaders to become more engaged in the fight against crime. In Dyersburg, Tennessee—a town of 21,000—the police department has received \$750,000 in grants from the COPS office to add 12 officers to its 50-member force. By engaging in “community policing”, these officers have formed partnerships with residents and business owners to address crime and safety issues affecting their neighborhoods. They employ bike and citizen patrols and have a full-time officer

assigned to work in local schools. To date, the COPS program has awarded more than \$300 million in grants to law enforcement agencies in the Mississippi Delta.

Community-based law enforcement—The Executive Office of Weed and Seed:

Operation Weed and Seed is a U.S. Department of Justice community based initiative that is having a desired effect in reducing crime and advancing opportunities for many Mississippi delta communities. Operation Weed and Seed is an innovative and comprehensive approach to law enforcement, crime prevention and community revitalization. It is a strategy—rather than a grant program—that aims to prevent, control and reduce violent crime, drug abuse, and gang activity in targeted high crime neighborhoods. The strategy involves a two-pronged approach: law enforcement agencies and prosecutors cooperate in “weeding out” criminals and “seeding” brings human services to the area, encompassing prevention, intervention, treatment and neighborhood revitalization. A community oriented policing component bridges weeding and seeding strategies wherein officers obtain helpful information from area residents for weeding while they aid residents in obtaining information about community revitalization and seeding services. Currently, there are Weed and Seed sites in the following Delta communities: Cape Girardeau, Sikeston, Caruthersville, and Charleston, Missouri; Dyersburg and Memphis, Tennessee; Greenville, Mississippi; and New Orleans, Louisiana.

Community Law Enforcement Recommendations

In order to build on the tremendous successes of the last seven years and continue to make the Mississippi Delta region safer and to improve the quality of life for its citizens, DOJ will continue to do what has been proven effective. DOJ will continue to vigorously prosecute Federal violations in the Mississippi Delta region to help protect citizens from dangerous and violent criminals; deter crimes of hate by vigorously prosecuting violations of the Federal hate crimes statute; and promote civil rights by ensuring equal access and fair treatment with respect to employment, education, fair housing, and voting rights. In addition, DOJ will work to protect natural resources in the region by prosecuting Federal environmental violations and by working with State and local governments to strengthen existing environmental task forces. Finally, DOJ will work extensively with State and local law enforcement to develop strategic partnerships and to promote innovative crime prevention strategies in areas such as gun crimes, violence against women, school safety, and drug abuse.

II. REVITALIZING THE REGIONAL ECONOMY

"Over the last six months, I've traveled to communities from Appalachia to the Mississippi Delta... Everywhere I go, I meet talented people eager for opportunity, and able to work. Tonight I ask you, let's put them to work. For business, it's the smart thing to do. For America, it's the right thing to do."

President William Jefferson Clinton, 2000 State of the Union Address

The 20 Federal agencies participating in the Mississippi Delta Regional Initiative Interagency Memorandum of Understanding have pursued a variety of policy and program actions in order to promote the economic progress of the region. These initiatives cover a broad spectrum—job growth, transportation, agriculture, infrastructure, business and industrial development, tourism, promotion of a well-educated, and skilled workforce, among many others. Many of these activities relate closely to the other sections of this Report regarding improving the quality of life and promoting natural resources, environmental preservation, and tourism.

The investment of private enterprise in the Mississippi Delta is fundamental to its future prosperity. Without such investment, there can be no prosperity. Generations upon generations relied upon agriculture, and understandably so, given the incredible richness of the soil. This deflected other investments, however, as has a legacy of racial division and a workforce whose educational achievement lags behind that of other regions. Yet, the assets exist, from natural resources to the tenacity of its people, and these assets are coming to bear as the general prosperity of the nation and the national recognition of the Delta's qualities positively influence business investment decisions. It will be the combination of actions by government and business, the wise promotion and use of its resources, and the development of strong indigenous leadership that will point the way toward economic success. The Federal government in its own right has a powerful role to play in this central issue for the Delta.

Partnerships among Federal, State, local governments, businesses, and grassroots organizations: *Delta Vision, Delta Voices* recognizes that the Federal government is only one actor in the quest to promote the region's economic advancement. Progress in the region depends upon active pursuit of effective coalitions of Federal, State, local, private business, nonprofit foundations, and other grassroots organizations to meet the challenges the region will face beyond the year 2000. The Federal agencies offer a series of recommendations on how best to address the remaining challenges facing economic growth in the region—always recognizing that public/private partnership must drive them. (The "Voices of the Delta" section that follows this section of Federal recommendations entirely consists of recommendations and goals from grassroots sources concerning the region's future development.)

Before discussing the recommendations, it is important to summarize briefly the context for this issue in recent years.

Job growth: The unemployment rate for the entire 219-county Delta region declined from 7.5 percent in 1993 to 4.2 percent at the end of 1999. From 1993 to the beginning of 1999, 184 of the 219 counties experienced job growth. There were some substantial success stories, such as declining unemployment rates for the major regional urban areas, including Pulaski County, Arkansas; Jefferson Parish, Louisiana; Shelby County, Tennessee; and Hinds County, Mississippi. Fewer rural areas experienced such improvement, with a few, such as Madison Parish, Louisiana, saw the unemployment rate fall from 14 percent in 1990 to 7.5 percent in June 1999.

Although many areas in the region have experienced limited progress in reducing unemployment, poverty rates remain far too high in many counties. Over half of the Delta counties had poverty rates over 20 percent for four decades. The poverty rate in the distressed counties of the region is 32 percent, compared to a national rate of 13 percent.

In addition, the per capita income in the Delta's distressed counties is only 53 percent of the national average.

President Clinton signed the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (which provided \$3 billion in WtW grants) and the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. The Department of Labor and other agencies explore the impact of these laws in detail in the Interim Report and the "Inventory" on the Department of Transportation's Delta Website at <http://www.dot.gov/delta>. Virtually all of the participating agencies pursued policies directly or indirectly related to job growth, such as welfare-to-work, transportation, small business promotion, Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities, and other economic development initiatives.

Persistent unemployment dilemmas in rural areas and inner cities: Some inner city neighborhoods have not participated in the overall urban prosperity, and rural areas in general lag behind the national unemployment rate. In fact, some rural counties suffer from unemployment rates two and three times as high as the national average. In Arkansas, St. Francis County's unemployment rate, for example, while declining from 13.4 percent in 1993 to 9% in 1998, is still at an unacceptable level. The continuing unemployment problems in many rural areas pose the greatest remaining challenge in the region's employment horizons.

Need for expanded resources for the Delta: The Administration recommends devoting an additional \$159 million in total Federal expenditures to address the profound social and economic needs of the Delta. Additional funding for the region should continue over the fiscal years from 2001 to 2005. This amount is over and above the current anticipated and proposed expenditures for that region across the Federal government. Given the size of the region, and appreciating that it has not experienced the full impact of the nation's prosperity over the last few years, this is viewed not only as a reasonable but necessary commitment of additional resources aimed at uplifting this historically impoverished region.

TRANSPORTATION

Advances in the region's transportation system play a crucial role in economic development. In 1990, the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission's (LMDDC) 10-year goal envisioned an improved network of limited access highways, airports, and rail and port facilities to promote economic growth. The great majority of the nearly 70 specific transportation recommendations in the 1990 Report *The Delta Initiatives* have either been completed or substantially fulfilled.

The LMDDC made several general highway recommendations, beginning with one urging that Congress and the President should release funds currently being held in the Highway Trust Fund. Highway Trust Fund investment in highways and transit was increased dramatically by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century of 1998 (TEA-21). ISTEA authorized \$151 billion over six years for highway and transit programs while TEA-21 went several steps further, providing new programs, new flexibility, and new guarantees of funding for the States. The 1998 act created new budget categories for highway and transit discretionary programs, establishing a budgetary firewall between the surface transportation programs and other domestic discretionary spending. As a

result, TEA-21 guaranteed a spending level of \$198 billion over six years. In addition, TEA-21 increased to 90.5 per cent the minimum annual return on contributions to the Highway Trust Fund for every State. The Delta region States are expected to receive additional Federal transportation funding as a result of this provision.

The Great River Road: Another major recommendation of the 1990 Report stated that Congress should prioritize funding for the Great River Road and immediately provide funds for its completion. Individual States are using the flexibility established in ISTEA and TEA-21 to fund improvements to the Great River Road and other major highway-related facilities. In Arkansas alone, since 1990 about 120 miles of improvements, including easements, historic preservation, highway reconstruction, highway resurfacing and major widening, have been completed at a cost of about \$140 million.

Rail service: DOT has engaged in a series of rail service improvements in the region. For example, in November 1998, Secretary Slater announced the designation of the Gulf Coast High Speed Rail Corridor linking New Orleans with Baton Rouge and other cities in the South. Under TEA-21, this corridor received approximately two million dollars in earmarks for high-speed rail development and grade crossings. AMTRAK has proposed, based on its recent market-based analysis, to expand passenger rail service on the Crescent between Meridian, Mississippi and Texas, a route traversing a large section of the Delta. Furthermore, Secretary Slater announced on March 3, 2000, \$1.96 million in additional funding to the Greater New Orleans Expressway Commission for pre-construction planning activities for the proposed New Orleans-St. Tammany Parish magnetically levitated rail system. No Federal funds are planned to be provided for construction of this project. If built with non-Federal funds, the Greater New Orleans project would connect Union Passenger Terminal to the airport and cross Lake Ponchartrain to reach the suburbs of St. Tammany Parish.

Aviation: The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) provided over \$400 million in financial assistance from Federal discretionary and entitlement funds allocated from the Federal Airport and Airway Trust Fund for Airport Improvement Program (AIP) projects to over eighty airports within the Mississippi Delta between 1993 and 1999. Federal legislation authorizes the Secretary of Transportation to make project grants for airport planning and development under the AIP to maintain a safe and effective system of airports. Eligible projects under the AIP include airport system and master plans; construction, expansion or rehabilitation of runways, taxiways and aprons; items needed for safety or security; navigational aids; land acquisition; noise control; and limited terminal development.

**Summary of Airport and Airway Trust Fund Expenditures
Mississippi Delta region
FY 1993 – FY 1999**

State	No. of Airports	Expenditures (millions dollars)
Arkansas	20	51.0
Illinois	8	2.0
Kentucky	5	7.4
Louisiana	21	182.6
Mississippi	9	33.8

Missouri	9	11.3
Tennessee	9	123.0
Total	81	411.2

Completion of the Commission’s transportation projects: The heart of *The Delta Initiatives’* transportation recommendations consisted of a detailed inventory of transportation improvements for the highways, aviation, maritime, and rail network of the Delta. Probably no other area discussed in the 1990 Report contained such a large number of highly specific recommendations; and probably no area now displays as many successful completions of those recommendations. These efforts were led by the Department of Transportation, with important contributions from the Army Corps of Engineers and other agencies. The Corps, Transportation, Commerce and other agencies also contributed substantial Federal investments in the area of maritime transportation. For example, Commerce funded feasibility studies for port facilities in seven communities of Louisiana alone. The Corps completed over 30 navigation projects along the Mississippi River, while DOT completed numerous maritime transportation projects throughout the entire region. As noted above, the great majority of the nearly 70 specific recommendations for all modes of transportation in the original Report have either been completed, or significant progress has been made in completing them. These transportation projects have provided a powerful impetus to improving the quality of life and of economic development in the region.

Transportation Goals and Recommendations

While substantial progress has been achieved in improving the region's transportation network and service base, many challenges remain in the effort to ensure fully adequate transportation. Transportation for the Delta’s citizens to employment opportunities, schools, health care, child care and other essential daily services and destinations is vital to the region’s future, and in rural areas particularly many needs remain. The first recommendation, of course, is support for continuing and building upon the fundamental transportation successes summarized above and ensuring a livable environment. Additional transportation recommendations are included in the tourism section of this Federal section, in the discussion of “enhancing tourism”. The following are some specific proposed solutions for addressing the remaining issues and completing unfinished business:

- **I-69:** The construction of the I-69 High Priority Corridor will extend from Sarnia, Ontario, Canada to Brownsville, Texas at the Mexican Border, and will result in major benefits for the nation’s transportation system, as well as the Delta region. The Corridor is expected to generate 27,000 more jobs and \$11 billion in wages over a 30-year period. TEA-21 authorized \$140,000,000 for each of fiscal years 1999 through 2003 for the “Corridors and Borders” program, which is for planning, environmental studies and construction of high priority transportation trade borders and corridors. As the lead State for the nine States through which the corridor runs, Arkansas received a \$10 million award under the Borders and Corridors Program for environmental studies in the entire I-69 corridor. An additional \$25 million in Borders and Corridors Program grant funds have been awarded to other States for uses that will benefit the I-69 corridor. In 1999, work began on a special environmental study for the corridor.

This study will allow independent and regionally significant projects to advance more quickly within the I-69 corridor. Substantial funding from all levels of government is essential for the future development of this important contributor to the Region's economic growth and development.

- **Great River Bridge:** Promising essential new access across the Mississippi River between Arkansas and Mississippi, this bridge facility has moved closer to development, with the identification of a preferred corridor and a supplemental environmental impact statement. Estimated to cost between \$580 and \$670 million, the bridge is another essential economic lifeline for the region.
- **Training:** Many people in the region have conveyed the view that a great need exists for information on the programs, activities and related funding of the Federal government and how to access them. We propose a continuing set of training/information sessions for stakeholders, including local government officials, private non-profit groups, and other interested parties to improve familiarity with the programs of DOT and the process for using them. The project would use existing funds that now go for a variety of outreach and training activities, and would also coordinate with other agencies and departments, as appropriate, that would be providing their own training and education programs.
- **Access:** Residents of the vast rural areas and numerous small towns of the Delta suffer from disproportionate isolation and diminished opportunities due to limited access to services. As an example of these proposed activities, in its proposed fiscal year 2001 budget, the Department of Transportation proposes that \$20 million to address such needs come from programs administered by the Federal Transit Administration. Of that amount \$15 million would go for Federal Transit Administration Bus and Bus Related Capital Investment Program and \$5 million for that agency's job access/reverse commute program.

(SIDEBAR)

MID-SOUTH COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSPORTATION CENTER PROJECT: WEST MEMHPIS, ARKANSAS

Federal, State, local, and private sector partners are working with Mid-South Community College (MSCC) on a project for a state-of-the-art transportation center to be developed in Crittenden County, Arkansas. The center would provide related education and training opportunities for Delta residents as part of a comprehensive approach to local economic development in direct support of existing and future transportation industry needs. This proposal addresses the primary reason for the lack of economic prosperity for the majority of Delta residents and the key frustration for existing business and industry—the lack of extensive training opportunities which provide the education and skills for jobs already present or emerging in the Delta. Developed and supported through a partnership with area high schools, two and four-year colleges, private enterprises and government agencies, the proposed center would provide a continuum of educational advancement in a variety of transportation-related fields.

This proposal also includes the establishment of high technology facilities on high school campuses throughout the region to enable the effective delivery of training to high school students as an integrated part of their daily curriculum. To break the cycle of

unemployment and underemployment in the Delta, high school programs must be developed in addition to, and coupled with, adult learner and business training programs that grow jobs for those being trained.

Importance of the proposed location: Crittenden County, Arkansas is located in the central United States on the Mississippi River and at the intersection of Interstates 55 and 40, the nation's second most highly traveled crossroads. Geographically, it is one of the few locations in the United States that has major rail, intermodal, trucking, river port, and airport facilities within a 15-mile radius of each other. Memphis, Tennessee, the recognized Distribution Center of America and the headquarters of Federal Express and FedEx is located just 10 minutes away across the Mississippi River. In addition to FedEx, 15 other cargo airlines operate in Memphis. Over 200 truck terminals are located in the region, offering direct service to mainland America, as well as Canada and Mexico. Neither the East nor West Coast is as easily accessed as is this part of the country. This central location allows companies to ship products to customers in any part of the world in less than 48 hours.

Transportation and distribution industries are rapidly expanding in the Mid-South region. The Memphis area alone counts 87,000 jobs directly related to the distribution industry. Typical examples of local growth include the recent addition of one of the nation's largest, most technologically sophisticated intermodal facilities in Marion, Arkansas. A \$1.4 million expansion of the West Memphis riverport and more than \$15 million in capital improvements at the West Memphis airport also reflected this development. In Memphis, UPS is in the process of constructing an \$80 million consolidated ground/air hub. Simultaneously, the Memphis International Airport, the world's busiest cargo airport, is undergoing a 450-acre expansion to help accommodate a growing influx of national distribution companies in the Mid-South.

While business expansion is taking place, economic development in many places continues to lag. The transportation industry requires a skilled workforce and innovative, high-tech solutions to its daily operational challenges to remain competitive in the global marketplace. Unfortunately, current economic development initiatives in Arkansas, which provide funding for industry training, such as tax credits and existing workforce training, exclude the entire transportation industry. Consequently, one of the areas with the greatest potential for workforce development in the Delta has no organized program for training workers.

A transportation technology center that provides a continuum of educational programs for high school and college students, as well as current and future industry employees, is the solution for ensuring a trained and educated workforce and positive economic growth. Locating that center in Crittenden County, Arkansas enables ready access to experts in all fields of the industry to provide direction with curriculum development and ongoing opportunities for lab and training experiences.

Facilities located in the heart of the Delta: Supporters of the proposal recommend construction of two college facilities comprised of training classrooms and laboratories, to provide state-of-the-art education in all aspects of the transportation industry. The main industrial site of the Delta Transportation Technology Center will be located in or contiguous to the Mid-America Industrial Park in West Memphis, Arkansas. This location is appropriately zoned for all the necessary heavy transportation training. The location of the facility in the Industrial Park provides easy access for local business

representatives to participate in ongoing development and advisory activities. In addition, students will be able to work in internship and guided study opportunities at those same companies prior to employment. The convenience of this location will also serve as an incentive for additional businesses to relocate in and around an industrial park situated in the heart of the Delta.

Satellite Transportation Technology Centers: As stated above, the key to this proposal is in providing a continuum of educational training opportunities starting with high school students. The only way for this to be done and ensure access and a consistent delivery of high quality, technically accurate training is to build branch transportation technology centers at or around high school campuses. Satellite transportation study centers could be established at high schools in cities including, but not limited to, West Memphis, Marion, Earle, Turrell, Crawfordsville, Hughes and Parkin. After implementation, this model could be expanded and duplicated in high schools throughout the Delta region, and ultimately throughout the entire country.

(END SIDEBAR)

Regional transportation plan: Delta leaders have expressed great interest in the formulation of a Delta region transportation plan. The proposed plan would give direction to the Delta's region-wide transportation needs. It would also send a loud signal to the national and global business community about the region's potential as an attractive business location. The plan could be aimed at coordination activities among States and localities and technical assistance, plus other funds that States and metropolitan planning organizations may contribute from regular formula allocations. The proposed Delta region plan would also highlight interstate intermodal facilities. The Department would provide funds to bring States and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) together around the idea of a coordinated process to develop a plan and then provide technical assistance and related support in the actual development of such a plan. The development of a Delta region transportation plan could be an enterprise of the legislatively proposed Delta Regional Authority, which would work in concert with State departments of transportation and MPOs, and their representative associations, such as the American Association of State Transportation Officials and the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations.

Other transportation projects: Transportation development, particularly intermodal connections and elimination of bottlenecks, among other projects, are highlighted by local and State leaders as critically important to the enhancement of economic opportunity in the Delta.

(SIDEBAR)

Highlights of Recent Transportation Activities in the Delta

Many vital transportation activities were underway in the Delta during 1999 and 2000. The following are several major examples of the ongoing efforts to improve the region's transportation network:

Four-laning of U.S. 61 from the Tennessee state line to the Louisiana state line is progressing well. The segment from the Tennessee state line to south of MS 4 is complete and open to traffic. Paving for the segment from south of MS 4 to south of Coahoma

County, Mississippi near U.S. 49 is scheduled to be completed in June 2001. The segment from the Coahoma County line to Clarksdale, Mississippi is complete. The section from Clarksdale to the Bolivar County, Mississippi line, which includes the Bypass of Clarksdale, has been awarded for grading and bridges, and is about 55 percent complete. Paving for this segment is scheduled to begin in September 2000 at an estimated cost of \$10 million. The section from the Bolivar County line to Shelby, MS, has just begun. The paving contract for the section from Shelby to Merigold, Mississippi is about 50 percent complete, and the segment from Merigold to Leland, Mississippi is complete and open to four-lane traffic.

Nine airports in Mississippi received over \$120 million in Federal Airport Improvement Program (AIP) assistance since 1993. Jackson International is the most active airport in the State and benefited from improved air service in the past few years including the introduction of low fare service and the substitution of all-jet service for previous prop service. This increased use has resulted in more wear on the airfield pavements requiring overlays and rehabilitation. The soil conditions in Mississippi result in substantial expansion and contraction, which requires more rehabilitation and overlay. This maintenance was performed at Olive Branch, Greenville, and Yazoo City airports among others. Greenwood's airport serves as an aircraft salvage yard for the disassembly of air transport aircraft. Apron and taxiway improvements were made at Greenwood. **In Clarksdale, Mississippi a Transportation Enhancement Program grant amounting to \$1.6 million** has helped transform the old train station there into the **Blues Museum**. The depot also houses several businesses and includes an area for bands to perform. An additional \$870,000 in Transportation Enhancements Federal-aid funds has been provided to acquire and restore the historic Greyhound Bus Station and to purchase and refurbish vintage rail cars for a museum exhibit on the existing rail spur adjacent to the bus station and the recently restored Clarksdale Depot. The Greyhound Bus Station will be used as a tourist information center and will accommodate tour buses. The project is currently in the design stage. These projects are a focal point for Clarksdale's effort to revitalize the central city area and to promote tourism. They provide jobs in both the service and industrial sectors.

The **Memphis International Airport** is in the midst of a multi-million dollar expansion program, including the completion and opening of a new east parallel runway in 1996. A center parallel runway will be completed and open in late 2000. Since 1990 the FAA has approved airport improvement projects for airports in the Memphis region totaling \$211.6 million. Integrally related to the airport work is the reconstruction and widening of a highway near the Memphis Airport to improve access for airport patrons and the Federal Express distribution center. All of this activity supports the evolution of Memphis as a distribution center for the nation and a key economic center for the Delta, resulting in major economic development and substantial job growth for the region.

Crowley's Ridge Parkway, Arkansas' only National Scenic Byway is a 200-mile route running through eight counties in the Arkansas Delta that is already generating job growth. Local authorities expect that the Byway will generate 160 new jobs directly related to tourism in the area. Arkansas received more than \$1.03 million in fiscal year 1999 Scenic Byways discretionary funds for 3 projects along the Crowley's Ridge Parkway:

- \$324,000 for development of educational and promotional material for the Parkway;

- \$630,148 for development of a visitor/interpretive center in Piggott, Arkansas, at the Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum and Education Center; and
- \$91,776 to establish a student internship and service learning program in association with the management and development of the Parkway and development of a hiking/biking trail and an African-American Tour along the Parkway.

The interpretive center was officially opened in July 1999. The town of Piggott, with less than 4,000 people, has opened or expanded 16 new businesses, with eight of them directly related to tourism; formed a downtown revitalization committee to develop a master plan; and hosted architectural students from the University of Arkansas Community Design Center to assist with the project. Similar economic benefits are occurring elsewhere along the parkway. Five of the eight county seats along the parkway are developing downtown revitalization plans, three new museums have opened, historic structures are being renovated, and improvements are being made in the five State parks along the ridge.

Light Rail in Memphis, Tennessee: The first extension of Memphis' vintage trolley system, connecting the Main Street Trolley with the Memphis Riverfront, has been completed. The Medical Center Rail Extension is envisioned as the last segment of the downtown rail circulation system, as well as the first segment of a regional light rail line. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) approved the Memphis Area Transit Authority's request to enter preliminary engineering for the rail extension, and this engineering work was completed in late 1999. The capital cost of the project is estimated at \$30,400,000. Congress appropriated funds for the Memphis Regional Rail in fiscal years 1994 and 1996-99.

In the President's FY 2001 budget, the Administration requested \$14.2 million for the Memphis Medical Center Rail Extension project as a Full Funding Grant Agreement.

Memphis Central Station Intermodal Terminal: This project involves renovation of a historic train station to create a facility that will be used as an intermodal terminal for MATA buses, trolleys, and AMTRAK. Its estimated cost is \$23 million, with an estimated Federal Transit Administration participation of \$14.3 million. Private sources will provide approximately \$5.5 million. Memphis received \$3.9 million for this project in fiscal year 1993, and another \$8.7 million in FY 1995. Site improvements and building restoration have been completed. Part of the building will be leased to private businesses, and other areas will be provided for a day care center. MATA's Information Center and a police substation are housed on the first floor. The Career Center was officially opened in 1999. Various agencies housed in the center provide job counseling, training, and placement services for clients making the transition from welfare to work.

The West Memphis's new transit service partnership with Memphis Area Transit Authority officially opened in June 1999, with vital support from the mayors of West Memphis, Arkansas, Memphis, Arkansas' First District Congressman Marion Berry, and State Department of Human Services representatives. This effort was the product of the Crittenden County TEA Coalition, utilizing State Department of Human Services funds which provide seed money for Welfare-to-Work initiatives. MATA busses will provide one local route to key destinations for medical, shopping and other needs, as well as an express route to and from Memphis.

The **Central Arkansas Transit Authority (CATA)**, in Pulaski County, is Arkansas' largest grantee. To date, CATA has received 19 grants for a total of \$31,568,518. The

grantee currently has 6 active grants with total obligations of \$11,268,430. Two recently approved grants include \$180,000 (part of an FY97 earmark) for preliminary engineering and project management services for a River Rail Project, and \$794,000 for a Downtown Transfer Center. Another example of transportation projects is a \$485,000 Job Access grant to CATA that will provide dependable and low-cost transportation for those moving from dependency into self-sufficiency. New services will include extending the reach of the present system into fast-growing retail and service employment areas with vans operating on flexible schedules and routes. The grant will provide:

- a one-time start-up of five vans for employees of a local business;
- a mobility manager to develop transportation agreements and programs for coordinating transportation for those entering the job market within the Little Rock Enterprise Community; and
- “graveyard shift” service from local hospitals to downtown transfer center and “night owl” distribution runs with user-side subsidy of taxi service or publicly owned vans.

Highway projects in Kentucky: The Delta counties of Kentucky have received over \$194 million in Federal funds for highway construction and rehabilitation since 1993. Projects have included major rehabilitation on the Western Kentucky, Pennyriple and Purchase parkways, and bridge and approaches on U.S. 51 in Ballard County and on U.S. 60 in Livingston and McCracken counties. Additionally, a study for a potential I-69 Connector from I-24 to Marion County has been conducted, as well as a study for a potential I-69 alignment around Henderson from Pennyriple Parkway to the Ohio River crossing.

The State of Illinois has been allocated \$749,000 in FY 2000 National Scenic Byways discretionary grants for the Ohio River Scenic Byway, entirely located within the Delta region of Illinois. These funds are available for various enhancements such as marketing programs, safety pull-offs for farm machinery, visitor centers, restroom facilities, and interpretive kiosks. These grants are expected to stimulate commerce and tourism along this designated National Scenic Byway. In addition, prior to FY 2000 and since FY 1992, FHWA has obligated \$162,000 in National Scenic Byways funds for enhancements to this byway.

Many other examples of transportation activities are underway in the region, in addition to the projects cited above. These projects demonstrate progress and the ongoing commitment to improve the transportation network for people throughout the Mississippi Delta.

(END SIDEBAR)

SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, ACCESS TO CAPITAL, AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

I am very proud to represent a region of our great nation—the Mississippi Delta—that is so rich in history and so full of promise for the future. The Delta’s tremendous natural resources, vital culture, and location along America’s mightiest river have drawn residents and visitors alike to this wonderful region. However, the Delta continues to face significant challenges, and it has not shared in America’s booming economy of the last several years. Some of the most economically distressed communities in the country are in the Delta, and the region desperately needs additional resources to address chronic

hunger, poverty, unemployment, and low education rates... The Delta's prospects are very bright, so long as there are those who are willing to work together. In flood control, health care, transportation, education, economic development, and other areas, the Delta is poised to make great progress. I am heartened by the knowledge and firm belief that the best days of the Delta are just ahead. U.S. Representative Jo Ann Emerson, Missouri

A variety of job creation and retention initiatives, welfare-to-work projects and other initiatives have been promoted in the Delta. The Small Business Administration (SBA), the Department of Labor, USDA's Rural Business-Cooperative Service, the Department of Commerce, and the Department of Treasury have especially important policy development roles in these action areas fundamental to job generation and community building.

In 1990, the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission noted, "the central challenge facing the Delta is to develop a strong business and industrial sector that will enable the region's economy to be one of growth and vitality...." Using innovative methods, such as "circuit riders," which was announced as a pilot program in Eastern Arkansas during President Clinton's visit to West Memphis on December 10, 1999, SBA's field offices and resource partners located throughout the region are conducting extensive outreach activities in and to the Delta's small business community. More "user-friendly" activities focus on informing small businesses about available financing programs, training and technical assistance resources.

Access to capital: Since 1990, SBA has repeatedly emphasized the effective deployment of its existing programs along with streamlined procedures to make it easier for small businesses to gain access to capital. For instance, since 1990, SBA's 504 program (offering fixed rate financing on purchases that also serve a public purpose) has loaned \$1.2 billion in the region operating through 41 lenders. SBA has also developed new programs. For example, in 1991 the Microloan Program, inspired by a community-lending program in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, was established to serve the Delta's smallest businesses. As many as 14 intermediary lenders in the Delta have provided over 1,000 SBA funded microloans. These loans have been powerful engines for job creation and retention.

New resources, such as the Mid-Delta Enterprise Community's One Stop Capital Shop in Itta Bena, Mississippi, and Women's Business Centers in Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri and Tennessee have been created to help small businesses obtain the financing and technical assistance critical to building a successful small business.

New Markets Tax Credit: The New Markets Tax Credit will be administered by the U.S. Department of the Treasury and will be worth up to 25 percent for investments in a wide range of investment vehicles serving New Markets communities, including New Markets Venture Capital Companies (NMVCs), America's Private Investment Companies (APICs), community development banks, and other targeted investment funds. For FY2000, the President requested spending \$1.2 billion over five years for such tax credits. In FY2001, President Clinton is requesting \$3 billion to be used for New Markets Tax Credits, which are designed to spur \$15 billion in private New Markets investments. The Delta, of course, is one of the primary areas the New Markets Initiative is intended to benefit.

Small Business Goals and Recommendations

Providing outreach to New Markets in the Mississippi Delta region: SBA recommends increasing the amount of financial, business, and procurement assistance available to the Delta region's minorities, women, veterans, and small firms located in low and moderate income urban areas. SBA will continue to work in partnership with local civic associations and community groups to increase lending to entrepreneurs in the Delta. SBA loan officers will continue to make bank visits to Delta county banks that have the potential to become proficient and active SBA lenders in the future.

Increasing small business access to credit: SBA will assist Delta small businesses in contributing to economic growth through increased start-ups, which will provide new jobs. SBA will focus on increasing the aggregate number of 7(a) general business loans, Certified Development Company (CDC) loans, investment capital financing, export loans, Microloans, and surety bond guarantees in the Delta region. SBA, through the use of circuit riders and other innovative outreach methods, will focus the distribution of credit on new small business markets.

Enhancing entrepreneurial development in the Mississippi Delta region: SBA will increase counseling to small businesses through its network of: district offices; Business Information Centers; Women's Business Centers; Small Business Development Centers; Service Corps of Retired Executives; and One Stop Capital Shops. New resources, such as SBA's Mid-Delta One Stop Capital Shop, will help small businesses obtain the technical assistance critical to becoming successful. In addition, SBA, working with resource partners, will continue its efforts to create new entrepreneurs from both the welfare and disability communities through counseling and technical assistance.

Providing information and technical resources through SBA's *E:Small Business* (<http://classroom@sba.gov>): SBA is committed to helping the Delta's existing small business owners and those with an entrepreneurial spirit gain access to the information needed to create, run and build a successful small business. SBA recognizes that small businesses located in rural areas may not be able to visit a SBA office or resource partner location. SBA is offering numerous on-line courses and information sites via its virtual Small Business Classroom. *E-Small Business* is designed to help small business take advantage of e-commerce opportunities to be competitive in the new digital economy.

Rural economic development: USDA's Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS) pursues a number of activities to encourage business development in the rural Delta. The Business and Industry (B&I) Guaranteed Loan Program helps create jobs and stimulate rural economies by providing financial backing for businesses. Similarly, the Intermediary Lending Program provides loans to intermediaries, which in turn provide direct loans to recipients that develop business facilities or community development projects. The Rural Business Enterprise Grant Program assists public bodies, nonprofit corporations, and Federally recognized Indian Tribal groups for development of small and emerging private business enterprises. Another major rural development engine is the Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Program that financed economic development and job creation projects, based on sound economic plans. In the fiscal years from 1993 to 1998 in the 219 counties of the region, these Rural Business Service programs provided a total of \$245,128,336 in loans and \$28,702,124 in grants.

Rural Development (RD): Rural Development programs must be supported and expanded for the vast rural Delta. For two of these programs, funding should be allocated as requested in the FY 2001 President's budget to help build capacity in distressed and disadvantaged areas of the Delta.

- Under the *Rural Business Opportunity Grant (RBOG)* program, the President requests that at least 25 percent of the funding be used to support distressed communities in the Delta.
- Under the *Rural Community Development Initiative (or RCDI)*, administered by the Rural Housing Service), a percentage of the funding should be allocated to support efforts in the Delta (as long as those needs are greater than other areas of the country) to develop the capacity of private, nonprofit community-based housing and community development organizations, as well as low-income rural communities to undertake projects for improved housing, community facilities and economic development projects. The funding would be made available to qualified private and public (including tribal) intermediary organizations proposing to carry out programs of technical assistance. Such organizations would provide matching funds from other sources in an amount equal to funding provided from the RCDI.

Department of Commerce programs: The Department of Commerce has been active in the Delta, especially in regard to its infrastructure, planning, technical assistance and business finance/revolving loan fund grants designed to stimulate economic growth and provide job opportunities. Commerce provided over \$114 million in grants to the region during the FY 1993 to mid-FY 1999 period. Further attention should be directed to Commerce programs that promote minority business, telecommunications capabilities, and export assistance. Several important programs implement the Department's responsibility for these issues:

- *International Trade Administration Export Assistance Centers, Foreign Commercial Service Offices and Minority Business Development Agency Business Development Centers:* The Department of Commerce, through its regional and district offices, will increase its outreach to the Mississippi Delta through technical assistance and management and export counseling. We will continue to work with our State and local partners to develop strategic approaches to increase economic prosperity in the region and its communities.
- *National Telecommunications and Information Administration - TIIAP programs:* The Department will continue to work with communities and State and local organizations in their efforts to bring technological innovation and information to inner city and rural communities. Through the TIIAP program, communities receive funding for programs and initiatives that address the technology and information needs of a community.
- *Economic Development Administration Grant Programs:* The Department's Economic Development Representatives (EDR) throughout the Mississippi Delta region will continue working closely with State and local organizations to provide guidance and support in their efforts to develop comprehensive and strategic economic development plans, and provide information and assistance to distressed communities and organizations interested in applying for Federal financial support. To enhance service delivery, EDRs travel throughout their respective States to provide information and assistance to eligible communities and organizations and to

help coordinate requests for technical assistance with EDA-funded university centers, planning and development districts and other Federal agencies that administer community and economic development programs. Currently, EDA has six EDRs that cover the seven-States that comprise the Lower Mississippi Delta.

- *EDA University Centers:* University Centers are staffed by economic development researchers and specialists at the universities who bring their knowledge and expertise to smaller communities in the Delta region. EDA sponsors a network of six University Centers in the Delta: Those centers are: Mississippi Valley State University, Itta Bena, Mississippi; University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee; Xavier University, Orleans, Louisiana; Arkansas State University, Jonesboro, Arkansas; University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Arkansas; and University of New Orleans, Louisiana.

University Center grants are typically awarded financial assistance for a twelve-month period and are renewed if performance is satisfactory and funds are available. The typical Federal share of funding for a University Center ranges from \$75,000 to \$120,000.

University Centers provide the most up-to-date technology and information regarding economic development to outlying and smaller communities throughout the Delta.

Through the University Centers, local leaders learn about innovative ways to use the latest economic information to plan for the future and create jobs for their communities. The majority of University Centers direct their efforts to assisting units of local government and nonprofit organizations in planning and implementing sustainable economic development programs and projects.

- *Planning and development districts:* EDA also funds a network of local economic development districts throughout the region. Twenty-nine multi-county districts are located in the Delta and they blanket the State and help communities develop and implement comprehensive economic development strategies and projects that will create local employment opportunities and increase incomes for area residents. Examples include basic water and sewer infrastructure, skill-training facilities, port and harbor improvements, incubator buildings, military base re-use, redevelopment of brownfields, and the construction of new business and industrial parks. They also help communities and businesses that have been hit by disasters such as floods and tornadoes by developing recovery strategies and capitalizing revolving loan funds to rebuild their businesses.

(SIDEBAR)

Economic Development Administration Investments for the Arkansas Delta

During the Clinton Administration, EDA has funded 391 projects totaling \$114 million in financial assistance for projects located in the Delta region from FY 1993 to FY 1999.

EDA's program has provided support to the region for 30 years. Projects from the Arkansas Delta area are discussed below to give specific examples of EDA investments. EDA funded 35 projects in the Arkansas Delta region. The funding for these projects totaled approximately \$24.1 million. EDA's support leveraged an additional amount of about \$13.6 million in local funding for these projects, for a total projects cost of more than \$37 million.

Blytheville and Gosnell received substantial funding, primarily in response to the Eaker Air Force Base closure in 1992. To date, EDA has invested \$8.4 million in defense-adjustment grants to facilitate the transformation of the local economy away from its traditional emphasis on the base. These projects emphasize a more diverse approach as laid out in their EDA-funded strategic plan.

The single largest project funded was for \$2.55 million in FY 1995 to the Blytheville-Gosnell Regional Airport Authority. This project financed airstrip upgrades and the renovation of hangars on the former Air Force base and enlarged them, permitting the hangars to accommodate larger planes. These improvements allowed Leading Edge Aviation, an airline painting company, to expand its business to larger planes and bring additional jobs and revenue to the area.

Facilities had to be configured to fit commercial specifications. Roads to these facilities needed to be built. Water and wastewater services needed to be expanded and upgraded to accommodate increased demand. Today the former base is now home to several large companies, such as Leading Edge Aviation, which employs 150 people. It is also one of the largest hubs for U.S. Postal Service mail-sorting operations during the Christmas season, employing 700 people. There are numerous small- to medium-size businesses as well which help to diversify and strengthen the local economy. A public works grant of \$1.2 million to the Blytheville-Gosnell Regional Airport Authority will help to create 350 new jobs and retain 850 employees at the airport.

In addition to the U.S. Postal Service use of the former base for mail sorting operations, it shares the facility with Leading Edge, the largest aviation painting company in America, whose clients include NASA, Northwest Airlines, Continental UPS and U.S. Airways. Leading Edge's employment is expected to grow from 150 employees to 500. More hangar space is needed to keep these companies in Mississippi County, which has lost over 700 jobs in numerous industries. Furthermore, the area steel mills—which employ hundreds of people—have to cut back costs to compete with cheaper steel imports. EDA's \$1.2 million grant will help finance a 35,000-square foot facility for the mail sorting operation that can also accommodate future alternate uses. The Airport Authority and the local community, which has had to invest in basic infrastructure and to respond to the crisis in the steel industry, did not have the funds to support the cost of this facility. The expansion would not be possible without EDA's grant.

These EDA projects in the Arkansas Delta exemplify the types of work EDA is pursuing throughout the seven-state, 219-county region in a broad array of economic development and infrastructure development activities.

(END SIDEBAR)

Economic adjustment in base closures and military downsizing: A number of communities in the Delta have been faced with the challenge and costs of adjusting local economies to base closures and other impacts of military downsizing. On October 5, 1999, the President signed the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2000 into law. An important provision of this legislation authorizes the Secretary to convey surplus base closure property to communities at no cost to stimulate economic redevelopment and long-term job creation. The President said: "This new policy...will allow us to speed the transfer of such property to local communities and minimize the time that the property lies fallow. In this way, we can give an economic jump start to

affected communities and help to stimulate the investments necessary to attract new job-creating businesses.”

Significant community infrastructure investment is required to revitalize those areas adversely affected by base closings. Transferring property from these bases at no cost relieves these communities of the requirement to pay the military for the property, thereby freeing up revenue to more rapidly overcome obstacles. These revenues can be leveraged with private sector investment and other Federal agency programs. DOD’s Economic Adjustment Program provides technical and financial resources to assist an impacted community on reuse of a former military base. The Office of Economic Adjustment facilitates the Department’s support for these areas and coordinates the delivery of Federal interagency assistance in support of local community implementation efforts.

DOD has issued interim policies to implement this new legislation, conducting public outreach sessions to understand current and revised regulations and guidance in the form of the Base Reuse Implementation Manual, and to ensure a streamlined, responsive program for community-based job creation initiatives.

The following are numbers (through 1999) with respect to job loss and Federal financial assistance for four military installations in the Delta region affected by downsizing and closure:

- 1) **Eaker Air Force Base, in Mississippi County, Arkansas**; 3,300 acres, closed in 1992; 777 civilian jobs lost. All airport-related land will be conveyed to local authorities, and to date 603 jobs have been created. Federal financial assistance from DoD, FAA, and the Department of Commerce totaled approximately \$4.7 million.
- 2) **England Air Force base in central Louisiana** closed in 1992, and in its place was developed a commercial regional airport, promising to become one of the most successful community-based redevelopment efforts in the country; it boasts 55 new tenants and 1,500 new jobs. Federal funding has been over \$14 million.
- 3) **Naval Air Station Memphis** is located 16 miles north of Memphis in Millington, Tennessee. It was “realigned” in 1995, closing the airfield and causing 250 civilian jobs to be lost. The transfer of property and airport facilities is currently underway; 40 new jobs have been created thus far. Federal financial assistance has amounted to \$2 million.
- 4) **Defense Distribution Depot, Memphis** is located two miles from the Memphis International Airport. It closed in 1995, with a civilian job loss of 1,289. At the present time the city of Memphis is negotiating with the Army to take title to the facility. Federal financial assistance has been approximately \$ 3.7 million.

Recommendation regarding economic adjustment policies

The Federal government must continue to support the Department of Defense’s Economic Adjustment Program into the new century, as well as other policies pursued during the Clinton Administration aimed at helping communities transition economically and socially in the aftermath of base closures and military downsizing.

JOB TRAINING, WELFARE-TO-WORK, AND WORKFORCE INVESTMENT

Job training: The 1990 LMDDC Report emphasized, “Even entry level positions now require advanced skills attainment,” and called for access to the most comprehensive job training programs possible. The U.S. Department of Labor has promoted a series of job training and welfare-to-work projects summarized in this section. President Clinton signed the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, two major pieces of legislation that will have a major impact on achieving this goal.

Welfare-to-Work: Moving people from welfare to work is now one of the primary goals of Federal welfare policy. The Balanced Budget Act of 1997, signed by the President on August 5, helps to achieve that goal by authorizing the U.S. Department of Labor to provide Welfare-to-Work Grants to States and local communities to create additional training for the hardest-to-employ recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and for low-income fathers. This program is helping Americans make the transition from welfare and dependency to work and self-sufficiency.

In order to receive formula funds under the Welfare-to-Work program, a State must submit a plan to the Department of Labor for the administration of a grant. After the Department determines that the plan meets statutory requirements, States administer the formula funds and assure they are coordinated with funds spent under the TANF block grant. Generally, private industry councils established under the Job Training Partnership Act (or, under the WIA, workforce investment boards) administer the program at the local level in coordination with elected officials. Funds allocated to States are based on a formula that equally considers States’ shares of the national number of poor individuals and adult recipients of TANF assistance. A State is allowed to retain 15 percent of the money for welfare-to-work projects of its choice. For every two dollars of Federal funding, States provide one dollar of non-Federal funding.

Under this program, the 25 percent of funds not allocated by formula are available for competitive grants awarded by the Secretary of Labor directly to local governments, private industry councils, community development corporations, community action agencies, and other private organizations that apply in conjunction with a private industry council or local government.

Formula funding for the Delta: By 1998, substantial Federal Welfare-to-Work formula allocations were devoted to the Delta. The 45 Delta parishes of Louisiana received over \$15 million in 1998. The Service Delivery Area (SDA) including Cross, Phillips, Crittenden, St. Francis, and Lee counties in east Arkansas received more than \$1.4 million, while the Southeastern SDA including Grant, Arkansas, Lincoln, Bradley, Ashley, Desha, Jefferson, Cleveland, Drew, and Chicot received over \$1.25 million. Central Arkansas’ largest county, Pulaski, as well as Prairie, Monroe, and Lonoke counties, received \$826,311. The northeastern Arkansas SDA received over \$750,000. Mississippi did not submit State Welfare-to-Work plans in either 1998 or 1999. The DOT Delta Website contains an in-depth analysis of statistics on each local area in the region.

Competitive Welfare-to-Work grants in the region: Under the competitive grant part of the program, several projects were awarded in the region. These included a \$5 million project for the New Orleans Welfare-to-Work Collaborative, an organization comprised

of more than 60 businesses, service providers and consumer representatives. This project emphasized pay for performance and family self-sufficiency, and addressed a community in the central city of New Orleans facing a shortage of low-skill jobs that pay a wage sufficient to sustain a family. A similar \$5 million competitive grant was awarded to Little Rock for an innovative project that focuses on a one-stop center anchoring employment and support services. A “whole family” approach includes job placement, employment education and training, substance abuse treatment, assignment of a personal mentor/job coach to assist with job retention, child care and transportation assistance, and help in locating housing.

Although Mississippi did not submit a State plan and thus did not take part in the formula funding for Welfare-to-Work, Hinds County, Mississippi did receive a \$3,294,191 award under the competitive grant part of the program. The target community includes an area of Jackson, Mississippi that historically suffers from high poverty. The project aims to address the same fundamental problems as do the New Orleans and Little Rock plans: inadequate education, poor work histories, substance abuse, inadequate transportation and child care, and inadequate job skills. The goal of the Remedial Employment Opportunity Program (REOP) is to match new workers and their need for economic self-sufficiency to area employers. Local substance abuse treatment centers, housing and other community organizations will work with private employers.

Workforce Investment Act of 1998. On August 7, 1998, President Clinton signed the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. This new authority overhauls the job training system by repealing the Job Training Partnership Act (effective June 30, 2000) and by bringing together many Federal, State and local partners into a comprehensive “one-stop” service delivery system. It is a customer-driven overhaul that will help employers get the workers they need to succeed in the 21st Century.

Annually, the Department of Labor allots, by formula, Federal job training funds to the seven States of the Lower Mississippi Delta region. These funds may be used to provide a wide array of services based upon individual need for low-income adults and youth, welfare recipients, and dislocated workers. Governors, in turn, allocate the funds to local communities where decisions are made on who will be served from among the eligible population, and how the funds will be used to help or qualify individuals find new jobs or first jobs. State and local officials have significant flexibility regarding how these funds are used and they generally make decisions based upon the population being served and the needs of the local communities. In addition, one-stop delivery systems have been developed throughout the Delta, where access to America’s Job Bank and America’s Talent Bank is available to all job seekers. Approximately twenty Job Corps Centers also are located in the region, with more than 10,000 youth receiving residential basic and vocational training annually.

The Welfare-to-Work and workforce investment reforms are relatively new programs, and thus data on their effects are not yet complete. The gradual increases in job growth and reduction in welfare rolls are moving in the right direction. The Welfare-to-Work programs provide innovative new approaches to the old problems of ending the debilitating cycle of dependency and unemployment, and these innovations are important to build on in the new century.

Job Training, Welfare-to-Work, and WIA Goals and Recommendations

It is essential that the progress achieved thus far in the Delta through the training, Welfare-to-Work and workforce development policies should be continued and broadened in the years beyond 2000. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) seeks to reform Federal employment and training programs, and creates a new, comprehensive workforce investment system. Designed to meet the needs of both employer and job seeker customers, the goal of WIA is to increase the employment, retention, and earnings of participants, and increase occupational skills of participants. In achieving these goals, the new system will improve the quality of the workforce to sustain America's economic growth, enhance the productivity and competitiveness of the nation, and reduce welfare dependency.

Welfare-to-Work Plans: In order for States to receive the full value and benefits of Welfare-to-Work programs and policies, it is important to work closely with them on the development and completion of tailored plans.

Work Investment Boards and "One-Stop" Centers: The Workforce Investment Act consolidates several job training programs. In doing so, States and local areas are mandated to establish Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs). Appointed by local elected officials, in accordance with criteria established by the Governors, local WIBs must have a majority of business representatives and must also include representatives of education providers, labor organizations, community-based organizations (CBOs), economic development agencies, and each of the "One-Stop" partners. In order to gain access to Federal funding, these boards must submit a 5-year plan to the U.S. Department of Labor. The cornerstone of this new system is streamlined service delivery. By building on One-Stop implementation efforts already underway in the vast majority of States, this integrated system will simplify and expand access to services for job seekers and employers. One-Stop Centers are mandated to coordinate activities and create systems of seamless service delivery. Executed properly, this plan will ensure that all entities work together to provide education and training that prepares employees for jobs in the local labor market and connects employers with skilled workers.

The Lower Mississippi Delta initiative affords Federal agencies an excellent opportunity to assist the people within the Delta. The broadest possible participation by our State and local partners, stakeholders, Federal agencies, and other interested organizations and individuals is essential in planning and implementing the Act both in the Delta region and across the country. Provisions in the bill ensure that all levels of government will be held accountable for results. The bill provides core measures of performance, including job placement, retention, and earnings that will apply to States and local areas.

Integrated service delivery: Economic conditions of the Delta depend on good service readily available to the public. True integration of Federal departmental services will be essential if this five-year plan is to be effective. An excellent example of integration is the Department of Transportation's—joined by other departments and agencies in this effort—assistance to local communities to help inner city residents get to outlying jobs. WIA supports integration of agency services within the mandated five-year plan. It must be more than a sketch for job training. States are mandated to examine all facets of integration—transportation, vocational education, job creation, and economic expansion—keeping in mind that all must be supported by a skilled workforce. We must make stakeholders aware of available resources, such as America's Job Bank, America's

Labor Market Information, and others. The Federal government's Office of Personnel Management maintains USAJOBS website, which is a constantly updated listing of every Federal job vacancy currently available and can be accessed according to location as well as type of work. It has links to the Department of Labor's job bank and State unemployment agency sites. The website address is www.opm.gov/usajobs.

At the same time, we must teach and encourage use of these programs. We must work directly with industries to provide a competent workforce armed with the skills needed for specific jobs.

Training for welfare workers: States and communities could use their Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds to increase training for the staff who are helping families move from welfare to work. Through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, States, territories, and tribes each receive a block grant allocation. A total allocation of \$1.5 billion in block grants will be available for the seven States within the Mississippi Delta region.

Education and training for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF): There is a need to increase access to education, training and employment programs, provide supportive services to remove barriers and help low-income adults move into work and move up the career ladder. Under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, States, territories, and tribes each receive a block grant allocation. The total block grant is \$16.5 billion each year through FY 2002. The block grant covers benefits and administrative expenses, as well as a wide range of services. States, territories, and tribes determine eligibility and benefit levels and services provided to needy families. Federal, State and local agencies, in collaboration with faith-based organizations and private sector entities, should utilize TANF flexibility and resources to ensure low-income families have access to programs to improve their skills and move up the career ladder.

Providing workforce development support to small businesses in the Delta region: Through the Welfare-to-Work and Disability Initiatives, the Small Business Administration will provide technical assistance and resource information to local businesses in the Delta in need of workers. SBA will help link businesses to local service providers and other organizations that provide job training and placement of persons on welfare. In addition, SBA will continue its efforts to provide information to businesses on tax credits, wage subsidies and other incentives offered at the Federal and State level for companies that hire people from welfare.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Clinton-Gore Administration has supported major policy initiatives and programs that emphasize leadership at the grassroots level, community partnerships, and long-term strategic planning as the entry points for community and economic revitalization, and development. These policies are exemplified by the Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities (EZ/EC) program, the Community Development Financial Institutions Program, and related community development innovations discussed below.

Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities (EZ/EC) and Champion Communities: The EZ/EC program is the major Clinton-Gore Administration innovation in the field of community development. The EZ/EC program emphasizes a comprehensive approach to community revitalization and improvement that encompasses

economic development as well as a range of “quality of life” issues such as education, housing, health care, infrastructure, and other issues. It is perhaps the most innovative and wide-ranging of the array of development initiatives discussed in this Report, since it is based on inter-related activities involving transportation, job creation, health care, education, infrastructure, small business development, and other areas analyzed in all sections of the 1990 Report, *The Delta Initiatives*.

In Round I of the EZ/EC program announced in 1994, there were eight rural and five urban EZs and ECs in the Delta. Another rural Delta EZ (in southern Illinois) was added in Round II of the program in 1999. The urban Enterprise Communities are in Pulaski County, Arkansas; Ouachita Parish, Louisiana; New Orleans, Louisiana; Memphis, Tennessee; and Jackson, Mississippi. The rural EZs and ECs are as follows: the Mid-Delta Mississippi Empowerment Zone, Mississippi; North Delta Mississippi EC, Mississippi; Northeast Louisiana Delta EC, Louisiana; Macon Ridge EC, Louisiana; Mississippi County EC, Arkansas; East Central Arkansas EC; Fayette/Howard EC, Tennessee; East Prairie EC, Missouri; and the Southernmost Illinois Delta Empowerment Zone, Illinois. The program is based upon the principles of sustainable development, economic opportunity, grassroots leadership, long-range strategic planning and collaborative problem solving, and community-based partnerships.

Nationally, Round I rural EZs received Health and Human Services block grants totaling \$40 million, while ECs received funding of \$3 million. EZ employers gained tax credits equal to 20 percent of the first \$15,000 in wages or training expenses for qualified employees. Tax-free facility bonds of up to \$3 million were available for some EZs and ECs. Qualified businesses could receive an additional \$20,000 tax deduction for investments in EZs. Communities also received priority consideration for many other Federal programs.

A new initiative that developed in tandem with the EZ/EC program within USDA’s Rural Development was that of Champion Communities. In order to be considered for EZ/ECs, communities organized and completed the valuable strategic planning process as part of their application for Round I EZ/ECs. To assure that this effort produced continuing benefits to these communities, USDA designated them as “Champion Communities” and provided continuing assistance to them.

However, the grassroots leadership and strategic planning phases of the program are more important, ultimately, than the Federal funding amounts. One of the great successes of the program has been the communities’ success in “leveraging” funds. For example, the rural communities drew \$10.225 million from their EZ/EC funding from 1994 to the beginning of 1999, while their total funding—including State, local, private business, and nonprofit foundation sources—amounted to ten times that much, or approximately \$107.4 million. The EZs and ECs provide a model for grassroots community leadership and sustainable development.

The Round II EZs designated in January 1999 (of which the Southernmost Illinois Delta Empowerment Zone is one) received first-year funding of \$2 million. The Administration is seeking full 10-year funding for these designated communities.

As Vice President Gore indicated in his statement for *Delta Vision, Delta Voices*, “The EZ/EC program embodies what the Delta initiative is all about; it is based upon the principles of sustainable development, leadership from the grassroots level, economic opportunity, long-range strategic planning and community-based partnerships.” In light

of the Vice President's statement and the importance of this program as a model for local initiatives, the following examples provide a sampling of EZ/EC activities. These reflect the types of grassroots community development generated by this program, and they demonstrate examples of action that should continue in the new millennium.

Community Housing Efforts

Housing revitalization in Mississippi County: The Mississippi County, Arkansas EC developed and implemented a comprehensive plan for affordable housing development and community improvement in Mississippi County. The plan coordinates efforts to achieve affordable home ownership, rental opportunities, and community improvement projects. To address the problem of a lack of information about credit and housing opportunities, the EC implemented a credit repair counseling and home ownership training program. Since its inception, 70 families have participated in this counseling program. The EC area has suffered from deteriorating housing stock that has lowered the standard of living for many low-income families. In response, the EC created a preservation and rehabilitation program for owner-occupied units. The EC surpassed its original goal of rehabilitating 20 housing units and now has rehabilitated 43 homes. The EC has also focused on creating affordable, clean, decent rental units for low-income residents. The EC has constructed 57 new rental houses for families, surpassing its original goal of 20 new homes.

Partnerships with nonprofit grassroots organizations: The North Delta Mississippi EC has developed an effective collaboration with Tallahatchie Development League (TDL), a nonprofit, grassroots organization that promotes community development in "education, economics, and family life." TDL is a partner in the ECs Housing Preservation Grant Program. In partnership with the North Delta Area on Agency, TDL offers 27 meals per day to senior citizens in the Tutwiler community. The League has co-developed 72 units of housing within the EC. TDL also provides consulting services to communities and other nonprofits in preparing applications for housing, Rural Development Section 515 programs, the Affordable Housing Program, and community development block grant funding.

Community Health Care

Delta Futures project for reducing infant mortality and teen pregnancy: This Federally funded "Delta Futures Safe at Home Project" provides a series of services in nutrition, the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) supplemental nutrition program, health information and education about the dangers of tobacco. The North Delta Mississippi EC partners with a consortium of health care providers, schools, Head Start, businesses, and community-based organizations that contribute solutions to the fight against low birth weight and infant mortality.

Nursing Assistants Program: The Northeast Louisiana Delta EC sponsored a Nursing Assistants program at the Louisiana Technical College's Tallulah campus. Students are enrolled dually in high school and the nursing assistants program, which enables them to become certified nursing assistants who can go to work immediately after graduation. In 1998, 37 students enrolled in two classes in Tallulah and 20 enrolled in a class in Lake Providence. Last year, 22 students graduated from the program. The program is an excellent preparation for students considering a job in the health care industry.

Infrastructure

Macon Ridge, Louisiana infrastructure development: Numerous examples of infrastructure development took place in 1998 in the Macon Ridge Enterprise Community, which received a series of infrastructure improvements through USDA Rural Development funding. The following are several prominent examples:

- Turkey Creek Water System received a grant amount of \$1,815,000 and a loan of \$695,000 for the construction of a rural water distribution system, including water production wells, elevated storage tank, distribution lines and service connections for approximately 400 households in Franklin Parish.
- In Ferriday, Louisiana, a Rural Business Enterprise Grant of \$225,000 was used to acquire the land and building for the Macon Ridge Enterprise Community Resource Center.
- In Harrisonburg, a \$250,000 grant and \$200,000 loan was used to construct a new wastewater treatment facility.
- For the Concordia Parish Water District, a \$1.294 million grant and \$482,000 loan upgraded a water system that had been inadequate by constructing three new water wells, four exchange units, a new metal building and a 200,000-gallon potable water storage tank.
- In the towns of Wisner, Newellton, and St. Joseph, and Catahoula Parish, USDA Community Facilities grants were used for improvements to fire and police department equipment.

Railroad improvements to Tennessee industrial park: The Fayette/Haywood County EC solved a major transportation problem for the Haywood County industrial park in Brownsville, Tennessee. The industrial park had been filling up and there were almost no sites remaining with railroad access. The EC applied for a \$600,000 USDA Rural Development grant and started laying a railroad spur to the underserved area of the park. A Fortune 500 company got in touch with the park just as the spur was being constructed, ultimately resulting in the opening of a \$20 million high-tech papermaking plant employing 35 people. The USDA funding was essential to the project, which came in under budget, in turn enabling a second spur to be built that will encourage more firms to locate at the Brownsville park.

Telecommunications: The Fayette County/Haywood County EC is working with local and State partners to promote a State-of-the-art community telecommunications center for workforce development. The Fayette County School Board is creating a Telecommunications and Business School that will be equipped with computers and Internet access. The EC developed a strategy to establish job training programs relevant to the needs of local and regional markets. Local and State officials, Shelby State Community College, and Rural Development are all cooperating in this joint effort to enhance telecommunications in the local area.

Community Small Business Development

Historically Black Colleges and Universities grant for business incubator: The Northeast Louisiana Delta Community Development Corporation worked with Grambling State University to obtain a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to develop a business incubator for new and emerging micro-businesses. The grant was awarded through the Office of Community Services' Historically Black Colleges and Universities. This project will provide economic opportunities and promote self-sufficiency for low-income residents of the area.

North Delta revolving loan fund for small businesses: The North Delta EC has funded 19 small businesses from its revolving loan fund. Each loan was in the amount of \$10,000. The businesses provide job opportunities and entrepreneurial opportunities for local residents. The ECs vision for a business revolving loan fund (RLF) became a reality for Quitman County, as the EC Board approved Quitman County Economic Development District as administrator for the RLF. In 1998, the business plan application process led to 15 loans, 88 percent of which were made to minorities. The total amount loaned was \$166,300, which was used for a variety of purposes from business expansion or purchasing equipment to inventory replenishments for existing businesses.

One third of the \$250,000 available was set aside for businesses going into the new business incubator located in Lambert, which will be in operation by the fall of 1999. An additional EC initiative is a new Community Training Institute, which will provide training in budgeting, grant writing, credit repair, and other issues of interest to EC residents.

Community Education and Training

Little Rock preschool program: In the Pulaski County/Little Rock, Arkansas EC, the “Success by Six” program is creating a community where children have the necessary skills to enter school ready and able to learn. The EC is partnering with 10 State and local entities and a steering committee representing more than 50 individuals or organizations. “Success by Six” features home visits by volunteer neighborhood residents who are trained as family resource advocates. For families with pregnant women or children under 6 years old, home visitors conduct assessments, determine household needs, and connect family members to community resources such as health care, social services, and educational programs. The program is working with roughly 20 families. Approximately 10 home visitors have been trained, with many more submitting applications to take part. Research has demonstrated that by reaching out to families when children are in their earliest formative stages, serious problems can be avoided in the future and less funds will be expended upon remedial education, health care, or other social costs.

New Orleans Safe Harbor Schools Initiative: The New Orleans EC created a “Safe Harbor Schools” initiative for educational activities in 10 sites within the community. Now in its fourth year of operation, the program is moving beyond basic survival skills to include creative learning experiences in language, arts and math. Safe Harbor Schools offered tutoring programs and enrichment activities presented by certified teachers. Offerings included computer skills and family learning events, as well as classes in conflict resolution and mediation. Four of the Safe Harbor sites are for middle and high school students. In the Algiers community, the program is focusing on out-of-school populations due to a high truancy and dropout rate, with GED preparation and career counseling being offered to 50 EC youths and students. Progress has been made in keeping students motivated by use of the computer lab and job training center, and through contact with the school’s numerous partners. The project has been a success for many young people who completed their GED and job training.

Job Creation and Retention

Job creation and/or retention at Macon Ridge EC: By early 1998, the Macon Ridge Louisiana EC summarized its record regarding jobs: a total of \$953,000 was loaned, with leveraging of private funds adding up to \$787,000. A total of 118 minority jobs were

created or retained, with 111 jobs held by women. The EC reported 25 minority-owned businesses and 20 businesses owned by women participating in the program.

Northeast Louisiana Delta job creation projects: Avondale Industries, the sixth largest shipbuilding firm in the country, placed an expansion site in Tallulah, Louisiana, in the Northeast Louisiana Delta Enterprise Community. Moses Williams, president of the Northeast Louisiana Community Development Corporation, said the Avondale success story was part of job creation initiatives in Madison Parish during the 1990s that led to a decrease in unemployment from 14 percent in 1993 to 7.5 percent in June 1999. “That’s the lowest unemployment we’ve had here in 20 years,” said Williams.

In letters to Avondale, Williams and Tallulah Mayor Theodore Lindsey pointed out Tallulah’s other advantages: It already had a port facility on the Mississippi and a trained labor force of welders who were ready to work. When Avondale executives showed interest in Tallulah’s port facility, State and local officials got involved to induce the company to make its move. Avondale invested \$2 million to renovate an existing building on the port. The Louisiana Legislature contributed \$1.3 million to make infrastructure improvements so the port could accommodate Avondale’s operation. The company qualified for Federal and State tax credits.

Avondale expects to increase its workforce to 200 by the end of 1999. The new jobs are a welcome shot in the arm for an area where unemployment has historically been twice the State average. Those jobs may be just the beginning of economic development success for Tallulah, as the shipbuilding operation attracts other business to the city. Not long after receiving a firm commitment from Avondale, the local Enterprise Community lent \$118,000 to a sewing company (called LAPCO) that specializes in making jackets for welders. Intrigued by the possibility of selling its product directly to the shipbuilder, LAPCO leased a vacant, city-owned building and used its EC loan to purchase factory equipment. LAPCO, which opened its Tallulah plant in August 1998, will employ 50 to 100 local residents.

That Tallulah managed to recruit a large corporation to bring in a plant locally does not mean that other communities could follow this pattern, or that the success of this project came from outside the community. To the contrary, the key elements of success behind this project came from *within the community itself*: the skilled labor, the technical college, the port facility, the local ingenuity, and above all the cooperation and leadership of the people in Tallulah. The collaboration of local leaders with Federal, State, and private entities in these successful projects provides a good model for communities to emulate in job creation and business development.

(SIDEBAR)

Job Creation in the Delta—Mid-Delta Mississippi Empowerment Zone

Dollar General Distribution Center, Indianola, Mississippi—creating more than 500 jobs:

The Mid-Delta Empowerment Zone Alliance (MDEZA) played a vital role in helping secure a major facility for the Mississippi Delta—Dollar General’s Distribution Center in Indianola, Mississippi, leading to the creation of 500 new jobs. Just 10 months and a day after announcing construction in August 1997, Dollar General Distribution Center shipped the first order.

The Company made the official announcement that it would construct its Distribution Center in Indianola Mississippi on August 28, 1997. Groundbreaking ceremonies for the 825,000-square-foot automated distribution facility took place on October 7, 1997. The first inbound shipment arrived May 18, 1998 and the first outbound shipment of goods occurred June 29, 1998.

MDEZA invested \$900,000 in infrastructure for the new distribution center, leading to a major success in leveraging MDEZA funds—the project has brought in a total of over \$38 million in public and private investments. In addition to the new jobs created (cited above) this project has also created 150 truck drivers who ship products to 370 Dollar General stores throughout the region. Dollar General CEO Cal Turner, Jr. says the company chose Indianola because of the “total community support” for the company. The EZ tax credits provide up to \$3,000 for every resident of the Zone that is hired by Dollar General.

Many of the workers in this automated distribution center reside in the Mid-Delta Empowerment Zone. MDEZA was also instrumental in leveraging a \$900,000 infrastructure grant to the City of Indianola thereby assuring construction of the \$30 million facility and over 500 new jobs for the region.

Henry Gardner and Clara Brown are two individual success stories who illustrate the impact of this project on lives of the people. Mr. Gardner, 41, had been a farm worker who received low wages before he went to work for Dollar General. He previously did not have health or retirement benefits. Now he says, “Dollar General offered me a place to work where there are nice people to work for.... The benefits and money help my family... Since I have been employed here I can now pay my bills.”

Clara Brown is another success story. A 48-year-old single parent, she says, “Dollar General gave me the opportunity to keep my home. My mother died and I did not know which way to turn. Dollar General gives me the money I need to provide for my kids so they do not have to do without the things they need.” Ms. Brown previously held lower-paying jobs, and she says, “I enjoy my job now and feel good about myself.” Since going to work for Dollar General she has been able to buy a car, and she said, “I have even bought my son a computer and can pay all my bills.”

On average there are 115 shipments per day in and out of the Center. New truck lanes are under construction on Highway 82 to safely accommodate this additional traffic.

MDEZA has been able to leverage its funds three-fold. For every MDEZA dollar spent, it has acquired three in return. The 42 contracts total \$11,239,439 and MDEZA contributed only \$2,752,430 for an advantage factor of 76%.

Business and Industry Loans for Catfish Processing, Itta Bena, Mississippi—

Creating more than 400 jobs: The Mid-Delta Mississippi Empowerment Zone provided vital assistance in bringing a major catfish-processing facility into the EZ. USDA’s Rural Development provided a business and industry loan guarantee in the amount of \$2.5 million to Freshwater Farms, a catfish-processing facility. That initial investment brought a facility to the EZ that has provided more than 236 jobs since the initial investment was made several years ago, and the business is still flourishing today. Heartland, Catfish, Inc. located a new catfish-processing facility in Itta Bena, Leflore County.

The catfish industry is an important new activity in Mississippi and in the Delta region as a whole, as it provides a major alternative to traditional row crop farming. The Heartland Catfish facility in Itta Bena is one success story in a statewide industry that now

contributes in excess of \$2 billion to Mississippi's economy annually. Contract farming in aquaculture is rare, and the economic benefits of aquaculture accrue primarily to private citizens. For the Delta region, aquaculture provides a unique opportunity for employment and income for limited resource, small farmers—many of whom are minority—who might not otherwise be able to stay in business. Thus, the foresight of the EZ and other community leaders led to the establishment of a major catfish plant in the EZ, and contributed to the growth of a major industry that has succeeded in diversifying and strengthening economic opportunity for the residents of the Empowerment Zone.

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Community Development Goals and Recommendations

The Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities (EZ/EC) program in the Delta is an effective model for community development, based on the fundamental EZ/EC principles of leadership at the grassroots level, economic opportunity, sustainable development, strategic long-range planning, and community-based partnerships. The EZ/EC program has developed a strong collaboration with numerous other agencies, including SBA, USDA, HUD, HHS, DOT, Education, Treasury's Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) program and others. This innovative collaboration should continue and expand in the future. The regional strategic plan of the Southern EZ/EC Forum is an excellent example of long-range vision for the Delta's future development.

Expansion of EZ/EC program in the Delta: There are currently nine rural EZ/ECs and five urban ones, and this number should be expanded. As is the case with any program, there has been a range of accomplishment, and some communities have enjoyed more success than others. The President's FY 2001 budget proposes mandatory funding for the remaining eight years for Round II Rural Empowerment Zones, as well as a third round of Empowerment Zones (eight urban and two rural EZs).

Enhancing Champion Communities: In order to enhance the benefits of Champion Community status, additional preference points in applying for Federal funding should continue to be given these communities, or other incentives should be developed to reward localities that have achieved this status and to encourage others to attain it. There should be funding for a new Center of Excellence to support Champion Communities in the Delta. There should also be funding for a returning Peace Corps member to provide technical support through the National Center of Excellence at Mississippi Valley State University.

Promoting Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI): There needs to be a concerted effort to expand the availability of capital, investment capital, and financial services in distressed urban, rural and Native American communities in the Mississippi Delta region. The Federal government needs to encourage the development of locally based institutions in conjunction with traditional banks and thrifts to provide access to capital, investment capital, and expanded financial services via grants, other financial assistance, and technical assistance. Financial and technical assistance should be provided to Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) that serve the Delta. CDFIs of a variety of types (microenterprise funds, credit unions, community loan funds and venture capital funds among them) should be encouraged to serve the credit and investment needs of the Delta.

In collaboration with the Department of Treasury, many communities have been assisted by initiatives of the CDFI Fund, which has provided extensive financial support for many community development organizations in local areas throughout the region. In President Clinton's "New Markets Initiative" trip to Clarksdale, Mississippi, in July 1999, he announced nearly \$15 million in new private investments in the Enterprise Corporation for the Delta, a nonprofit organization that uses investments from the CDFI Fund to leverage private investments in business. The President announced that the Bank of America would pledge \$500 million in equity for business enterprises in low-income areas; of that total, \$100 million will go into a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI). The President said, "We are going to do everything we can in the government to give the financial incentives necessary for people to invest here."

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Changing Lives in the Delta—Enterprise Corporation of the Delta

During this historic period of economic expansion in the United States, there are communities that remain relatively untouched. To highlight the untapped economic potential of such communities, President Clinton launched his "New Markets Initiative" with a four-day trip to six communities in early July 1999. The President visited Clarksdale, Mississippi, where he saw firsthand the impact that can be made with private sector investments in the lower Mississippi Delta as illustrated by the work of the Enterprise Corporation of the Delta (ECD).

ECD is a non-profit loan fund that seeks to strengthen the rural Delta region of Mississippi, Arkansas and Louisiana by providing market-driven financial and technical assistance to Delta companies and entrepreneurs. This certified CDFI provides a much needed mechanism to attract private sector capital to support its job creation and economic development initiatives. ECD has been awarded a total of \$4.5 million since 1996 through the CDFI Program. In addition, ECD has been able to raise from mainstream financial institutions a total of \$5.325 million as a result of the Fund's Bank Enterprise Award Program. "ECD has done a tremendous job using the CDFI Fund's programs and providing a significant economic investment in the Delta, said CDFI Fund Director Ellen Lazar. "ECD is a wonderful model for how Federal dollars can be used to leverage private sector investments."

Clinton toured Clarksdale's depressed downtown and participated in a business roundtable at Waterfield, Inc., an ECD-financed cabinet manufacturer with 68 employees, one-third of which are former welfare recipients. One such employee is Cora Porter, assistant plant manager, who joined the President on stage but whose journey began sweeping the floors of Waterfield's predecessor. Today, this proud grandmother of 13 handles personnel, ordering, distributing material and shift coordination. "Cora is an exceptional person," said Waterfield owner Shelly Rice. "She is an innovative, hard working and loyal employee."

Nearly 1,000 people braved the sweltering Delta heat to attend the roundtable discussion, which focused on the need for investment capital in the Delta region, examples of small businesses that are making a difference and the investment potential for corporate America. The President also announced nearly \$15 million in new private sector investments in ECD.

“President Clinton’s message about the need for private support to develop the Delta’s tremendous assets is right on target,” said ECD’s Executive Director Bill Bynum.

“ECD’s work would not be possible without strong partnerships with the region’s banks and corporations and the Federal government. More and more, people are realizing that working together to strengthen the Delta’s economy benefits everyone.”

The President praised ECD for its work in the Delta. “It is a real success story. Just since 1994, [ECD has provided] financial or technical assistance to more than 600 companies,” Clinton said. “Overall, ECD has helped to generate more than 5,000 jobs and \$200 million in annual sales. The story needs to go out across America: this is a good investment. This is a good deal.”

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Bank Enterprise Awards: There should be a continuing mechanism to encourage regulated banks and thrifts to provide the Delta region with access to credit and financial services both directly and through support and partnerships with CDFIs. The CDFI Fund Bank Enterprise Award (BEA) Program provides incentives to FDIC-insured institutions to increase their level of activity to underserved communities and CDFIs, including those serving the Delta. Numerous banks in the region have participated in the BEA Program.

Community Adjustment and Investment Program (CAIP): As the global economy becomes more competitive, many communities within the Delta region could be affected by changes in international trading patterns. In areas experiencing job displacement due to such changes in trade patterns, there should be a coordinated Federal effort to assist trade-affected communities and companies in sustaining and creating jobs. This effort should encourage business development and job growth by providing technical assistance, grants, and financing in communities that lack access to affordable credit and need technical expertise. The assistance could include funding for job training programs, financing for a company’s purchase of equipment, and capital for business expansion. The Federal efforts should be coordinated with: the private and non-profit sectors, State and local authorities, community leaders, and community-based organizations. For example, the Community Adjustment and Investment Program (CAIP), administered by the North American Development Bank, provides loans, guarantees, grants and technical assistance to businesses and not-for-profit entities. The programs help create or retain jobs in communities experiencing job dislocations due to changing trade patterns with Canada and Mexico resulting from NAFTA.

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**Community Adjustment and Investment Program (CAIP)
Financing for Port Barre Apparel, Inc., Port Barre, Louisiana**

The Community Adjustment and Investment Program (CAIP) is a valuable part of the commitment that the Clinton Administration made during negotiations on NAFTA. The CAIP’s mission is to help create and sustain jobs in U.S. communities experiencing temporary job dislocations attributable to changing trade patterns with Canada and Mexico associated with NAFTA. The CAIP exemplifies globalization with a human face by helping to provide worker training and finance assistance in communities affected by trade.

The CAIP is affiliated with the North American Development Bank, a bilateral financial institution established by the United States and Mexico. The CAIP provides financing to

eligible communities, businesses and workers by: (1) making direct loans, (2) facilitating loan guarantees through agency programs with the Small Business Administration and United States Department of Agriculture, and (3) providing project and technical assistance grants. CAIP eligibility is based upon a number of factors, including unemployment statistics and NAFTA-related job losses.

The Port Barre, Louisiana Apparel, Inc., Loan

In the fall of 1999, a CAIP job creation project in Port Barre, Louisiana, was one of the local initiatives highlighted at a Delta 2000 Initiative listening session held at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Maria Matthews, Deputy Administrator of the USDA Office of Community Development, presented the opening speech at the session. Ms. Matthews cited the Port Barre project as an excellent model for dynamic job creation efforts in the Delta.

Deputy Administrator Matthews said that in September 1999, CAIP provided financial assistance to defray loan guarantee fees and facilitate a loan in the principal amount of \$975,000 to Port Barre Apparel, Inc. of Port Barre, Louisiana, located in St. Landry's Parish. The loan guarantee, combined with the borrower's equity investment and a bank line of credit, will enable Port Barre Apparel to open a tee shirt cutting and sewing business in an old Fruit of the Loom manufacturing facility. The Fruit of the Loom plant was closed when operations were relocated to Mexico.

Many workers displaced by the Fruit of the Loom relocation are expected to be employed at the new Port Barre Apparel plant. According to the borrower, this new plant will have a competitive advantage by offering more efficient service than foreign suppliers due to its proximity to wholesale and retail customers.

Deputy Administrator Matthews, who previously was Executive Director of the Imperial County California Enterprise Community in southern California before becoming head of the USDA EZ/EC program in 1999, has been heavily involved in issues related to NAFTA for many years. She said the Port Barre project exemplifies CAIP's mission in helping to create and sustain jobs in U.S. communities experiencing temporary job dislocations due to changing trade patterns associated with NAFTA. The Port Barre Apparel management team expects to create 85 new full-time jobs in its first year of operation and 130 jobs by the end of two years. Within five years, they project plant employment to reach 360 workers.

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BusinessLINC: To strengthen business-to-business relationships that can provide smaller firms—especially those in economically distressed areas—with access to the broader marketplace, access to technical expertise, and access to business partnering opportunities, the Delta region should expand its nascent local BusinessLINC coalition. BusinessLINC stands for "Learning, Investment, Networking and Collaboration," and was first launched in 1998 by Vice President Gore, former Treasury Secretary Rubin and SBA Administrator Aida Alvarez. The national coalition is led by the Business Roundtable and Texaco CEO Peter Bijur. Currently, local coalitions are forming in the Delta, Dallas, Boston, Chicago, New York City, and Washington, D.C., with more expected. The Department of Treasury, along with other agencies, will help the Delta BusinessLINC Coalition identify more large companies that would be willing to partner

with small businesses to help these companies get access to capital, technical assistance, networking advice and joint venture opportunities.

Livable Communities: The activities of the Livable Communities initiative should be continued and expanded. This initiative, through activities at the U.S. Department Transportation and other Federal agencies and departments, promotes coordinated efforts to link State and local governments, and community groups. The Administration's Circuit Rider Pilot Project, announced in December 1999, for the East Arkansas area is one such example. On a broad basis, the Federal government should undertake a more sustained coordinated approach to enhancing the ability of communities, the private sector, the non-profit sector, State and local officials, and community-based organizations to become more aware and to more easily access the vast array of Federal programs available to meet a wide variety of needs. This information should be available via the Internet and other mechanisms for those who do not have access to the Internet or who are disabled. An example of such an undertaking is the Building Livable Communities website (www.livablecommunities.gov) which contains a wide variety of Federal programs available to assist communities with their efforts to enhance livability.

Grassroots development—the Delta's Future

The particular projects summarized above represent only a small fraction of the accomplishments, but they demonstrate how communities are meeting and in many cases surpassing the program's goals, leveraging resources and creating sustainable development. Ultimately, the success of these community development ideas—EZ/EC, BusinessLinc, CDFI, Livable Communities, and the other innovations discussed in this section—flow from men and women in the Delta communities who have demonstrated the commitment and hard work needed to make their vision of opportunity and revitalization become a reality.

THE FARM ECONOMY

“Once, many thousands of years ago, this flat Delta land was the very floor of the sea. Later it was covered with great swampy forests, and any person who wandered into them by himself would get very lonely and afraid; he would have to be wary of the quicksand, not to mention the giant lizards, snakes, alligators... Now it is the richest land in the world. Some say if you plant a cotton seed in it, you have to jump away quickly to avoid being hit by the growing stalk.”

The late Willie Morris, describing the great historic process whereby the nineteenth century Delta wilderness was transformed into what is today the most fertile farmland in the world.

Agriculture remains an economic juggernaut in the Delta. This region is one of America's most prolific producers of cotton, rice, soybeans, and other major agricultural products. Agriculture affects not only farmers and farm laborers, but has a widespread impact throughout the region's economy, since equipment dealers, banks, local stores, and many other businesses and individuals are affected by the fate of the farm economy. USDA pursued policies to promote the economic viability of the traditional major producers, as well as new initiatives intended to promote direct marketing, sustainable agriculture,

alternative products such as aquaculture, and other policies aimed at preserving marketing and credit opportunities for small and minority farmers.

The 1990 Report recognized the major importance of the agricultural sector in the Delta. Adequate credit must be made available to high-risk farmers, and the Report generally emphasized the need for helping minority or limited-resource farmers who are troubled by small acreage and limited capital. The Commission urged more attention to direct marketing and other alternative marketing methods, and the development of sustainable agriculture. USDA, under Secretaries Mike Espy and Dan Glickman, inherited a problem of discrimination against minority farmers by USDA, and they have acknowledged the terrible plight of African-American farmers and how much remains to be done to alleviate this problem. The Secretaries changed policies at the Department and promoted greater attention to the problems of minority and limited resource farmers. USDA attempted to reverse policies of the past that had discriminated against small and minority farmers, and such programs as farm credit for socially disadvantaged farmers were expanded. In the Clinton Administration, USDA has devoted tremendous attention to the task of improving the plight of the small and minority farmer.

Marketing for minority and limited resource farmers: During the 1990s, USDA increased its efforts to promote farmers' markets and other direct marketing initiatives to assist limited resource farmers. Secretary Dan Glickman pursued a series of objectives recommended by the National Commission on Small Farms in 1997-98, including promotion of better marketing for the roughly 94 percent of America's farmers who are in the medium to small range in size.

USDA conducted a series of marketing feasibility studies, and other technical assistance was provided to farmers' markets in the Delta. Marketing initiatives for aquaculture, for farmers seeking to change from tobacco to other crops, and other alternative agriculture projects were assisted. The Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Farmers' Market Nutrition Program greatly expanded in scope from 1993 onwards. The WIC farmers' market program simultaneously creates a new market for small fruit and vegetable farmers while promoting better nutrition for nutritionally at risk women, infants and children. Missouri, Illinois and Kentucky were part of the program before 1998, and Arkansas and Mississippi joined the WIC farmers' market program in 1998; the Delta is the center of activity for this program, because the region contains large concentrations of produce farmers as well as WIC clients. In addition, the Foreign Agriculture Service has conducted a new series of policies designed to include small farmer cooperatives in farm export trade opportunities.

Cooperatives' assistance for small farmers: In other initiatives addressing the Commission's concern for limited resource farmers, USDA promoted its programs for assisting cooperatives, which are ideal mechanisms for addressing low population densities, smaller markets, and higher service costs. USDA's Rural Business Cooperative Services funded 25 technical assistance projects in the Delta, and conducted a series of projects with 1890 Land Grant institutions.

(SIDEBAR)

**HERMITAGE, ARKANSAS TOMATO COOPERATIVE:
A Model for Developing New Markets in the Rural Delta**

When Randy Clanton began working with local tomato growers to form a cooperative in the mid-1990s, many of the producers—like so many small farmers across America—faced the prospect of leaving their Bradley County farms and the familiar rural community where they had always lived. Clanton, a Bradley County farmer who is now President of the Hermitage Tomato Cooperative Association, said the local tomato growers were “dying on the vine.”

By 1999, the Hermitage tomato cooperative had succeeded so impressively that President Clinton praised it as a model for small farmers to create new markets across the country. Eighteen farmers joined forces to pool their crops and resources and open up a processing facility. In a New Markets Initiative visit to Hermitage, the President commended the Hermitage co-op as a model for how rural communities can remain viable as the agricultural economy changes.

“Now you can have a life here in this part of our State and you can prove that people can make a living in rural America and do something good,” Clinton said in his Hermitage speech on November 5, 1999. “And I believe we need more of these kinds of co-ops throughout our country.”

The co-op provides a superb model that helps small farmers be more competitive, provides good sustainable jobs in the processing facility as well as spin-off growth from the project, and improves the tax base for rural communities so that infrastructure investment can become a reality.

The co-op was made possible through a partnership of the growers, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Rural Development, the Burger King Corporation, Kroger, local banks and other community leaders in Bradley County. As a result of this public-private partnership, the co-op was established to grow and process tomatoes. The organization is made up of tomato growers who were on the brink of being forced out of farming before the co-op’s formation because they could not guarantee the volume required to be competitive. By forming a co-op to establish themselves as higher-volume suppliers, these farmers have been able to gain bigger customers and better prices. They can guarantee a sufficient supply of tomatoes to secure contracts to supply Burger King (through Restaurant Services Incorporated.).

The co-op began in 1996, and has enjoyed a huge expansion of its business in the last few years. In its first year, it produced 3,500 crates of tomatoes for Burger King, but that number skyrocketed to 61,000 crates in its second year, and to 65,000 crates in its third year. By 1999, production for Burger King grew to approximately 75,000 crates.

The co-op processing facility employs nearly 120 people during tomato season. These people would otherwise have to leave their homes to find jobs, or might be unemployed or on welfare. The community has begun to enjoy some “spin-off growth,” such as a new restaurant and other new business, as well as a new building for the school district.

The co-op was made possible by a Memorandum of Understanding between USDA and Burger King’s Restaurant Services Incorporated whereby the parties agreed to expand business opportunities in Underserved Disadvantaged Rural Communities (500 counties in rural America with persistent poverty called UDRC’s). The parties committed themselves to identify high-quality business leaders in UDRC’s to become approved suppliers for Burger King, to help them obtain financing, provide employment in the communities, and to provide food donations to the nation’s largest anti-hunger charitable organization—Second Harvest.

In 1998, USDA provided vital assistance for the co-op in the form of a \$3 million Business and Industry Guaranteed loan to purchase and modernize the processing plant. In 1999, a loan was guaranteed for \$1,850,000 to construct a building to house an additional packing line and increase the cooling capacity of the Cooperative. In December 1999, President Clinton announced that a third loan in the amount of \$4,754,860 would be guaranteed to purchase equipment, remodel an existing building for a re-packing operation, and construct a farm supply store and a convenience store. This loan provides the co-op with a year round operation, creating more stability for the income stream and the farmers. The co-op increased its membership from 15 to 23 with the possibility of additional members in the future.

The President was accompanied by a host of Cabinet members and other nationally recognized figures, including Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman, Secretary of Transportation Rodney Slater, Small Business Administrator Aida Alvarez, Reverend Jesse Jackson, Congressman Jay Dickey (R-Ark.), USDA Rural Development Under Secretary Jill Long Thompson, the Chief Executive Officers of Kroger, Burger King and many others. Clanton and Hermitage Mayor Mike Colvin were among the main speakers. Wilbur Peer, an Arkansas native who served in the Clinton Administration as Associate Administrator of Rural Business/Cooperative Services in Washington, D.C., was instrumental in supporting the project from its beginnings. The co-op was assisted by USDA Rural Development State Director John Edwards and Shirley Tucker, based in Little Rock. With the B&I loan guarantee, the co-op found its lender in Farmers Bank of Hamburg, Arkansas. The co-op earned nearly \$3.9 million in sales in 1998, when its members produced and processed 412,000 20-pound cartons of tomatoes from approximately 300 acres. For Burger King alone, the co-op packaged 60,000 cartons. Before the co-op's formation, Clanton said, the local small farmers "had no chance of surviving. Most had their own processing equipment on their farms, and it wasn't modern or big enough to handle even another neighbor's production." Once the farmers set up the co-op, they could seek appropriate funding to purchase the land and an existing tomato processing facility, to upgrade and buy equipment, and provide working capital. The better processing line, packaging and marketing would give members' product a unique look and help them compete for new markets.

Clanton sums it all up by saying, "We want to be on the cutting edge, not left behind."

(END SIDEBAR)

Sustainable agriculture: The Commission urged Congress and USDA to support a stable, sustainable, agriculture, which is profitable yet preserves the environment. On this subject, USDA has formed the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program (SARE). SARE has pursued a variety of projects in the Delta aimed at promoting value-added enterprises, sustainable forestry practices, and environmental research projects. The Delta also will benefit from President Clinton's Executive Order of August 12, 1999 creating a national initiative to accelerate the growth of bioenergy, which is the use of biomass (organic matter) to produce electricity and transportation fuels such as ethanol, or chemicals. Corn has long been used to produce ethanol, and the technology is improving for using rice straw as a viable biomass resource.

A SAFETY NET FOR FARMERS

In the late 1990s, farmers in the Delta and throughout the country faced one of the most severe depressions in American history. Emergency Federal relief for agriculture was funded in the autumn of 1999, providing almost \$9 billion in aid for farmers beset by depressed prices, drought and other problems. This assistance provided some desperately needed help for farmers struggling for their economic survival.

In looking beyond the 1999 farm crisis, many people knowledgeable about agriculture in the Delta have suggested the need for revised farm legislation. Congress has now spent roughly \$19 billion more in the first four years of the “Freedom to Farm” legislation than it was supposed to spend in the entire seven-year life span of the bill. The original concept of Freedom to Farm was an effort to ease the government out of the role of guaranteeing commodity prices. In 1996 and 1997, farmers were benefiting from high prices in the private market while enjoying substantial government payments designed to ease their transition; but as prices have crashed in the last two years, Congress had to pass major bailout legislation.

Agricultural Goals and Recommendations

USDA should aid farmers without delay and with particular emphasis on small and medium size farmers.

Income Assistance: There should be an income assistance program directed at those with the greatest need, particularly smaller and low-income farmers. It would be designed to be commodity-specific in that it will pay producers based on falling prices and income from the crops they actually plant. As they are now, Agricultural Marketing Transition Payments are distributed largely on the basis of past production, which makes the program less responsive to current needs. Congress has created some commodity specific assistance programs—for example, peanut producers are currently applying for the Farm Service Agency (FSA) Peanut Marketing Assistance Payments, which are designed to help producers affected by reductions in quotas. There also were similar commodity specific programs, such as the Small Hog Operation Payment (SHOP) program and the Dairy Market Loss Assistance Program in FY 99.

Crop Insurance: Legislation is needed for a comprehensive crop insurance reform program as soon as possible. Until such time, we must act now, and recommend the following key legislative changes:

- We should continue the premium discount provided by previous emergency bills to make crop insurance more affordable and accessible for farmers. In 1999, this program helped farmers increase by \$4 billion the amount of coverage available in the event of natural disasters and market declines. Long term, there is a need to modify the premium rate subsidy to give greater incentive for producers to buy higher levels of coverage. Congress should include provisions relating to mandatory participation;
- There should be standards for reimbursing private developers of new policies, more flexible contracting authority for the Risk Management Agency (RMA), and designation of RMA as developer of last resort for certain narrow-market policies; and
- The Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program’s (NAP) area-wide threshold should be replaced with a statutory requirement that would extend eligibility to production losses in areas declared by either the president or the Secretary of Agriculture as natural disasters. This change would have the advantage of providing

benefits to farmers whenever a natural disaster is declared and would expedite delivery of payments to producers. There should be the same level of risk protection for catastrophic losses for all insured and noninsured crops. This means NAP should maintain the same level as catastrophic risk protection coverage. The Administration supports an increase in the gross income cap on eligibility for NAP benefits from \$2 million to \$2.5 million. This change is consistent with other program benefit requirements.

Other Provisions: Other targeted proposals include increasing and expanding international food assistance programs; helping livestock producers with emergency feed assistance and weather-related livestock mortality losses; providing additional loans for farmers and ranchers, including emergency loans; and outreach and technical assistance to farm workers and socially disadvantaged farmers.

These proposals are thorough. Rather than simply throwing money at the problem, we want to be smart and timely about providing for the long-term while helping farmers and ranchers with their immediate needs. The 1996 farm bill, while not to blame for all farmers' problems, did not provide an adequate safety net for farmers, as the current farm economy indicates. Congress needs to address the long-term structural issues that face American agriculture.

Trade: The Administration firmly supports the expansion of exports as a critical element of the Federal government's response to the farm crisis. Further energizing our export expansion activities will help us bring markets into balance sooner, thus hastening the recovery of the farm economy. Therefore, the Administration is renewing its request for authority to roll forward the Export Enhancement Program balances to future years or use some of those funds for food aid or other export assistance activities.

Export Assistance for small and minority farmers: Small and minority farmers have historically suffered from disadvantages in the export trade, and in order to help address this problem, USDA plans to conduct pilot programs in Mississippi and perhaps other Delta States to train small and minority producers in export marketing. The Export Readiness Training (ERT) pilot program is developed under the aegis and with the funding support of the Emerging Markets Program of USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS). Additional funding is being provided by SUSTA (Southern United States Trade Association) and the international Small Business Development Centers in Mississippi (the program will also be conducted in Alabama and Georgia). The program will be conducted in partnership with the State departments of agriculture; the international Small Business Development Centers; Alcorn State University, one of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which will conduct the training; SUSTA; and FAS's Emerging Markets Office.

The training will help participants identify, research, and take advantage of potential export opportunities and will include instruction on developing and marketing as well as familiarizing the participants with the basics of international marketing. The intent of the pilot program is to train approximately 30 candidates from groups, which may include individual farmers, producer cooperatives, processing firms, and other small and minority agricultural businesses. It will also include selected participants who will be trained as trainers for several organizations representing small and minority producers in the region. The length of training is expected to be 2 years, with slight variations in each State. The training program begins in calendar year 2000. The training involves initial funding of

\$166,666 in Mississippi. This and similar programs should be expanded to provide further opportunities for including small and minority farmers in America's export trade.

Research, Education and Extension (REE): The following programs offer valuable assistance to Delta farmers:

- *The Cooperative, State Research, Education and Extension Service* recommends continuing and expanding support for universities to work with small farmers to develop research, education and extension programs. In particular, programs for the development of value-added products, entrepreneurial and business skills, and assistance for beginning farmers should be promoted. Increased funding for the Evans-Allen 1890 Land Grants program will strengthen support for underserved rural populations in the Delta. Research should be promoted that builds on developing linkages with Extension programs, such as nutrition initiatives, targeted toward low-income communities and families. Increased funding should be targeted for Extension formula programs at the 1890 Land Grant Universities to support Sustainable Agriculture and/or Forestry Dependent Rural Communities.
- *The Agricultural Research Service* recommends increased research on stresses that affect the integrity of ecosystem structure. These stresses include changes in land and resource use, introduction of invasive species, use of pollutants and excessive nutrients, and changes in atmosphere and climate. In addition, through the Delta Nutrition Intervention Initiative, there should be support for the continuation and growth of research on nutrition. This is critical in addressing health issues that can be linked to lack of proper nutrition for vulnerable populations in the Delta. Research on the effects of genetic modifications in aquaculture species also should be promoted, in consultation with other agencies and academic institutions. Ongoing research on improving disease detection and prevention in aquaculture also should be supported.
- *The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS):* A national aquaculture regulatory program could provide aquaculture producers with services identical to those received by other livestock farmers, such as enhanced protection from incursions of exotic diseases. A national program would protect the health of farm-raised fin fish, meet international trade requirements, and help encourage trade in American aquaculture products. This would be especially beneficial to the Mississippi Delta region, which has experienced growth in the aquaculture industry in recent years. For example, Mississippi has more than 108,000 acres (1999 NASS figures) of catfish ponds and produces approximately 75 percent of America's catfish. Currently, USDA's APHIS assists the aquaculture industry, but its ability to assist aquaculture producers is limited.
- *Regional farmers' marketing technical assistance:* The Agricultural Marketing Service's (AMS) Wholesale and Alternative Marketing program promotes the development of farmers' direct markets, as well as collection and wholesale markets. Regional initiatives to promote farmers' markets in the Delta would be used to conduct research to identify marketing strategies appropriate for small- to medium-sized producers in the Delta, provide technical assistance, and work directly with State departments of agriculture and other organizations that assist producers in agricultural marketing activities. Pilot projects should be developed to demonstrate marketing strategies and testing of innovative marketing approaches. Feasibility

studies would be conducted for marketing projects, and lessons learned on individual projects would be used for future studies.

- *Expanding the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program:* As explained more fully in the food security recommendations, USDA is working with local nutrition and farmers' market supporters to expand the program to more States and to enlarge the program in States where it currently exists. Five of the seven Delta States—Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Kentucky, and Illinois—are in the program. Louisiana and Tennessee certainly would be welcomed into the program. The participants are able to enjoy fresh, wholesome produce while small local farmers gain financially by expanding their markets to the WIC population.

Conservation: An important component of keeping farmers in business over the long term is good environmental stewardship. The following actions will assist in this endeavor:

- increasing the Conservation Reserve Program to 40 million acres from the current 36.4 million acres;
- increase bonuses for continuous sign-ups for the Conservation Reserve Program by \$100 million per year, in FY2000 to 2002;
- raising the cap on the Wetland Reserve Program to enroll 250,000 acres per year;
- increasing funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to \$325 million; and
- improving technical assistance for farmers and ranchers.

III. PROTECTING AND RESTORING NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENHANCING TOURISM

“A river [the Mississippi] known by its ineradicable name to generations of men who had been drawn to live beside it as man always has been drawn to dwell beside water, even before he had a name for water and fire, drawn to the living water, the course of his destiny...”

William Faulkner, writing of the Mississippi River's profound allure for many generations of people in the Delta

The Mississippi River is one of the great rivers of the world, accepting water from more than half of the United States, providing a transportation artery deep into the heart of America, and creating one of the richest agricultural areas in the world. From the pre-historic mound builders to the early explorers who traveled on the Mississippi River, from the trappers and early settlers to the people of today, the Mississippi River has been an integral part of the Delta communities. The Mississippi River created many of the 80-million acre Lower Mississippi Delta's most valuable and well-known features: rich soils, extensive wetlands, and diverse habitats that support hundreds of species, the Mississippi flyway, and commercial and recreational fisheries.

For many years, there has been a focused investment and strong inter-governmental commitment to conserving natural resources and protecting local communities in south Florida and the Everglades. Now is the time for a similar commitment to work with and invest in the communities of the Lower Mississippi Delta.

These natural resources and the environment are the foundation upon which economic growth and a good quality of life are built. In 1990, the Lower Mississippi Delta Commission recognized the importance of protecting the natural resources and environment, and promoting a strong tourism economy. The Commission stated, "...in the long run, protecting the Delta's environment pays dividends by attracting more businesses, tourism dollars, research grants for institutions of higher learning, and job opportunities." Abundant natural resources provide raw materials, including a plentiful supply of clean water, for industrial, commercial, and residential uses. A clean and healthy environment protects human health, provides recreational opportunities, and forms the base of a strong tourism industry. The key natural resource and environmental Federal agencies include the Department of Interior; the Environmental Protection Agency; the Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service; the Department of Commerce's National Marine Fisheries Service in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; the Department of Defense's Army Corps of Engineers; and the Department of Justice (including the Environmental and Natural Resources Division). These agencies—working with their State and local partners—have an opportunity to protect the unique natural resources and to improve the economic and social situation in the Delta.

Actions in the 1990s: Since the 1990 Report, progress has been made on several fronts. More than 300,000 wetland acres have been restored and lands have been protected in National Wildlife Refuges and National Parks. Flood control projects to protect communities have been completed. Water supply protection, including installation of sewage lines, is ongoing and the risk to human health from pesticides is being investigated. Environmental education and training have been expanded to provide better access to those most in need.

In recognition of the national importance of the cultural and natural assets of the Delta, portions of the Mississippi River were named an American Heritage River, providing local communities with coordinated Federal support for planning and project development. In addition, the Mississippi Delta Heritage Area study was completed, providing suggestions for natural and cultural resource protection and tourism development.

However, much still needs to be done. Since European settlement, 80% of the bottomland hardwood forests have been lost. Each year 25-35 square miles of coastal wetlands that

provide habitat for key species, including many commercial fish species, are lost. Fish consumption advisories are widespread and poor water quality threatens the well being of people, fish and wildlife alike. The “dead zone” in the Gulf of Mexico threatens the continued viability of the commercial and recreational fisheries economy. Continual sedimentation of important channels threatens navigation and flood control. As the new century dawns, these are the issues that must be addressed.

Partnerships among Federal, State, and local governments, businesses and grassroots organizations: The Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Interior, Justice, and the Environmental Protection Agency are active in many partnerships in the Delta with tribal, State, and local governments, private citizens, academic institutions, and non-profit organizations. Some of the major collaborative efforts include:

- Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force—protecting coastal wetlands and understanding and slowing coastal land subsidence and land loss;
- Gulf of Mexico Program and Watershed Nutrient Task Force—reducing the size of the “dead zone” in the northern Gulf of Mexico and assessing the effects of nutrient inputs into the Mississippi River;
- Atchafalaya Basin Advisory Committee (see the article herein, “River of Trees”)—supporting the development of a plan for the Atchafalaya Basin that will protect the natural resources, provide flood control, enhance tourism, and strengthen the economy;
- Mississippi American Heritage River Commissions—local organizations in Baton Rouge and Memphis working to promote the two Mississippi River American Heritage River designations through community improvement activities, historic preservation, tourism promotion, and other projects;
- Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee—providing recommendations to manage the aquatic resources of the Delta, including improving water quality;
- River Corridors and Wetland Restoration Partnership Program—working to protect, restore, and reforest river corridors and wetlands near the Mississippi River; and
- Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture—recovering waterfowl populations through protection and restoration of freshwater wetlands and shallow water habitats in the Delta.

These partnerships are crucial to improving the economic and social circumstances of the Delta while protecting natural areas, fish, wildlife, and the environment, and providing recreational and tourism opportunities. The ability to achieve the recommendations described below depends upon the success and continued development and strengthening of these collaborative efforts.

NATURAL RESOURCES

“It [the Mississippi River] remains what it always was—a kind of huge rope, no matter with what knots and frays, tying the United States together. It is the Nile of the Western Hemisphere.”

John Gunther

The 1990 Lower Mississippi Delta Commission recognized the importance of protecting and enhancing the vast natural resources of the Delta while improving the quality of life and economic viability of local communities. The Commission focused on a variety of concerns about natural resources, including wetlands, water quality and quantity, and habitat protection. The Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Interior, Justice, and EPA have partnered with tribal, State, and local governments, as well as with the private sector, to achieve the Commission's goals.

These collaborative efforts have resulted in a wide spectrum of accomplishments in the areas of wetland quality and quantity, water quality and quantity, habitat preservation and restoration, forestry and minerals management, flood protection, river navigation, environmental outreach and planning, and support of local empowerment efforts.

Highlights include the following:

- The protection, enhancement, or creation of 300,000 acres of wetlands through various voluntary programs, including the Wetland Reserve Program, and enrollment of 2 million acres in the Conservation Reserve Program.
- Over 35,000 acres of riparian buffers were installed and agricultural Best Management Practices were implemented to protect water quality.
- The location of “essential fish habitat” to protect shrimp and other commercially important species was studied under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.
- Significant progress was made in the Mississippi Rivers and Tributaries Project to provide flood protection for Delta communities, ensure navigable waterways throughout the region, and provide an estimated \$367 billion in total benefits for a cost of \$10 billion.
- Hazardous waste sites were cleaned up to protect and restore coastal and marine resources and natural water flows were restored to provide adequate clean water supplies.
- Two-thirds of the rural abandoned mine lands in the Delta region were reclaimed.
- Other accomplishments include the development of several intergovernmental initiatives, including the Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force to protect coastal wetlands and address coastal land loss, and the Gulf of Mexico Program and Watershed Nutrient Task Force to address the “dead zone” in the Gulf of Mexico.

Natural Resources Goals and Recommendations

While progress has been made in natural resource protection, many challenges remain to ensure that the Delta's natural areas, fish, and wildlife are available for the enjoyment of future generations. To this end, the Federal agencies suggest setting a long term goal that we, with our State and local partners, can aspire to: The Lower Mississippi River and its tributaries will achieve a “fishable and swimmable” water quality standard. (This goal is defined in Section 101(a) of the Clean Water Act. However, in many areas the river still may be unsafe for swimming because of dangerous currents.) The Lower Mississippi River Delta—including ground and surface water, forests, wetlands, wildlife, fisheries, and other natural features—will be protected, restored, and sustained to provide for the personal, cultural, economic, environmental, and recreational needs of local communities—now, and for future generations.

For the next five to ten years, the Federal agencies propose the following recommendations that will help protect and restore the Delta's natural resources.

Improving water quantity: Inadequate water supplies are a growing concern in the Mississippi Delta region. Important aquifers, including the Mississippi Alluvial and the Sparta are experiencing excessive drawdown and in some areas water shortages are already occurring. The Federal agency partners, in cooperation with State, local, and tribal governments, and other interested partners, should investigate, develop, and implement management strategies to ensure clean and sustainable ground and surface water supplies in the Delta for human, industrial, and agricultural use, and to sustain the natural ecosystem. These partners should work together to expand existing model programs in the Delta region to identify the optimal withdrawal levels from surface and ground water sources that will ensure the sustainability of water supplies by 2005. Using this information, the Federal agencies, working with the State and local governments, can identify water conservation strategies, additional water sources, and other methods to ensure minimum stream flow is maintained and to ensure the current trend of excessive water aquifer withdrawal is reversed.

Improving water quality: Water quality is an area of ongoing concern in the Delta. In many areas, fish consumption advisories are in effect. Pollutants come from many sources and can have a significant adverse effect on the health of the people in the Delta. The Federal partners should work with State, local, tribal, and other partners to bring 75 percent of all surface water in the Lower Mississippi Delta to a "fishable and swimmable" water quality standard as defined in the Clean Water Act by 2010. By 2005, the appropriate partners should expand monitoring across the Delta, including studies of water quality, pollution sources, toxins in fish, and effectiveness of best management practices, through the National Water Quality Assessment Program, the National Stream Quality Accounting Network, and other Federal and State programs. The appropriate partners should also pursue the following goals:

- Take a watershed approach to water quality improvement.
- Employ voluntary incentive-based programs to improve surface water quality and maintain ground water quality, and address point and non-point sources of pollution, including pesticide and nutrient loads.
- Install, upgrade, and maintain adequate wastewater treatment facilities, including addressing combined and sanitary sewer overflows and proper management of on-site systems.
- Ensure minimum stream water flow regimes, including use of water conservation methods.
- Stop the encroachment of saline water into freshwater ground water, including managing excessive aquifer withdrawal. Implement best management practices for forests, wetlands, and agricultural and urban lands, including continued installation of riparian buffers.

Improving the health of the Gulf of Mexico: The Gulf of Mexico has a large "dead zone" where organisms, including important commercial fish, cannot live. Action is needed to identify and correct the causes of this problem. The Gulf of Mexico Program, in which the Federal agencies are partners, is working to reduce, mitigate, and control low dissolved oxygen levels in the northern Gulf of Mexico. The extent of the Gulf of Mexico "dead zone" should be reduced according to the plan being developed under the

Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Act of 1998. The plan is expected to include investigation and description of the “dead zone”, monitoring of streams and wetlands for pollutants and nutrient loads, modeling processes for movement of pollutants and nutrients from landscapes to river systems, restoring wetlands, and managing river flows into coastal wetlands to reduce nutrients entering the Gulf of Mexico.

Protecting and Restoring Wetlands: Wetlands provide critical habitat for a wide variety of fish and wildlife in the Delta, are hatcheries to important fish species, and provide recreational opportunities. Wetlands also filter and clean water that flows through them prior to reaching the human water supply. Incentives-based and voluntary easement programs and other tools, including the Wetlands Reserve Program, can be expanded to increase the acreage of protected wetlands in the Delta by at least 45,000 acres/year, helping the region meet its goal of adding special protection to a total of 200,000 acres by 2005 and 450,000 acres by 2010. Working through voluntary programs with willing landowners, including demonstration programs, the rate of restoration of forested wetlands should increase to 100,000 acres per year. The FY 2001 President’s Budget proposes to remove the Wetland Reserve Program’s cumulative acreage cap and allow up to 250,000 acres be enrolled annually. The appropriate Federal, State, local and private sector partners should work together to support wetland restoration efforts, protect wetlands from destructive practices and coordinate Federal activities, projects and policies, to ensure there will be no net loss of overall wetland acreage from 1990 levels and support the national goal of 100,000 acres net gain per year of wetlands by 2005.

(SIDEBAR)

The Atchafalaya Basin, a “River of Trees”

The Atchafalaya Basin, encompassing 1.4 million acres, includes the largest continuous river-swamp in the United States. In addition to providing habitat for more than 170 bird species, including 6 endangered species, and over 100 fish species, the “River of Trees” supports recreational activities that generate more than \$123 million; supports commercial fishing and crawfish harvesting that generates \$5-6 million; contains more than 25 percent of Louisiana’s commercial forest lands; contains more than 3000 oil and gas wells; and is crossed by major gas and oil pipelines. The Basin also has a rich cultural heritage, particularly the development of unique Acadian and Native American cultures, and is the home of several hundred archaeological sites.

Many of the problems common to the Mississippi Delta as a whole threaten the Atchafalaya Basin, including poor water quality, fish kills due to hypoxia, sedimentation, invasive exotic species, mercury in fish resulting in a fish consumption advisory, and subsidence and land-loss. These natural resource and environmental problems also result in economic and social costs, including human health problems, smaller commercial fisheries, and the increased risk of catastrophic flooding.

The Atchafalaya Basin, a “River of Trees” is the focus of a watershed-wide effort by Federal agencies, State and local governments, private citizens, academic institutions, and non-profit organizations to preserve and restore the river swamp, stop coastal land-loss, protect natural areas for wildlife and recreational use, develop ecotourism, enhance economic benefit to the local communities, and maintain a relief floodway for the lower Mississippi Valley and a major transportation artery for the nation. Wetland restoration

provides important fish and wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities. It also protects human and environmental health by filtering out pollutants and reducing nutrient loads, thus improving water quality and decreasing Gulf hypoxia. The reforestation of bottomland hardwoods and key upland areas controls erosion and sedimentation, thus protecting commercial fisheries, keeping shipping channels open, and ensuring continued flood control capacity. The collaborative effort being undertaken in the Atchafalaya Basin, to protect natural resources and the environment while improving the quality of life and strengthening the economy for local communities, serves as a model for further activities throughout the Lower Mississippi Delta.

(END SIDEBAR)

Restoring coastal land loss: Coastal land loss due to subsidence and other factors continues to be an area in need of coordinated and corrective action. Members of the Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force and other partner groups should work together to reduce the current rate of loss of coastal wetlands by up to 20 percent by 2005 and up to 35 percent by 2010. These partners should investigate coastal land loss, including identifying areas most at risk, causes of subsidence, threats of sedimentation, and impacts of changed hydrologic characteristics to provide science-based information for coastal restoration efforts and protection of essential fish habitats.

INSERT COASTAL LAND LOSS CHART HERE

Protecting wildlife habitat: In addition to providing habitat for wildlife, protected areas provide recreational use and can improve water quality by decreasing erosion and sedimentation. The land acreage under conservation status for wildlife and recreational use should be increased, giving special emphasis to decreasing habitat fragmentation through reforestation, protection of large land parcels, and creation of connecting wildlife corridors. Federal and State agencies, academic institutions, and other appropriate partners should engage in the following activities:

- Use and expand ongoing demonstration projects and research to optimize land conservation, including investigating the value and use of restored and reforested wetlands, managed landscapes, wildlife corridors, and other lands to meet the needs of wildlife, to provide flood control, and to provide sustainable forest and agricultural production.
- Increase and enhance the tools for voluntary restoration of fish and wildlife habitat on private lands by 2005.
- Increase the acreage within designated National Wildlife Refuge lands in the Delta, purchased from willing sellers, by up to 50,000 acres by 2005 and up to 100,000 acres per year.

Flood control and floodplain management: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers funds a number of water resources projects, including a major flood control project along the main stem of the Mississippi River and in the watershed of one of its two principal outlets, Louisiana's Atchafalaya River basin. In the Delta region as elsewhere in the Nation, the Corps also seeks to identify ways through which local communities can reduce the risk of flood damage while enhancing the natural values of their waters.

Improving public access to information on community safety, natural resource and environmental issues: The Federal agencies gather a large amount of information that is useful to local communities, including water quality, toxins in fish and other data.

Through community partnerships and other collaborative efforts, the Federal agencies should pursue the following goals:

- Expand community, county/parish, tribal, and State access to natural resource and community safety and hazard information, including preparation and warning for floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, chemical spills, and other safety concerns.
- Locate, collect, develop, and maintain data and provide access to a regional clearinghouse containing benchmark information for fish and wildlife habitat, distribution, and movement; surface and ground water flow, quality, and quantity; and geological and geographical data, starting by 2005 and adding information as it becomes available.
- Increase the availability of science-based digital data (GIS format) for planning and other purposes, at a regional, State, and local scale, to major communities (including Memphis, Jackson, Baton Rouge, Little Rock), counties and parishes, tribes, and Delta States, starting with the development of model programs by 2005.
- Provide decision-making assistance tools to local communities that incorporate natural and social sciences with economic, social, and other interests, similar to the Integrated Science and Community-based Values in Land-use Decision Making Project, starting with pilot programs by 2005.

Controlling invasive species: Invasive species have become an area of concern across the nation. Invasive species can be costly to the environment and the economy when they push out native species, impede navigational waterways, and clog water supply pipes. The Federal agencies should work with interested partners, including local academic institutions, to develop monitoring and predictive tools and eradication methods to aid States, the private sector, and natural resource managers to slow the rate of exotic species invasion by 2005, with the aim of preventing the establishment and spread of invasive species.

These partners should also work together to reduce the geographic extent of the areas within the Lower Mississippi Delta impacted by invasive species in accordance with the plan being developed by the Invasive Species Council established under Executive Order 13112 and its State, tribal, and local government and private and non-profit partners. This plan will build on the National Strategy for Invasive Plant Management, published in 1998 by the Federal Interagency Committee for Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds. The National Strategy, supported by a wide variety of public and private organizations, addresses effective prevention and control of invasions and effective restoration of affected lands through existing and expanded Federal and State programs.

ENVIRONMENT

The 1990 Lower Mississippi Delta Commission emphasized the importance of protecting the environment, human health, and the quality of life in local communities. The goals of the Commission focused on air and water quality standards, waste management, and environmental education. Since 1990, several other critical environmental issues have become national priorities, including health risks from pesticides, ensuring environmental

justice for all communities, and community right-to-know about environmental issues. The Environmental Protection Agency, with other Federal agencies and State partners, has taken the lead in pursuing the goal of a clean, safe environment for all U.S. citizens. There have been significant improvements in the health of the environment in the last ten years. Highlights include reducing air and water pollution through State implementation and enforcement of national emission standards and by managing storm water runoff through improved storm sewer systems to protect water quality. States and localities have been empowered to prevent, assess, safely clean up, and sustainably reuse brownfields and other waste sites. Public health protection has been strengthened by establishing new safety standards for all pesticides used on foods, by funding the Centers for Children's Environmental Health and Disease Prevention Research, and by providing new tools and resources for cleaner, safer water under the 1996 Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments and the 1998 Clean Water Action Plan. Several outreach programs, including the Toxic Release Inventory and Surf Your Watershed websites, have enhanced public awareness and safety. In addition, the human and environmental health conditions plaguing minority and low-income communities in the Delta have become a major focus area.

Environment Goals and Recommendations

While progress has been made in environmental protection, many challenges remain to ensure the health of future generations. To this end, the Federal agencies suggest setting a long-term goal that we, along with our State and local partners, can aspire to: Air and water quality, solid and hazardous waste management, and emergency response in the Lower Mississippi Delta will be improved, ensuring protection of public health and providing opportunities to build cleaner, safer communities in which to live, work, and play.

For the next five to ten years, the Federal agencies propose the following recommendations that will help to protect and improve the health of the environment.

Providing safe drinking water: Through targeted and affordable assistance for drinking water treatment and delivery systems, at least 95% of the population in the Lower Mississippi Delta should be served by community water systems receiving water that meets all health-based standards by 2005. In addition, at least half of the population of the Lower Mississippi Delta should receive drinking water from systems with source water protection programs in place. In cooperation with State, county/parish, local and tribal government and private and non-profit partners, guidance and technical assistance should be provided for private well owners to ensure the safety and protect the source of their drinking water.

Ensuring safe fish and safe beaches: By 2005, consumption of contaminated fish and shellfish and exposure to microbial and other forms of contamination in waters used for recreation will be reduced in the Lower Mississippi Delta. Working with States to expedite the pace at which they are strengthening their beach and recreational water quality standards, all States in the Lower Mississippi Delta should be using criteria at least as protective as the currently recommended national health-based criteria by 2003.

Cleaning up sites and providing opportunities for redevelopment: By 2005, all applicable sites in the Lower Mississippi Delta with permits under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act should have approved corrective action plans in place.

Also, by 2005, construction will have been completed at all Superfund sites in the Lower Mississippi Delta on the National Priorities List as of January 1, 2000.

Improving air quality: Air quality in the Lower Mississippi Delta will be adequately monitored for ozone and fine particulates, including additional special purpose monitors where needed to provide appropriate geographic coverage. All areas within the Lower Mississippi Delta will attain all national health-based standards by 2010.

Reducing exposure to harmful chemicals: By 2005, the public health and environmental risk from pesticide use in the Lower Mississippi Delta will be reduced by 50% from 1995 levels, through training and outreach to pesticide applicators, farm workers, and the public on steps to take to reduce pesticide exposure. Allowable pesticide residue levels will be reviewed to ensure that they meet the new, tougher health standards under the Food Quality Protection Act. New pesticide products will be reviewed as quickly as possible so farmers will have access to these new, safer substitutes. In addition, assistance will be provided to increase the use of practices such as buffer zones and filter strips, which result in protection of ground and surface water resources from pesticide runoff.

Improving the public's right to know: Federal agencies and other partners should work to improve the public's access to information in the Lower Mississippi Delta on public health, safety, and environmental quality in their local communities, including information on the quality and sources of local drinking water, the use and release of toxic chemicals, the safety of eating locally-caught fish and shellfish, and the monitoring and safety of swimming in local recreational waters, by 2005. Through the Internet, outreach efforts, consumer confidence reports and other tools, all Lower Mississippi Delta communities and residents should have full access to current, accurate, and substance-specific information in order to expand community involvement and help residents make informed choices about their local environment and how to protect themselves and their families as they see fit.

Preventing pollution and ensuring clean-up: On September 9, 1998, Attorney General Janet Reno and Carol Browner, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, announced the Mississippi River Basin Initiative, a multi-agency crackdown on pollution in the Mississippi River Basin. Since this announcement, Justice's Environment and Natural Resources Division, together with United States Attorneys' Offices, has furthered the government's efforts to address illegal pollution in the Mississippi River Basin. Attorneys from the Environmental Division and Assistant U.S. Attorneys have attended joint training programs and are working together to investigate cases involving civil and criminal environmental violations within the Mississippi River Basin. Justice Department attorneys are also working with State and local jurisdictions to create and strengthen existing environmental crimes task forces. These efforts have resulted in civil and criminal environmental cases being filed against individuals and corporations in approximately 15 Federal districts within the Mississippi Delta region. The Division will continue its efforts to target pollution in the Mississippi River Basin.

TOURISM

"In the Delta, most of the world seemed sky...The land was perfectly flat and level but it shimmered like the wing of a lighted dragonfly. It seemed strummed, as though it were an

instrument and something had touched it. Sometimes like a fuzzy caterpillar looking in the cotton was a winding line of thick green willows and cypresses, and when the train crossed this green, running on a loud iron bridge, down its center like a golden mark on the caterpillar's back would be a bayou.”

Eudora Welty, in *Delta Wedding*, describing a traveler's enjoyment of the Delta landscape

The 1990 Lower Mississippi Delta Commission recognized that tourism has tremendous potential for sparking economic growth in the Delta. The Commission focused on recommendations to State and local governments, including developing a regional tourism organization, improving the marketing of the Delta, developing thematic tourism corridors, trails, and programs that connect the region, and promoting the Delta environment. The Lower Mississippi Delta contains many interesting and valuable sites related to the earliest recorded history of the United States. Areas of special historical and cultural interest include ancient Indian mounds where large cities flourished, the DeSoto expedition trail, Mississippi River plantations, Civil War battlefields, sites embodying African-American history, and Civil Rights sites. In addition, the natural beauty of the Delta is a major tourist attraction.

Tourist revenue brought almost \$13 billion to the Delta in 1998. Millions of visitors come to enjoy the natural beauty, culture, food, and deep historical, musical and literary heritage of the region.

(SIDEBAR)

Tourist revenue in the Delta (1998)

Arkansas: \$1.8 billion

Illinois: \$0.27 billion

Kentucky: \$0.55 billion

Louisiana: \$5.67 billion

Missouri: \$0.78 billion

Mississippi: \$1.36 billion

Tennessee: \$2.54 billion

Total: \$12.96 billion

(END SIDEBAR)

The National Park Service, Department of Transportation, Department of Commerce and other agencies, working with State and local partners, have pursued a series of initiatives designed to promote tourism for the region. These efforts have resulted in several key accomplishments. In particular, the designation of the Lower Mississippi River as an American Heritage River by President Clinton in 1998 is helping to focus Federal, State, and local efforts on strengthening historic and cultural preservation, natural resource protection, and economic revitalization. The Delta Heritage Area study was also recently completed, providing a wide variety of recommendations for the protection and enhancement of natural and historical sites. Planning is currently underway for an Arkansas Delta Heritage Trail that may include a Japanese-American Internment Camp,

the Helena Blues Center, and an Indian Mound site. Existing National Wildlife Refuges and National Parks provide recreational and tourism opportunities.

(INSERT TOURISM MAP OF THE DELTA HERE)

Tourism Goals and Recommendations

The tourism industry in the Delta has begun to develop. However, significant opportunities exist for expansion. While tourism development is primarily a State and locally driven process, there are certain key areas where the Federal agencies can be of assistance. We suggest the following long-term goal to support State and local efforts: The most significant and unique historic, prehistoric, and cultural features of the Delta will be preserved and restored for the use, enjoyment, and education of current and future generations. Recreational, educational, and tourism opportunities in the Delta will be enhanced. For the next five to ten years, the Federal agencies propose the following recommendations that will help to develop a strong tourism economy.

Supporting the Delta National Heritage Area: National Heritage Areas provide significant opportunities to encourage citizens, local businesses and organizations, and local governments to work together to foster a greater sense of community, to reward community pride, and to care for their land and culture. A National Heritage Area is a place designated by Congress where natural, cultural, historic, and scenic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally distinct landscape. National Heritage Areas represent the national experience through the features that remain and the traditions that have evolved from them. Continued use of National Heritage Areas by people whose traditions helped to shape the landscapes enhances their significance. Among the original heritage corridors and areas are some of the most successful and inspiring conservation strategies in America today. Heritage partnerships have been praised as problem solvers, as unifiers, as proof that environmental and economic progress can be consistent. A National Heritage Area in the Lower Mississippi Delta would provide a tremendous opportunity to develop and interpret the myriad of historically significant sites and communities. Congressional designation of a National Heritage Area will strengthen local economies by helping to increase interest in and tourism to the Delta.

In 1998, the Lower Mississippi Delta Heritage Area Study was completed. The study identified a wide variety of important natural and cultural sites in the Delta that could strengthen the tourism industry. The study offers four management alternatives focused on nine themes: natural resources, flood control and navigation, New Madrid earthquake zone, cultural diversity, American Indian heritage, African-American heritage, Civil War, Delta Blues, and Delta Agriculture. A Congressionally designated Heritage Area in the Delta could encompass one or several of these themes or other themes of interest to, and developed by, the local community. Heritage Areas are developed, protected, interpreted, and preserved by the people living in the community with ongoing help and support from Federal agencies. At the request of a coalition of local organizations, the Federal agencies could help local Delta communities implement the study suggestions to establish, develop, and market a model National Heritage Area in the Lower Mississippi Delta by 2005.

The Federal agencies and other parties should work to prioritize and protect the Delta's most significant historical, prehistorical, and cultural sites and traditions, as defined with

the local communities and described in the Lower Mississippi Heritage Area Study. Technical assistance should be provided to support the planning, development, and implementation of educational and tourism opportunities associated with the Heritage Area with special emphasis on protecting and developing African-American and American Indian history through trails, museums, and other cultural sites. The Lower Mississippi American Heritage River program should continue to be supported. Technical assistance should be improved to local communities for economic development, cultural, historic, and environmental projects as defined and prioritized by the local American Heritage River Commissions.

Protecting Civil War sites: The Mississippi River linked North and South and divided East and West during the Civil War, making control of the river crucial to both sides. Some of the greatest battles of the war were fought there and the Delta region is rich in Civil War history. We should act to protect the sacred ground and priceless artifacts of our Civil War sites to honor our ancestors and to help future generations understand the American struggle to become united as one country. Using the prioritized list of America's Civil War Battlefields developed by the Civil War Advisory Commission, and beginning with those Battlefields identified as most threatened, these important historical and cultural sites should be preserved through the American Battlefields Protection Program and other programs.

In addition to protecting Civil War Battlefields, tourism opportunities should be enhanced through the development of a Vicksburg Civil War Trail. By protecting and interpreting our Civil War sites, not only do we provide people with the opportunity to understand America's past, but we also provide local communities with an improved economic base as more tourists are drawn to a community. The Vicksburg Campaign was one of the most important campaigns of the Civil War. In his effort to take Vicksburg, General Grant engaged in battles in Arkansas, Tennessee, Louisiana and Mississippi. The final series of battles began in Mississippi at Grand Gulf in March 1863, traveling up to Jackson, and finally ending at Vicksburg in May-July 1863. The National Historic Park at Vicksburg commemorates the battle and siege of Vicksburg. However, the other battle sites and fortifications, and the marches endured on the Vicksburg Campaign, have long been recognized as important to provide a full understanding of the battle for the Mississippi. Important sites include Arkansas Post, Milliken's Bend, the winter quarters in Tensas Parish, Grand Gulf, Snyder's Bluff, Jackson, Port Gibson, Raymond, Champion Hill, and Big Black River Bridge. By developing a trail that follows General Grant's footsteps from battlefield to battlefield, we can gain a better understanding and appreciation for the great efforts and sacrifices of our ancestors and we can celebrate our American heritage.

Highlighting and protecting civil rights sites: African-American history, and the folktales that described that history, were rooted in pain and suffering and religion and joy. To many, the civil rights movement is identified with the 1960s. But civil rights is not just a 1960's phenomenon. The struggle for civil rights began, no doubt, with the first slave, but was expressed publicly through a series of uprisings and rebellions during the era of slavery, and given voice by the music and folktales of the people who lived the pain, and by the literature of such notables as Harriet Beecher Stowe. The push for civil rights was a grassroots movement that ordinary people participated in, and that ultimately

changed the way that every person in this country lives. Thus the civil rights movement of the 1960s was but a late chapter in a long book.

The national civil rights movement is integral to understanding politics and the civil rights movement in the Delta region. There were many key players in the movement—schools, churches, individuals and organizations. Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, played a major part in shaping integration throughout the nation. The church also played a role in the political and civil rights processes. Individuals such as Dr. Martin Luther King forged inroads into the broader society of America that could not be reversed.

So many of the rich aspects of the history of African-Americans are grossly under-represented in this country. Visitors should have the opportunity to learn about this history. Important places in the history of civil rights and other aspects of African-American history generally are not included in tours.

The tourism industry and the heritage agencies in State and Federal government need to highlight significant sites and resources associated with African-Americans—of the contributions of black people to the civil rights movement and in the shaping of regional and national politics, of the role of historically black institutions of higher learning, of the way the story has been told by black storytellers, black historians, and teachers of black history, of the systems of control (such as Jim Crow laws, literacy tests, voter rights acts), of the locations and structures that play a role in key events related to the struggle, of the network of people and places that collectively made up the underground railroad, and of the significance of major court decisions from **Plessy v. Ferguson** to the landmark **Brown v. Board of Education**.

(PULL QUOTE)

“Since its founding in 1965, NEH has given more than \$15 million in grants that have affected the Delta in profound ways. From the preservation of local papers that documented the history of Delta communities to creating a film on the Mississippi Voter Registration project, NEH has sought to preserve the history and culture of the Delta and to share its rich worlds with the rest of the nation.”

William R. Ferris, Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities

National Endowment for the Humanities initiatives in the Delta: Under the leadership of Chairman William R. Ferris, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) has funded an extensive list of projects in the Delta. These initiatives not only brought more dollars to the area, they also provided for the academic and intellectual fostering of the region by giving more resources to scholars and institutions of higher education. Since its founding in 1965, NEH has given more than \$15 million in grants that have affected the Delta in profound ways. From the preservation of local papers that documented the history of Delta communities to creating a film on the Mississippi Voter Registration project, NEH has sought to preserve the history and culture of the Delta and to share its rich worlds with the rest of the nation.

To cite one example of the numerous projects in the region, NEH provided a \$50,000 grant to the University of Illinois in 1997 to support the development of a prototype of a Mississippi River Basin Website database focused on the history and culture of the Delta. Another example was a \$190,000 grant in 1996 to the University of Arkansas to support

the creation of multimedia software dealing with the history of Native American encounters with Europeans in the Mississippi Valley, incorporating documents, audio-visual materials and foreign language materials. In 1998, Loyola University in New Orleans received a \$25,000 grant to support a Humanities Focus Grant faculty study project as part of a new interdisciplinary American Studies minor on the development of American photography from the daguerreotype to the computer-based image. The NEH Division of Public Programs provided funding for the film, *Freedom on My Mind*, which tells the story of the 1961-64 Mississippi Voter Registration Project through the voices of participants.

These innovative activities have broadened the cultural and intellectual horizons of many people in the Delta, and NEH should continue to receive steadfast support in the years beyond 2000.

(SIDEBAR)

The River Road African-American Museum & the American Heritage River Initiative

Long missing from the experience of Delta visitors has been an adequate portrayal of the culture and heritage of African-Americans who lived along the River Road Corridor between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, Louisiana. A small museum, located on the old Tezcuco plantation in Burnside, Louisiana, is one effort to help fill that void. The River Road African-American Museum and Gallery collects, preserves and interprets artifacts about the history and culture of African-Americans, particularly those who lived, worked and died within the River Road Corridor. As its brochure suggests, the museum pays tribute to the hundreds of slaves who were purchased and brought to Burnside, Louisiana in 1858.

Through partnering with the Lower Mississippi American Heritage River Alliance, efforts are now underway to enhance and enlarge the River Road African-American Museum. The major development program, including buying new land and relocating existing buildings, will make this the only African-American Museum complex devoted to the heritage and history of thousands of slaves who were brought to work on plantations along the Mississippi River.

The Africa Plantation House, once owned and named by Dr. John H. Lowery, a black doctor in Ascension Parish, is one of the buildings that will be moved to the new site. The historical significance of the circa 1830 building stems partly from its architecture, but more so from its association with Dr. Lowery, who employed 200 workers on his rice and sugarcane plantation. Later, the house was the home of Leonard Julien, who invented the sugar cane planting machine in 1964.

The Central Agricultural Schoolhouse, once alive with the voices of African-American school children from the community of Convent, will take on a new life at the new site. As an art gallery and museum, it will, fittingly, feature an exhibit on education in rural communities, offering the visitor a look back in time to those earlier days.

(END SIDEBAR)

Travel and tourism initiative: The Commerce Department will continue to work with State and local tourism organizations to develop marketing programs designed to increase the awareness of the Delta as a showcase for cultural and historical activities. The Office

of Tourism Industries will work with State and local governments and organizations to develop planning and implementation strategies that build on the results of the 1998 Lower Mississippi Delta Region Heritage Study. It will also provide follow-up assistance to the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities and the Mississippi Center for the Study of Southern Culture on programs currently underway.

Tourism marketing plan: The Mississippi Delta region enjoys extraordinary recreational, historical, and cultural assets that today generate more than \$13 billion a year in new revenue from related tourist activities. A regional tourism marketing plan would coordinate efforts among the region's tourism bureaus and agencies locally and at the State level, along with related private sector interests such as chambers of commerce, hotel and restaurant associations, and other entities, to market the entire Delta region as a prime tourist destination for music, art, history, culture, and natural beauty. This would not only be an efficient means of promoting the region's tourist assets, but it would also enhance the region's tourism profile in this country and abroad. The initiative would feature a region-wide conference that would lead to the establishment of a long-term action program. Existing authorities among relevant Federal departments and agencies would combine with funds from public and private tourism interests to defray conference and related costs. Such agencies would include the Department of Transportation, which has responsibility for scenic by-ways, millennium trails, American Heritage Rivers, national park and public lands transportation, as well as the Department of Commerce. Federal funding would be used for technical assistance and coordination of activities in partnership with State and local agencies and private sector entities.

Providing outdoor recreation and tourism and enhancing open space: Natural resources are one of the Delta's greatest assets, and as more and more of the country urbanizes, demands on the Delta's natural areas will increase. To meet these demands we should provide, improve, and publicize public use and educational capabilities at National Wildlife Refuges, National Parks, and other Federal facilities to support a steady increase in outdoor recreational and tourism opportunities (environmental education, hiking and boating, wildlife viewing and photography, hunting and fishing). There should be improvements and expansions of visitor facilities; increased outreach to local communities through public/private habitat improvement projects, promotion of tourism opportunities, and other methods; and increased availability of environmental education programs. The Federal and State partners should work with local community partners, through programs such as Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance and through the Urban Recreation Research Center at Southern University in Baton Rouge, to preserve open space in and near urban communities with special emphasis on parks, trails, and river corridors that provide a variety of recreational and educational opportunities and environmental benefits.

THE DELTA'S LITERARY AND MUSICAL HERITAGE

One of the greatest arenas for future tourist development lies in the realm of culture. The Mississippi River is the cradle of American literature and music. Many of America's greatest writers lived and traveled along the Great River, from Mark Twain to Richard Wright, William Faulkner, Walker Percy, and Eudora Welty. There are many historic sites along the Delta that trumpet the region's great cultural contributions to the world: the Blues, Jazz, Country, Cajun, Zydeco, Gospel, Rock & Roll, and Rhythm and Blues. Famous sites in the Delta include Muddy Waters' cabin, Storyville in New Orleans, the

Blues Museum in Clarksdale, Mississippi, and the Museum of the Mississippi River in Memphis. New Orleans is the birthplace of Louis “Satchmo” Armstrong and Mahalia Jackson, the famed gospel singer. The University of Mississippi is a world-renowned showcase for the literary genius of William Faulkner. Currently, people from around the world come to see these attractions. Some of these sites are already preserved and used to promote tourism, while others need to be redeveloped.

The region’s literature and music play a role in racial healing. Many of the Delta’s most profound literary works lament the tragedy of racism. People from all ethnic backgrounds have contributed to the Delta’s musical heritage: many Americans have believed that rock was only the “whites’ music,” or that jazz and rhythm and blues were exclusively developed by African-Americans; but a closer view of the region’s heritage will reveal that African-Americans and Hispanics influenced rock and country, while there were white influences on jazz, gospel and rhythm and blues. Given the importance of music to the day-to-day lives of ordinary people, racial healing through music may have a more broad-based impact than purely academic discussions of the matter.

Considering the Delta’s profound contributions to America’s cultural tradition, there is great untapped potential in expanding this phase of the region’s tourist industry. One proposal for helping to promote the development of tourism is the creation of a “National Cultural Heritage Trail” to help promote the development of tourism. Such a trail would preserve vital historic sites and cultural traditions, promote tourism, and advance the President’s initiative on race by helping the nation understand the diverse racial crosscurrents that have enriched American music and literature. The trail would develop a tour route and “living museum” along the River. Potential governmental and nongovernmental partners might include record companies, cable music channels, musical instrument companies, railroads, airlines, rental car companies, music foundations, movie studios, local chambers of commerce, Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities, Champion Communities, and others. USDA’s Rural Development, the National Parks Service, the National Endowment of the Arts, the National Endowment of the Humanities, the Smithsonian Institution and its Festival of American Folk Life, State arts councils, and rural development councils could also assist in this effort.

Promotion of greater regional, national and international interest in the Delta’s literature and music would not only enhance economic development through expansion of the region’s tourist industry, but even more importantly, it would enrich the educational and cultural fabric of American society as a whole.

IV. PROMOTING REGIONAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

“I was very excited when Senator Blanche Lambert Lincoln of Arkansas asked me to join her and our House colleagues in the introduction of S. 1622, the Delta Regional Authority Act. This important legislation sends the message to the Lower Mississippi Delta that we in Washington are working in a bipartisan manner to encourage economic development for the people of this region.”

U.S. Senator Bill Frist, Tennessee

A Permanent Regional Planning and Development Entity

Communities throughout the country have found that working together within a regional development context can yield a variety of benefits for economic and community development:

- They can speak with a united, regional voice.
- They can use their resources more effectively and wisely.
- Working collaboratively, they can enhance efforts to attract Federal resources and ensure accountability while allowing residents and entrepreneurs to gain access to capital resources for the creation and expansion of business.

Regional infrastructure funds can create opportunities for capitalizing innovative public/private projects. The cooperative, regional approach provides a sharing of information and expertise across communities throughout a region that faces common social and economic challenges.

Many regions throughout America have seen the wisdom in developing a unified regional approach to developmental issues, including Appalachia, the Pacific Northwest, the Great Plains, and other regions. The Southwest Border region is beginning a similar regional initiative. Indeed, many States require regional planning bodies, such as Federal law TEA-21, which guides all Federal surface transportation funding.

Mississippi Delta Regional Initiative: The regional development approach in the Mississippi Delta received a powerful impetus from the establishment of the Southern Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities Forum. This Forum began as an informal organization of rural and urban EZs and ECs in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. This organization held quarterly meetings starting in 1995 to share program ideas and discuss issues of mutual concern. The Chair is Thelma French, New Orleans EC (urban), and the Vice Chair is Moses J. Williams, Northeast Louisiana Delta EC (rural). The USDA Office of Community Development (OCD) discussed with Forum leaders in August 1997 the possibility of forming a Delta regional initiative similar to the Southwest Border Regional Partnership that was organized in June 1997. Because of the similar cultural and economic conditions throughout the Delta, the regional approach was supported as an effective way to strengthen the area's ability to attract resources by speaking with one united, regional voice.

In October 1997, OCD began implementing a Cooperative Agreement between USDA and the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Center (LMDDC), which was formerly known as the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission. USDA and the Southern EZ/EC Forum developed a partnership with the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Center. By using the remaining years of priority funding in Round I and by leveraging other resources, they could effectively aid in implementing the recommendations in *The Delta Initiatives*.

The Forum and USDA cooperated in forming a Delta regional initiative consisting of the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Center, the Enterprise Corporation of the Delta, the Forum, and the Foundation for the Mid-South. The Forum then expanded to include all the EZs and ECs throughout the seven States studied by the Commission in 1990. In April 1998, a Delta Partnership Agreement was drafted in the form of a social compact between the organizations to work cooperatively for sustainable economic and community development to improve the quality of life in the Delta. The parties signed the agreement in New Orleans in April 1998, with Vice President Al Gore, USDA Secretary

Dan Glickman, and Department of Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater signing as witnesses. The Delta Partnership plans to have a Board of Directors composed of community leaders from the EZs, ECs, and Champion Communities. The Board will develop an overall Delta Regional Initiative strategic plan based on the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Center's recommendations, and upon the strategic plans of the EZ/EC members of the Forum.

In the summer of 1998, 10 Departments of the Federal government pledged to work with communities in the Delta to promote the region's development. The Departments included USDA, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Transportation, Small Business Administration, Interior, Commerce, Labor, Education, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Like the Southwest Border Regional Partnership, leaders of the Mississippi Delta regional Initiative believe that while the process looks toward gaining greater resources for the region's development in the immediate and long-term future, there have already been benefits from the process of information-sharing and cooperation among the Delta communities. Moses Williams, Vice-Chair of the Delta initiative, said, "Sharing ideas about common problems was very helpful." Initially, the communities were not familiar with the process of establishing benchmarks, but what the communities learned from each other, as well as from USDA and HUD, helped them understand that process. "We've also helped each other with organizational structure. Few of us at first knew about 501(c)(3), but we've learned how to organize to get the most bang for your buck."

Before the Southern EZ/EC Forum and the Delta regional initiative, Williams said, "You tended to think you were alone in your community with your problems, as if you were on an island. You think to yourself, 'I'm the only one with these problems.' You feel better knowing you're not by yourself... and then you start solving problems."

Williams said the goals of the initiative started with "coming together as a region, uniting to address profound social and economic conditions." With its grassroots support, the regional planning movement in the Mississippi Delta shows great promise of expanding the horizons of economic and community development for the people of the Delta in the years beyond 2000.

Delta Regional Authority: Legislation similar to that previously proposed by the Administration during the last Congress has been introduced with bi-partisan support in both the Senate and the House, respectively, by Senator Blanche Lincoln and Congressman Marion Berry. The Authority would undertake a set of activities in support of Delta priorities, in partnership with States, localities, and the private sector. In addition to its coordinating and administering functions, the commission would also provide a modest program of grants to encourage a broad range of economic and related activities.

(PULL QUOTE)

"I would like to express my support for the Delta Regional Authority Act (SR1622, HR 2911). This legislation establishes the Delta Regional Authority to serve the needs of the 219 counties situated within the Lower Mississippi Delta region. Illinois is home to 16 counties within that region... The Federal programs and services introduced as a result of the Delta Regional Authority would interact with current and future State agency initiatives in Illinois. Therefore, we are working to develop our activities in anticipation

of this legislation's passage. I look forward to continuing to work with the President on this most important project."

George Ryan, Governor of Illinois

Regional planning: The EZ/EC communities played a dynamic role in promoting a regional approach to economic and community development. The rural and urban EZs and ECs in the region banded together to form the Southern EZ/EC Forum, which is working with other nonprofit foundations as well as local, State and Federal governments to promote their long-range vision of regional development. The Southern EZ/EC Forum's efforts are among the key forces supporting the overall *Delta Vision, Delta Voices* initiative.

Delta Compact: A key regional entity that promotes the Delta's development is the Delta Compact, which is largely comprised of community-based nonprofit organizations in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi that attempt to direct resources to the most distressed communities and populations in the Delta. More than 35 Delta Compact signatories have committed over \$40 million in resources and technical assistance to this collaborative enterprise.

Economic Development Districts: The Department of Commerce has continued its longstanding policy of providing regional planning support to the Delta during the 1990s. The Agency has funded 29 multi-county regional planning organizations (Economic Development Districts) helping Delta communities develop comprehensive economic development strategies to provide economic opportunity. The Economic Development Administration (EDA) provided further support for regional planning efforts by funding seven University Centers servicing the Delta.

FEMA Regional Planning Recommendations

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recommends that a Mississippi Delta Project Impact Commission be formed, comprised of representatives from the States and communities located in the region. The goal of the Commission would be to develop a regional approach toward mitigation planning and project implementation to protect communities, enhance the environment, help manage growth and promote economic development.

Various resources available to such a Commission are identified below.

- **Project Impact: Building Disaster Resistant Communities:** Through this initiative, FEMA encourages communities across the country to assess their risk, identify their vulnerabilities, and take steps to prevent disaster damage before disaster strikes. We do this by asking local officials and the private sector to plan together to prepare for future disasters. For communities in flood-prone areas such as the Mississippi Delta, this includes floodplain management and land use planning. To assist with this effort, FEMA has provided to the State of Louisiana the consulting services of Dr. Rodney E. Emmer, who specializes in issues relating to water and related land resources in alluvial, delta, and coastal regions, coastal zone planning and environmental planning. He will work with FEMA and the State to enhance hurricane mitigation and preparedness strategies through broad, regionally based planning initiatives. The strategies will include measures to encourage communities to include the protection and restoration of wetlands buffers and barrier island shorelines in their

hazard planning efforts.

Eleven of the 185 Project Impact communities are located in the Mississippi Delta region and there are over 900 businesses that have joined on as Project Impact partners. Project Impact is indeed having an impact. We are changing the way communities view disasters and stimulating a process that requires grassroots participation.

- **Mapping and the Cooperating Technical Community Program:** A vital component of flood damage prevention is mapping the hazard risk areas and FEMA is committed to modernizing our flood maps. To expedite this undertaking, FEMA has launched the Cooperating Technical Community (CTC) Program. Under this program, FEMA will establish a formal agreement with communities, regional agencies, and States to do some, or all, of the mapping for a particular area. FEMA may cost-share the expense with the communities but because our funding is so limited, some communities will use their own resources entirely. Mapping the Mississippi Delta region is an essential step in a comprehensive mitigation plan for the area.
- **Repetitive Loss Strategy:** FEMA has developed a listing of 10,000 properties around the country that are the most vulnerable to repeat flood insurance losses. These are properties that have had four or more flood losses or two to three flood losses that cumulatively exceed the value of the building. By focusing mitigation efforts on these properties, we can make a difference in the lives of people who live in these properties and a difference for the country by reducing National Flood Insurance Program expenditures and by reducing the amounts needed for Federal disaster assistance in subsequent events.

We can demonstrate that mitigation works. In the past 5 years, FEMA and our State partners have bought out or elevated almost 23,000 properties nationwide. Not only have these projects saved untold human suffering, but also experience has shown us that these mitigation measures are also cost-effective.

- **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) and the Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) Program:** Funding available to States for mitigation projects includes the HMGP and the FMA Program. The HMGP sets aside an amount equal to 15 percent of the total amount of Federal disaster expenditures to be used as a 75 percent cost-share for disaster mitigation projects. These projects can be located anywhere in the State for any relevant hazard and do not have to be in the region of the declared disaster.
The FMA Program provides States with funding unrelated to a particular disaster for mitigation flood mitigation planning and to implement measures to reduce flood losses. As with the HMGP, the funding is a 75 percent cost-share contribution to the State.
- **National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP):** In 1968, Congress created the NFIP in response to the rising cost of taxpayer-funded disaster relief for flood victims and the increasing amount of damage caused by floods. The NFIP makes Federally backed flood insurance available in communities that agree to adopt and enforce floodplain management ordinances to reduce future flood damage.

To encourage communities to undertake and fund mitigation projects like buyouts and elevations, FEMA can offer the incentive of reduced flood insurance premiums in their jurisdiction under the Community Rating System (CRS).

Circuit Riders Project for Technical Assistance

This project is aimed at expanding technical assistance to the poorest and smallest of communities of the Delta, so that they can compete more effectively with larger communities in applications for State, local, Federal, and private sector resources. The President announced the initiative to develop a pilot project for east Arkansas when he visited West Memphis, Arkansas on December 10, 1999. The Memorandum among 15 Federal agencies was completed in the spring of 2000. The Memorandum is summarized below:

(SIDEBAR- Must be after previous paragraph)

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT ARKANSAS DELTA CIRCUIT RIDER INITIATIVE

This Agreement among the Secretary of Agriculture, Secretary of Commerce, Secretary of Defense, Attorney General, Secretary of the Interior, Secretary of Education, Secretary of Health and Human Services, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Secretary of Energy, Secretary of Labor, Secretary of Transportation, Secretary of the Treasury, Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Administrator of the Small Business Administration, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, or their designees, and such other senior executive branch officials as may be determined by the Co-Chairs of the Task Force. The Initiative will be managed in accordance with the President's Memorandum of December 10, 1999, outlining his intent for the initiative. The purpose of this Memorandum is to establish an Arkansas Delta Circuit Rider Pilot Project to provide local level technical assistance in community-based development needs. The program is to be a concentrated, coordinated effort by the Federal agencies named as party to this agreement. The program will be a comprehensive approach addressing needs such as housing, economic development, transportation, environment, tourism, cultural resources, infrastructure, technology, education, and health care. **Program proposal:** The circuit rider program will dedicate staff to provide technical assistance at the local level. This staff resource will assist rural communities in the Arkansas Delta in:

- identifying community needs and priorities in economic and community development;
- coordinating Federal resources in the participating communities;
- drafting strategic plans to leverage both private and public resources for such development; and
- implementing the plans.

The staff will be based in the USDA Rural Development State Office in Little Rock, and when necessary will work out of Rural Development Offices in eastern Arkansas. The USDA Rural Development State Director will coordinate the requests for service; will assemble teams from the participating agencies to visit communities, as appropriate, and will determine the priority for service. To the extent possible and practical, the USDA Rural Development State Director will also engage appropriate Offices of the State of

Arkansas in community briefings and in the provision of assistance to client communities.

The USDA Rural Development Office of Community Development and the Senior Community Builder from the Arkansas State Office of the Department of Housing and Urban Development Area Office will assist communities in capacity and community building and with the development of strategic plans. Participating Departments and Agencies, named above, and other appropriate USDA Offices such as the Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service will, as requested by the USDA Rural Development State Director for Arkansas, assign appropriate personnel to participate in community meetings, provide assistance to communities with strategic planning assistance and guidance in meeting local needs, and in applying for financial assistance through Federal programs.

This pilot project will be in effect for a five-year period beginning upon execution of this agreement. Over the long term, the pilot may serve as a model to expand the circuit rider concept to all seven States in the Delta region.

(END SIDEBAR)

The Social Security Administration and Regional Technical Assistance: The Regional Social Security Offices have played a key role in the planning and implementation of Vice President Gore's " Hassle-Free" projects in the State of Tennessee—where Federal, State and local service providers deliver one-stop, hassle-free services to the public.

The Kentucky State Director's Office staff are members of Kentucky Medicare Partners. Along with the Kentucky Department of Aging, Health Care Finance Administration Atlanta Regional Office, Administration (Kentucky's Medicare carrier), and Medicaid of Kentucky, this group serves to educate the public throughout the State, especially the elderly, about all categories of SSA, Medicare, and Medicaid benefits and application procedures.

The Greenwood, Mississippi Social Security Office, in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, participates in the following:

- The Early Intervention System Plan, an interagency effort of nine Mississippi Delta counties to assist disabled children. Private, local, county, State, and Federal entities are represented, offering medical, dental, nutritional, psychological, support group, family counseling, and transportation services. A directory has been published, listing services available with contact information for entities providing the listed services. Referrals are also made for the elderly, where appropriate.
- Outreach efforts are made in cooperation with Mississippi Valley State University (HBCU) to educate students and the community about topics such as SSA programs, solvency, entitlement to benefits, etc. Greenwood Field Office staff teach classes each semester that address these topics. They also sponsor a booth at the university's annual community day with Field Office staff available to answer questions and provide general SSA information.
- North Central Planning and Development Commission in Winona, Mississippi, heads the area Agency on Aging. Each year, the Greenwood SSA Field Office sponsors and staffs an information booth at the senior fair in cooperation with the Commission.

Through the Field Office's outreach efforts, SSA has provided training to assist in eligibility and reporting requirements to area hospitals, all area nursing homes, Head Start centers, and charitable organizations.

In addition to the outreach efforts highlighted above, we propose that:

- Field Offices in Mississippi Delta States in the Atlanta region (Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee) provide leadership in establishing a network of Federal agency representatives to provide information/education to local communities about Federal services available.
- Field Office managers and public affairs staff in Mississippi Delta States will conduct public education campaigns to educate the population, particularly in rural areas, about SSI program eligibility and benefits.

Providing assistance in historically impoverished areas: Federal officials who work in the Delta have found that working in historically impoverished areas is quite often much more difficult than working in other parts of rural America. For example, qualifying a low-income family for a housing loan in the Delta is typically much more time-intensive than it is in other regions. The same often holds true for Rural Development business programs and infrastructure programs. Totally dedicated individuals are needed with the technical skills, patience, and a true understanding and appreciation of the importance of effective outreach efforts to insure that Rural Development programs are delivered in the best way possible. Unfortunately, it has been the experience of many Federal agencies in the region that when jobs come open in the Delta, the best qualified candidates may not apply for those positions. Compared to positions in other areas, working in the Delta's complex issue environment has not provided an incentive for employment. USDA Rural Development officials in the region proposed looking into the option of paying key employees who work in the Delta incentive pay for positive results. This is often done in other fields of government when there is a shortage of qualified personnel. The military does this with physicians. Attracting the best people to administer Federal programs in the Delta would make them more effective.

The issue of a "brain drain" from the rural Delta is especially disturbing as we look ahead. To bring about a fully revitalized region, it is necessary to provide an environment for young people to stay and prosper—economically, intellectually and socially. This is the ultimate goal of the Delta 2000 Initiative.

VOICES OF THE DELTA

Statements from Governors of the seven Delta States

Governor Mike Huckabee, Arkansas
Governor Don Sundquist, Tennessee
Governor David Ronald Musgrove, Mississippi
Governor M.J. “Mike” Foster, Louisiana
Governor Mel Carnahan, Missouri
Governor George H. Ryan, Illinois
Governor Paul E. Patton, Kentucky

Statements from Members of Congress from the Delta

U.S. Senator Blanche Lambert Lincoln, Arkansas
U.S. Senator Bill Frist, Tennessee
U.S. Senator Tim Hutchinson, Arkansas
U.S. Senator Mary L. Landrieu, Louisiana
U.S. Representative Marion Berry, Arkansas
U.S. Representative Jo Ann Emerson, Missouri
U.S. Representative Bennie G. Thompson, Mississippi
U.S. Representative John Tanner, Tennessee

Grassroots organizations from the Delta

Delta Caucus
Kellogg Foundation Mid-South Delta Initiative
Delta Council of Mississippi
Southern Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities Forum
Delta Compact
Statement of J. Wayne Leonard, Chief Executive Officer of Entergy Corporation and
Chair, Delta BusinessLinc
Mississippi County, Arkansas Gateway Committee: An Economic Transition Story
Delta Race Relations Consortium
Mid-South Delta Local Initiatives Support Corporation
National Mississippi River Museum Proposal, Tulane-Xavier Center for
Bioenvironmental Research
The Nature Conservancy: Statement of the Mississippi River Project Director Cynthia
Brown
Lower Mississippi Delta Development Center—The Importance of Natural Resources to
the Delta
Southeast Missouri Enterprise Community Statement
A view from the Kentucky Delta—City Commissioner Robert Coleman, Paducah,
Kentucky
The InterState-69 Initiative
Zachary Taylor Parkway Commission, Louisiana
The Marketing Loan Concept: One Answer to the Farm Crisis
Farm Bureau Statement

Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Supplemental Nutrition Program Farmers' Market
Program
Summaries of Delta Initiative Listening Sessions, Fall 1999

GOVERNORS' STATEMENTS

Governor Mike Huckabee Republican, Arkansas

I've asked 12 Arkansans to serve on the Governor's Arkansas Delta Development Initiative work group. This work group will join key state agency directors and legislators in recommending legislation needed to address the social and economic needs of the Arkansas Delta. The main goal of the ADDI work group is to develop legislation for the 2001 legislative session that will improve the quality of life and eliminate poverty in the 42 Arkansas counties that were part of the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Act. The Delta region has enormous natural resources as well as a deep cultural heritage. The land in the Delta was once the most productive in the state because of abundant timber, water and other natural resources. Delta residents have always faced the hardship of poverty with a strong work ethic and eternal hope. I'm committed to helping them gain the tools needed to further improve education, health care, economic development, housing and transportation. The ADDI work group will be the first state legislative effort addressing significant issues in the Delta, and it will be designed to complement federal initiatives.

The Delta is not a rich area if your way of measuring things consists of looking at statistics on per capita income and median family income. But the region is rich in so many other, more important ways. It's an area where families are still a vital part of the social fabric, a place where grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts and uncles often are still close by. It's an area where going to church on Sunday is still considered the norm rather than the exception. It's second nature in the Delta for parents to leave work early to watch their children perform in school plays, play in the band or compete on the football team. It's not considered unusual to check on your neighbors there and pick up their mail and newspapers when they're out of town. People in the Delta have a strong sense of history, a sense of continuity, a sense of place.

Now, we must build on those strengths. We can't alter our past. We can, however, set the stage for a prosperous future in the Delta. If those of us in public service will provide the proper leadership, Delta residents will work together to pull themselves up in the national rankings. For too long, officeholders have been guilty of looking to the next election rather than the next generation. We must now look more than two or three years down the road. We must do things that will make one of the unhealthiest populations in the country one of the healthiest. We must also find ways to attract high-tech, knowledge-based industries to the Delta and prepare our people for the kinds of jobs that won't be leaving for south of the border. We must bring the Delta out of poverty and not just repeat the empty rhetoric Delta residents have grown tired of hearing. The problems of the Delta no longer can be ignored by any American, no matter where he or she might live. A lot of this will take time. Politicians like to be able to point to concrete accomplishments—buildings constructed, roads built—and some of these efforts might not be noticed until today's Delta children become healthy, contributing adults. What we must convince ourselves of is that a much better Delta is not beyond our reach. We have the ability to make changes that will allow us in our old age to look back at this period and be able to say it was time well-spent.

Governor Don Sundquist Republican, Tennessee

Economic development has always been one of my top priorities. I welcome the opportunity to bring private industry and the community together to work with our federal, state and local governments in the name of economic progress.

I have seen the progress such partnerships have afforded our country's Appalachian region and believe the same can happen in our Mississippi Delta. That is why I support legislation to create the Delta Regional Authority (DRA) in the seven states along the lower Mississippi River.

During my 12 years in Congress I represented portions of the Delta region in Tennessee and as Governor I represent them all. I know firsthand the obstacles that prevent this region and its people from achieving their full potential. The special assistance that the DRA would offer is necessary for the region to fully enter the mainstream of the nation's economy.

The success of the Appalachian Regional Commission offers a wonderful model for the DRA. As Governor, I have been intimately involved in the Appalachian program and can attest that it has effectively brought together the federal, state, and local governments and the private sector. Instead of dictates from Washington, these parties have worked together to set up spending priorities and bring realistic programs to our citizens.

Economically distressed counties in Appalachian Tennessee have decreased from 37 prior to the formation of the Appalachian Commission to 10 today. Income levels have increased from 68 percent of the national average to over 81 percent. Poverty rates have been reduced by more than half.

The same opportunities exist in the Delta region, and the DRA can be instrumental in bringing about meaningful change.

In Tennessee, ARC funds have been used to bring in industry as well as address fundamental quality-of-life issues. We have, for example, used ARC funds to bring municipal water to rural populations that had for years relied on drinking water from wells and springs contaminated by agricultural runoff. We brought municipal sewage service to small towns where failed or deteriorated septic tanks seeped raw sewage onto the ground's surface. We constructed adult learning facilities that have taught marketable skills to previously unskilled workers. We developed primary health care facilities in areas where none existed.

These are but a few of the examples of how ARC funds have been used in Tennessee.

The Delta region of Tennessee deserves no less. The problems that we have faced in Appalachia also exist in West Tennessee.

Of Tennessee's 21 Delta counties, seven would be classified as economically distressed under the ARC criteria. There is significant unemployment and underemployment. Public infrastructure is inadequate to afford our citizens an acceptable quality of life or the means for economic growth. Levels of health and educational attainment are below where they should be.

For these reasons, I offer my support for the Delta Initiatives and the creation of the Delta Regional Authority. It is my hope that we can work together to realize the enormous potential of the Delta and its people.

**Governor David Ronald Musgrove
Democrat, Mississippi**

One Mississippi Delta writer speaks of the dirt road he saw from his grandmother's window—a road he thought led to nowhere. Half a century later, we continue to struggle valiantly, sometimes desperately, to see prosperity at the end of our Delta roads.

A critical need exists in the Delta for renewal and revitalization of the economic, physical and social environments. Beyond this, or perhaps more accurately stated, blanketing these efforts must be a renewal of the spirit, which allows us to build, to broaden and to bridge. In some way, by some strand, we are each connected to the Delta. It is through that commonality, we must find a way to share a newfound strength and a contagious determination that says, "we can do" in the Delta, a strength that will make no allowances for "we tried."

While much of our nation, indeed part of our state, has experienced growth over the last decade, many Delta communities have not participated fully in our newly found prosperity. By partnering with other states, and by working with local leaders, we can create community-based development and tackle the toughest challenges facing Delta counties today.

Water sewer issues. Housing. Roads. Transit. Child care. Education. Training. Job creation. Job retention. These are not the subjects for years after years of patchwork programs that provide only temporary fixes. And they are not the subjects for empty promises and political rhetoric. Our people deserve long-term solutions based on responsible, long-range planning.

To become competitive, we must develop cooperation. To promote investment, we must demand accountability. To drive growth, we must work determinedly. This is not just about the Delta—this is about who we are and who we dare to become as a nation.

Working together, we can develop a road map for the future of Mississippi that benefits all of us.

**GOVERNOR M. J. "MIKE" FOSTER, JR
REPUBLICAN, LOUISIANA**

As all of you are well aware, the lower Mississippi Delta continues to have the largest concentration of high unemployment and poverty in the United States. This is unacceptable. The people of the Delta are a valuable resource. They have seen the Delta area change from an agricultural giant to an area of extremely high poverty and unemployment.

A plan of action which has accountability built into it needs to be developed. It is important that the governor of each state in the Delta has input into the formation of this plan on behalf of the citizens of his state. Each state should have a Delta commission to help develop goals and strategy and to coordinate with the other states for a regional approach to improving the quality of life for the residents of the Delta. Changes in the entire Delta region must be monitored to determine if programs are working or not.

Without a coordinated effort, it is likely that we will continue on the same path we have

followed for too many years without knowing until it is too late if we are making a difference.

Any organization selected to coordinate the activity of the Delta should be located in the Delta region and not in Washington, if it is to achieve the most beneficial results. We cannot accept the current conditions in the Delta, and a regional concept will be the most effective in implementing change.

**GOVERNOR MEL CARNAHAN
DEMOCRAT, MISSOURI**

I appreciate the opportunity to highlight the issues affecting Southeast Missouri, as well as our meaningful efforts to improve the region's quality of life and economic vitality.

Our initiatives toward building a more prosperous Southeast Missouri may serve as examples for addressing the issues impacting the Mississippi Delta region.

We have joined hands with the communities in Southeast Missouri to focus our efforts to address three major issues: education and adult literacy; economic and community development; and agriculture.

Education and Adult Literacy

Missouri's Outstanding Schools Act of 1993 resulted in a new Foundation Program formula that improved the equity of funding among all school districts. In this school year alone, 55 school districts in 12 Southeast Missouri counties will receive over \$42 million more in basic state aid. Total funding for the program has increased by nearly \$1 billion since its inception.

The Outstanding Schools Act also initiated Missouri's A+ Schools program. The program sets high standards for schools and gives young people the opportunity to earn a full scholarship to a Missouri community college or technical school. Participating schools have lower dropout rates, improved academic achievement, better attendance and fewer discipline problems. For many families with limited financial means in Southeast Missouri, the A+ Schools program may be the only opportunity for their children to further their education beyond high school.

Recognizing Southeast Missouri's need to boost adult literacy and improve basic academic skills, we have been aggressive in promoting adult basic education programs. In February, the U.S. Department of Education recognized Cape Girardeau's Adult Basic Education program as one of the nation's top ten outstanding adult education and literacy programs. This program serves nearly 1,400 people in a five-county region.

Economic and Community Development

Over the past seven years, the Missouri Department of Economic Development has invested more than \$71 million in initiatives to help locate new and expanding businesses in Southeast Missouri and to improve the critical infrastructure in the region's communities. In addition to partnering with such firms as Procter and Gamble and Good Humor/Breyers Ice Cream to expand the employment base in the region, our efforts have included micro-enterprise initiatives designed to help small businesses grow and be more competitive. To help workers remain competitive in the marketplace, we have initiated skill-based customized training programs in conjunction with many of the region's employers.

Recognizing that neighborhood vitality is essential to a community's quality of life, Missouri is fostering state-local-federal partnerships to improve neighborhoods by rehabilitating homes and improving infrastructure, such as water and waste water systems. Our combined efforts are providing resources for the development of affordable housing, the preservation of neighborhoods, and a greater emphasis on building new community leadership.

Agriculture

Until the world market becomes a level playing field for agricultural trade, we must help our farmers by giving them access to capital and resources to produce and market their products.

Missouri has initiated a "one-stop" center to help boost the state's farm economy. The establishment of the Agricultural Innovation Center within the Missouri Department of Agriculture will provide information and assistance to help farmers implement new and innovative methods of raising, processing, and marketing their products.

I have also called upon the Legislature to increase state funding to further implement value-added programs, including loans, grants and tax credits that enable farmers to add value to their raw commodities and earn more for their products.

Southeast Missouri is known for its fertile land which yields some of the most diverse agricultural products in the nation. Seven of the ten top crop-producing counties in the state are located in the area. Southeast Missouri family farmers are an admirably resilient and innovative group. Given the right tools, they will survive and prosper.

While significant strides have been made, there is still much work to be done. I offer my support for the Mississippi Delta Initiatives. It is my hope that through our partnership we will continue to improve the quality of life and economic vitality of the people and communities in Southeast Missouri and the Mississippi Delta region.

GOVERNOR GEORGE H. RYAN REPUBLICAN, ILLINOIS

I would like to express my support for the Delta Regional Authority Act (SR1622, HR 2911).

This legislation establishes the Delta Regional Authority to serve the needs of the 219 counties situated within the Lower Mississippi Delta region. Illinois is home to 16 counties within that region. All of the Delta counties, not just those in Illinois, have historically been underserved by critical infrastructure support, industrial development, access to educational opportunities and quality health care services. The Delta Regional Authority would assist in forming a cooperative entity between the federal and state governments, aimed toward providing much-needed resources and attention to this distressed area of the nation.

The federal programs and services introduced as a result of the Delta Regional Authority would interact with current and future state agency initiatives in Illinois. Therefore, we are working to develop our activities in anticipation of this legislation's passage. I look forward to continuing to work with the President on this most important project.

GOVERNOR PAUL E. PATTON
Democrat, Kentucky

As Governor of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, I strongly support the mission of and full Congressional funding for the Delta Regional Authority as recommended by President Clinton. This and other Delta regional initiatives promise expanded economic opportunity to individuals and their communities in the 21 Delta counties of Western Kentucky.

The Delta region of Kentucky, like each state within the Lower Mississippi Delta region, has its own unique problems and opportunities. While the region overall has experienced positive economic growth, some areas have been left behind. We must build upon our successes in the Delta region to ensure that **all** may enjoy the benefits of prosperity.

I envision the Delta Regional Authority as a partner to assist Kentucky's ongoing efforts to improve the capacity of our people and their communities to participate and succeed in the emerging global economy. The new economy provides opportunities for those who are prepared to compete, but presents obstacles for those who are not.

The needs for developing Kentucky's human capital in this region span a lifetime. We must emphasize early childhood development, including early access to health care and childcare, as well as early childhood education. We must increase our high school dropout prevention efforts and provide more vocation counseling for our future workforce. National research proves that the lack of a high school diploma greatly diminishes an individual's earning potential and hampers the region's potential to attract long-term, high wage jobs, both of which are crucial elements of sustained economic development. Adult literacy and job training programs must be increased to assure that every adult is functionally literate and possesses the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully participate in the workplace. Finally, all of our citizens—young or old—must have access to an effective health care system.

To build stronger communities in the Delta region of Western Kentucky, we must invest more in local infrastructure. Many households in our Delta communities are plagued by unsafe drinking water provided by failing systems, or do not have connections to waterlines in the first instance. Public health is also threatened where sewer systems are inadequate or nonexistent. Very few communities in the area have access to the Information Highway. Regional transportation priorities include improving important corridors such as U.S. 60, Great River Road (U.S. 51), and U.S. 68/KY 80. The future bodes well for Kentucky's Delta region to become a national crossroads as proposals for Interstates 69 and 66 are discussed.

To address these vital issues affecting the lives of people and communities in our Delta region, the Commonwealth of Kentucky welcomes the opportunity to join with the other six Delta states as a full and active partner in support of the Delta Regional Authority and other important Delta economic initiatives.

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

U.S. SENATOR BLANCHE LAMBERT LINCOLN

Democrat, ARKANSAS

As the United States fortifies its workforce to compete in a global economy, improving opportunities in the Mississippi Delta region must be among our top priorities. Anyone who has traveled along the highways of the South recognizes that poverty and a lack of industrial opportunities have restrained the Delta in our nation's endeavor to succeed. The lower Mississippi Delta region, following the course of the Mississippi River, stretches from southern Illinois to the Delta of the Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico. According to the latest Census figures, communities in the seven-state Delta region— Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana—face a poverty rate of 22% while the National average is at 12%.

I have introduced legislation, The Delta Regional Authority Act (S. 1622), to build on efforts begun more than a decade ago when Congress created the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission. Under the leadership of former Arkansas Senator Dale Bumpers, the Commission was charged with studying the unique problems of the Delta region and recommending a course of action. The Commission submitted its Report, *“Realizing the Dream ... Fulfilling the Potential,”* in 1990. The Chairman of the Commission, former Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton, called the Report a “handbook for action.”

The Report highlighted problems facing the Delta, whose economy has traditionally been based on agriculture. The Report noted the Delta faced high unemployment, low levels of income and education, welfare dependency, poor health care and housing, along with serious shortcomings in transportation infrastructure. Unfortunately, a decade after the Report was issued, these problems still exist because we have not done nearly enough. The Delta Regional Authority Act seeks to improve the infrastructure of the Delta region. It is common knowledge that when industries seek to expand and build new facilities, they look at the availability of roads, water systems and other basics. The federal government has tried to foster development in these areas by providing federal grant monies, but we haven't approached the economic problems in the region with an appropriate understanding of the unique demographic and geographic challenges that face the Delta.

Education programs are available, but if there's no technical assistance to help people actually access the grant resources, then the programs become wasted opportunities. We can encourage young folks to pursue higher education and start their own businesses, but if transportation and other resources are inadequate, how can they succeed? For instance, in many areas of the Arkansas Delta there are no copy shops, computer repair stores, or office supply stores. These basic offerings that we take for granted in more developed regions simply are not available. That is why creating a central location for technical assistance is so vital. We may not be able to put copy shops in every town, but we can provide help that will be only a phone call or an e-mail away.

Currently, many communities in the Delta have problems gaining federal grants for two reasons. First, they often don't have the technical expertise to ensure that their grant applications will be competitive with those of larger cities. Second, they often don't have enough local government or corporate resources to meet the local matching requirement. The Delta Regional Authority created by this legislation will authorize \$30 million annually to provide technical assistance in the grant application process. Local

communities across the seven state region will have one-stop shopping when they need assistance completing grant applications and accessing resources for economic development. Second, the Delta Regional Authority will be authorized to provide money to help grant applicants meet the federal match. Certainly the matching dollar requirement in the grant application process is important to demonstrate the community's commitment to the project, but we shouldn't exclude the very communities who need grant assistance the most.

As the majority of our country moves forward, I am hopeful the Delta Regional Authority Act will start the economic engine of the Mississippi Delta.

U.S. SENATOR BILL FRIST
Republican, Tennessee

I was very excited when Senator Blanche Lambert Lincoln of Arkansas asked me to join her and our House colleagues in the introduction of S. 1622, the Delta Regional Authority Act. This important legislation sends the message to the Lower Mississippi Delta that we in Washington are working in a bipartisan manner to encourage economic development for the people of this region. During my trips home over the past five years, I have been struck with the degree of poverty and unemployment in many rural communities in West Tennessee. To be sure, the Delta has made some steady progress, but it has been slow. We must act to quicken the pace of this growth. Through our common-sense legislation, we create a federal-state authority which will partner with public and private groups to combat economic depression and stimulate growth by focusing on the needs of communities in the Delta. The legislation will focus on economically-depressed counties, while providing flexibility to allow these counties to partner with economically-strong counties to develop plans that foster growth.

In Tennessee, we are very aware of the success the Appalachian Regional Commission has had over the past 35 years in encouraging economic development in one of our nation's most impoverished areas. Since 1964, the Appalachian Regional Commission has decreased the poverty level of Appalachia by more than half. The Appalachian region in East Tennessee has actually seen a 10% increase in population since 1990, where in the 1950s millions of people were **leaving** the region to escape poverty. It is important that we apply the model of success to the lower Mississippi Delta, which has been historically neglected when it comes to economic development initiatives.

We will begin to bring about meaningful and lasting change in the Delta with passage and implementation of the Delta Regional Authority Act. The resulting partnerships and cooperation among localities will encourage economic growth and significantly improve the quality of life for the citizens of the lower Mississippi Delta.

A Helping Hand Needed For The Delta
U.S. Senator Tim Hutchinson
Republican, Arkansas

With all of the talk about America's robust economy, thousands of Arkansans have not yet experienced these prosperous times. The Delta region represents the poorest of the poor in our country, many without what you and I consider even the most basic needs, like clean drinking water and indoor plumbing, let alone economic opportunity.

The problems we face in the Delta are not new. I have spent a lot of time in the Delta during the past three years. In 1999, I traveled the Delta extensively and visited with constituents there. Often, I found a sense of hopelessness and despair. I found young people leaving, with no plans to return. I found an agriculture community in crisis, with few opportunities outside of farming. Yet, I also found an indomitable spirit in those who are striving for better lives and more opportunity.

I visited with constituents in Mississippi County, whose average median income is only \$17,000. In Desha County, the median income is only \$15,000. And in Chicot County, the average median income is just \$14,000. The real tragedy is that these economic figures have not changed in years. This is just further proof that the Delta has suffered in the backwaters of national prosperity.

The government can provide a helping hand to assist these areas in growing their economy and moving toward prosperity. That's why I've joined Senator Blanche Lincoln, Congressman Marion Berry and other members from affected states in introducing legislation that will create a federal-state organization to promote economic growth in the Mississippi Delta region.

Under this legislation, The Delta Regional Authority, a joint federal-state organization, will serve as the central economic development resource for the Mississippi Delta, which includes approximately 219 counties within the states of Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, Missouri, Kentucky and Illinois.

The Authority will be comprised of two co-chairmen and a representative from each Delta state, either the governor or an alternate selected by the governor. One co-chairman will be appointed by the President, with Senate approval necessary. Representatives of the states will choose the second co-chair. The Authority will coordinate all levels of government, helping Delta communities to more effectively access federal grant programs. Functions also include assessing the needs of the region through research, establishing regional economic priorities and encouraging private investment in the area. The establishment of this commission can help provide hope for families in a region that has not experienced the same economic recovery as the rest of the country. I encourage anyone who doubts the great need for this commission to review the income and economic data. More importantly, I would encourage my colleagues to visit the Delta, talk to the people there about the unique challenges they face and their hopes for the future. Seeing it firsthand helps one understand the poverty that plagues this region. I applaud the cosponsors of this bill for their effort to help our Delta families in Arkansas and the surrounding states, and I will continue to look for solutions to provide that helping hand to those in the Delta region.

The Challenge and Promise of the Lower Mississippi Delta region
U.S. Senator Mary L. Landrieu
Democrat, Louisiana

This nation has long depended on its rivers—such as the Mississippi River—as major transportation corridors for shipping goods across the country and to international markets, making the Lower Mississippi Delta region an important cog in the overall national economy engine.

In fact, for more than 150 years, cotton has been a major segment of the Delta region's economy. In more recent decades, we have seen a diversifying of our economy through the introduction of soybeans, rice, timber, oil refining and even the chemical industry. However, technological and automation advancements since the 1950s also have meant a high number of displaced workers in this already economically depressed area.

The Lower Mississippi Delta region is a land of great contrast. The region includes thousands of square miles of some of the country's richest national resources and most valuable physical assets. Yet the population of this area, which includes my home state of Louisiana, constitutes the poorest region in the United States.

The challenges facing the Lower Mississippi Delta region are clear: high unemployment, high illiteracy rates, a lack of affordable housing and a sluggish economy. In fact, while 12 percent of the nation's population lives below the poverty line, 24 percent live in poverty in Louisiana's Delta region.

The key to solving these problems is finding ways to stimulate the economy. I have long believed that in order to have a strong economy, you must have a strong work force. And to cultivate a strong work force, a top-notch education system is vital. We must be able to educate our children well enough to compete in the new technology-driven and global economy—one that is fast-growing, flexible, innovative and highly competitive.

A recent Report by the Progressive Policy Institute found that Louisiana—which makes up a good portion of the Lower Mississippi Delta region—lags behind in the information technology revolution. We are 47th in the number of adults with Internet access, 44th in business-related Internet sites, and 49th in computer technology in schools. Clearly we are behind as the nation's economy transitions to an increased dependency on technology.

While I do not think this Report means we are lost in the shuffle, it does mean we need to make some adjustments. Leaders in business, education and government all need to work together to make the information technology revolution work for Louisiana and the entire Lower Mississippi Delta region. In order to accomplish this, we must search for new solutions to the educational challenges facing children and adults. We must realize that because learning begins at birth and continues throughout life, our education and training system must provide learning opportunities at all stages.

Despite numerous reports and studies, a comprehensive program for addressing the region's needs has never been successfully implemented, although several efforts are underway. I believe the key to successfully jump-starting the region's economy will be strong public/private partnerships.

I call upon those of us in the Delta region—businesses, government and residents—to merge our efforts in order to maximize our results.

Improving the Mississippi Delta region
U.S. Representative Marion Berry
Democrat, Arkansas

I was born and raised in the Arkansas Delta. As an adult, I chose to stay in the Delta to live, work and raise my family. I am very proud of my roots, and I believe the Delta is the greatest place on earth. I am equally proud of the people of the Delta, and their enthusiasm and determination to succeed. However, for as long as I can remember, the Delta region has lacked many of the basic things it needs to become a prosperous area of our country. Adequate infrastructure, education and job training, and diversified economic opportunities are desperately needed to give the people of the Delta a chance to succeed.

We are all aware of the needs of the Delta. Numerous statistics are available on the high rates of overall poverty, child poverty, and unemployment in this area, and the low education rates in the region. This Report shows many of the things that have been accomplished in the Delta region over the past decade, but we know we have to do more. Most importantly, we have to continue to work together to improve the Delta. The studies have been done, and we know the problems of the Delta. It is our job to work together, as a community, to solve those problems and work to make it the best it can be.

H.R. 2911, introduced in October 1999, would set up a Delta Regional Authority, an entity to foster a coordinated effort to help bring economic prosperity to the Delta region. It will create an entity where all entities, federal, state, and local, can come together, lay their ideas for improving the area on the table and get to work on ways to make a better future for the Delta.

The DRA will provide financial and technical assistance for programs and projects designed to improve the Delta. The DRA will establish priorities for each region, and will review and study public and private programs to increase their effectiveness. It will also give local organizations a say in how to improve the Delta they know best. Most important, the DRA provides a forum for all those interested to come together to work to make the Delta a better place to work, live and raise a family. A way to improve a region I know can be one of the most productive areas of the country.

We all know the best way to improve the Delta is to improve infrastructure and education. The Delta is a natural transportation hub. We need to effectively use that hub to attract people, business, and jobs. We also know that an educated society is a productive society. If our children are given the best education and brought up healthy and safe, this will mean a brighter future for all of us. The Delta Regional Authority will be a great tool in coordinating efforts and making these improvements a reality. It is time for us look towards the future to see what a great place the Delta can be and what all of us can do to see that it happens.

Working with Local Citizens, Improving the Delta
U.S. REPRESENTATIVE JO ANN EMERSON
Republican, Missouri

I am very proud to represent a region of our great nation—the Mississippi Delta—that is so rich in history and so full of promise for the future. The Delta's tremendous natural resources, vital culture, and location along America's mightiest river have drawn residents and visitors alike to this wonderful region. However, the Delta continues to face significant challenges, and it has not shared in America's booming economy of the last several years. I cringe each time I read a new story about the roaring stock market or the prospering dot.com economy, because I know that these good times have not found their way to the Delta. Some of the most economically distressed communities in the country are in the Delta, and the region desperately needs additional resources to address chronic hunger, poverty, unemployment, and low education rates.

One of the most urgent needs in the Delta is continued strong support of flood control and navigation, particularly the Mississippi River & Tributaries (MR&T) project. This comprehensive flood control plan is of critical importance to the people in the lower Mississippi River Valley and has saved the government billions of dollars through the protection it has provided since its inception. It has protected the property and livelihood of thousands of Delta residents and, more importantly, it has prevented the loss of life. It is my hope that the federal government will maintain its historic and necessary commitment to flood control in the Delta, a key component to the future of the region. I am pleased that there is a growing recognition of the need to give the Delta the tools that it needs to prosper in the next century. In fact, dedicated local citizens have already begun the important work of bringing economic development and job opportunities to the region. The Lower Mississippi Delta Development Center in Memphis, for example, has worked tirelessly to improve the quality of life for residents of the Delta. Local drainage districts, conservation districts, and regional planning commissions have also implemented projects and programs that have been critical to the growth of their communities. These local people and groups, proud of their homes and coming together in support of their communities, are an example to all of us of what good citizenship is all about. Much remains to be done, and it is my hope and intent to continue to partner with local people—the real stakeholders—to build toward the future. The strength of the Delta is in the hearts and minds of its people, and they know better than anyone what needs to be done to meet the challenges which they face.

In Congress, I have joined Congresswoman Eva Clayton of North Carolina to re-establish the Congressional Rural Caucus. The overarching mission of this Caucus is to focus attention and resources on rural parts of our country such as the Delta, and to ensure that the voice of rural America is heard in the policymaking process. The Caucus, which has a membership of more than 120 U.S. Representatives, gives rural America "a seat at the table" as legislative and policy decisions are made in Washington, D.C. The fact of the matter is that our rural areas are the bedrock of our nation and represent the very best that America has to offer.

The Delta's prospects are very bright, so long as there are those who are willing to work together. In flood control, health care, transportation, education, economic development,

and other areas, the Delta is poised to make great progress. I am heartened by the knowledge and firm belief that the best days of the Delta are just ahead.

U.S. Representative Bennie G. Thompson
Democrat, Mississippi

The Mississippi Delta region has experienced significant progress since Governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas presented the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission's Report, *The Delta Initiatives: Realizing the Dream...Fulfilling the Potential* in 1990. After his election in 1992, President Bill Clinton and his Administration have sought to fulfill many of the recommendations in *Delta Initiatives*, and have had considerable success. However, there is significant work to be done before we can fulfill the dreams of that Report and also address new problems which have emerged over the last decade. In particular, we must find new means to harness the combined power of the public and private sector in order to leverage new investments in the Delta. The President's New Markets Initiative has already made substantial efforts to address this task, but this work must be expanded in order to create a more holistic approach to resolving the remaining social, political, and economic problems in the Delta.

What the Delta needs is a comprehensive effort to get its residents moving again. As Reggie Barnes, the Superintendent of the West Tallahatchie School District, wrote in his views on the *Mississippi Delta: Beyond 2000 Interim Report*, "It is as though the people of the region have accepted the fact that their lives are all they can expect and have an attitude of just doing the best with what they've got."

Many of the federal efforts to improve the quality of life in the Delta are piecemeal: They support business, development, health, education, or other improvements in a particular location or under the work of a single entity in a manner which leaves this work isolated. The problems of the Delta do not stop at the city limits, the school district's lines, or the borders of the area served by a particular non-profit organization. They are systemic to the social, political, and economic fabric of the entire region.

The empowerment zones and enterprise communities designated in some areas of the Delta have made substantial progress towards bringing people and organizations together from across a wide variety of backgrounds. Now we need to take the next step of statutorily creating an entity that will organize these efforts across the entire Mississippi Delta region, similar to the manner in which the Appalachian Regional Commission has served that area. If we genuinely support this new organization, and provide it with the resources needed to get the job done, we can take the next real step towards fulfilling the dreams of the people in the Delta.

The statutory creation of an economic development commission for the entire Delta can be the chief means of focusing these efforts on a regional level. However, we also need support at a national and state level for innovative programs that can provide other resources needed to address the underlying problems created by years of poverty and poor education and health care.

Congress and the Administration must work together to make real investments in school infrastructure, hiring more teachers, early child development initiatives, childcare, after-school and summer youth programs, job training, public transportation, community health services, and other crucial areas of need. People in the Delta want to learn, work,

and be productive citizens, but from birth to death they face obstacles which limit opportunity and frustrate ambition. A national commitment must be made to design and fund reliable, flexible programs that can resolve these problems in the Delta and across the country.

It must be noted that more efforts to assist the Delta must be coupled with a higher standard of accountability. It would be untrue to say that every initiative in the region to date has been either a success or a wise investment. While thousands of people all across the region have been helped by the efforts made in the last decade, it is the few examples of waste and corruption that gain the most public attention and risk endangering all our work. Public and private initiatives in the Delta must do a better job monitoring progress on projects, analyzing results, and implementing reforms. Non-profit organizations and government units also need more training to ensure they are properly implementing projects.

It is only through a real public and private commitment to facing the problems of today—and finding innovative means to address them—that we can begin providing the Delta's residents with the opportunities and motivation needed to get this region moving again. The Delta is ready to take the next step towards fully entering the global marketplace of ideas and commerce in which much of the United States is already engaged, now it is up to us to provide it with the resources needed to fulfill this potential.

**U.S. REPRESENTATIVE JOHN TANNER
DEMOCRAT, TENNESSEE**

I want to thank Governor Sundquist for hosting the roundtable discussion on the Delta Regional Authority on April 3, 2000, in Savannah, Tennessee, and for Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater's work on this proposal with the Administration. Because of my commitment to the needs of the Delta region, I am an original cosponsor of Congressman Marion Berry's bill, H.R. 2911, which would authorize the creation of the Delta Regional Authority (DRA). Our friend, Senator Blanche Lincoln has introduced the measure on the Senate side, and President Clinton has included \$159 million in his FY 2001 budget proposal to increase economic opportunities in the Delta, including \$30 million for the Delta Regional Authority.

The Delta Regional Authority, established by our bill, would help to organize and develop a 10-year economic development plan for our region. The distressed areas of the Delta region have never had the benefit of a coordinated federal assistance program like the Appalachian Regional Commission. The DRA would be modeled after the ARC and would coordinate federal, state and local efforts to funnel grant money, infrastructure projects such as I-69, and technical training programs for our teachers in the Delta area. It has been noted that our region's poverty rate is 175% of the national average, and half of the counties have had poverty rates over 20% for the past forty years. The DRA will help to provide assistance so that we can continue to fight the war on poverty in the region and bring these percentages down. The DRA will greatly enhance the quality of life for our citizens by providing water and sewer system grants and loans, and money for good bridges and roads which will attract industries and add jobs. The coordinated efforts of the DRA will also include job training and educational grants to make sure that our

citizens have the knowledge and skills to compete for good jobs in an ever-increasing global marketplace.

The DRA funding would be targeted to counties with the highest poverty and unemployment rates and lowest per capita incomes. \$25 million would be allocated for area development such as a distressed counties program, physical infrastructure and job training. \$3 million would be provided for assistance to participating state and local economic development entities already in place, and another \$2 million would be set aside for technical assistance and administrative costs.

Governor Sundquist, Secretary Slater and I, along with other Members of Congress and other governors from the region have met personally with President Clinton and his staff about this initiative. It is our hope that this year, with your help, the DRA will become a reality. I urge you to contact your representative and senators and encourage them to cosponsor the Delta Regional Authority legislation if they have not done so already.

GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS IN THE DELTA

(Note: The Mississippi Delta 2000 Initiative will publish extended versions of the following statements in a compendium that will be completed shortly after the Delta Vision, Delta Voices conference in May, 2000. We also invite other grassroots organizations to submit statements for inclusion in the compendium, and also for publication on the Delta Website at <http://www.dot.gov>.)

The Delta Caucus and the Arkansas Delta Council

The Arkansas Delta Council is a 501(c)(6) non-profit organization of regional leaders from over twenty Eastern Arkansas Delta Counties. Established in 1990, its mission is the improvement of the quality of life in the Arkansas Delta and the completion of the goals of the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission as stated in its 1990 Final Report to Congress. Delta Council seeks to achieve these goals through advocacy efforts in Washington and elsewhere, as well as a host of community and regional development efforts through grant funding and other initiatives.

The Delta Caucus is a major effort to provide a grassroots advocacy on behalf of the Delta region, and involves all seven states of the Lower Mississippi Valley. It is relatively new, but has been very active in putting together rallies in Arkansas and a 150-person “march” on Washington in October. The mission of the Delta Caucus is defined by a document and petition, entitled the Delta Covenant, which has been signed by literally thousands of Delta residents and delivered to both President Clinton and our leadership in Congress. The Covenant states simply that the citizens and members of the Caucus respectfully urge Congress and the President to establish a targeted and direct federal economic assistance program for the Lower Mississippi Delta region, and provide significant funding for the program to help the region participate in the Nation’s economy. It recognizes that the Delta region, while the poorest region of the country, is the only blighted area without such a targeted economic support program.

Specifically, the Delta Caucus has endorsed the Delta Regional Authority proposal endorsed by the White House and introduced by Senator Blanche Lincoln. However, we are also wanting this bill to be a starting place for a bi-partisan package of help for the region. If Congress refuses to pass this legislation yet again (it has been turned down several times in the past 10 years), we do not want to have all of our eggs in that basket, but would rather ask what kind of package could get the bi-partisan support needed to actually pass

First, the Delta Caucus is requesting that President Clinton designate a high-ranking official to represent the President in negotiations with Senator Cochran and Lott of Mississippi, without whom any proposal is likely to fail in the end. There are fifty ways to kill something in Congress for every one way to get something accomplished. We would like to see a good faith effort made to put other more political matters on the side when working on an issue that is about both President Clinton’s and Senator Lott’s home. Secondly, there are at least three issues which should be addressed at that meeting, in addition to the Delta Regional Authority:

- First, advanced construction funding to secure the I-69 corridor and Great River Bridge construction in the next budget.
- Secondly, the expansion of the Empowerment Zone tax credit for new employees to at least 25-30 core depressed Delta counties.
- Thirdly, the expansion and targeting of the Single Family Low Income Housing Tax Credit for the Delta region.
- There are possibly other areas of bi-partisan agreement, regarding education, targeted grant funding, and others. However, we believe that enough bi-partisan support exists both in the Delta region and in Washington to accomplish the first three proposals.

Again, it is our opinion that the President should get this ball rolling now by designating an official to represent him and negotiate with Congressional leaders regarding these important matters for the Delta region.

W. K Kellogg Foundation Mid-South Delta Initiative

The Mid South Delta Initiative (MSDI) represents a partnership between Delta communities in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF). The initiative focuses on 55 contiguous counties and parishes along the Mississippi River. MSDI is aimed at helping people in these Delta communities acquire useful tools to identify and create a more vibrant economic future. The Initiative's purpose is to assist the social transformation of the Mid-South by strengthening the capacity of individuals, families, organizations, institutions, and policymakers to develop healthier and more sustainable communities in the Delta region.

Three strategies are being used to implement the initiative. They are: enhancing community economic opportunity, strengthening regional partnerships for economic development, and leveraging internal and external resources, experiences, and investments. To date, an Initiative office has been opened in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. This is the first Kellogg Foundation office anywhere in the United States outside of Michigan. Additionally, a Delta Initiatives Advisory Coalition (DIAC), a regional advisory committee, has been established to help WKKF guide its work. Implementation funding in the amount of \$1,050,000 has been committed to 5 Round I community teams from across the region. These communities are in the second year of WKKF's three-year commitment to their work. Additionally, one-year planning grants adding up to \$105,000 have been provided to another ten Round II community teams. Communities successfully completing this planning phase will be eligible for a share of implementation funds totaling \$3,000,000 over a three-year-period.

DELTA COUNCIL OF MISSISSIPPI

(Delta Council is a major nonprofit institution based in Mississippi that promotes the overall economic development of the Mississippi Delta region.)

While the Mississippi Delta is far from achieving its vision of economic parity with the nation, we are making significant progress. In the last three years alone, the 18 Delta and

part-Delta Counties of Mississippi have had 42 new industries locate in the region with over 260 companies constructing significant expansions. This has resulted in over 7,000 new jobs and over half a billion dollars in new investment. Per capita income for the region is gaining on state and national averages and unemployment is continuing to decline. For the first time in history, manufacturing wages have surpassed the \$1.0 billion mark.

This progress has not been accidental nor will it reverse. It is based upon strong working partnerships led by local leadership and relying upon the continuing assistance of numerous state and federal agencies that have direct experience in successful rural economic and community development.

No area can prosper without adequate transportation resources. In addition to other highway programs, Mississippi has taken great strides in opening up the U.S. 82 corridor and will soon complete this important four-lane project across the entire state. This highway crosses the Mississippi River near Greenville and will eventually provide four-lane access from the Alabama-Mississippi state line in east Mississippi directly to Little Rock, Arkansas. The Greenville bridge has been classified as a navigation hazard by the U.S. Coast Guard and is authorized for replacement. The FY 2000 Budget included \$9.0 million in critical funding to finalize all pre-construction activities. This funding was subsequently eliminated by the Department of Transportation and federal Highway Administration. We believe that this high priority replacement of a documented navigation hazard is critical to maximizing the economic benefit of our highway infrastructure. At the same time, we applaud the continuing development of the I-69 corridor and believe it will do much to enhance the economy of the area.

Recognizing the importance of our historically black colleges and universities, we would like to express our support for increased funding to Mississippi Valley State University for the purpose of strengthening curriculum and management at the University. Delta State University has embarked upon an innovative partnership with Delta Council and 34 Delta School Districts which will train new school administrators, increase the number of new teachers to alleviate our critical shortage and enhance the overall quality of K-12 education. We believe that this \$1.5 million allocation should be restored and expanded. Perhaps the single most important element of economic development in the Mississippi Delta is that of job readiness and skills enhancement training. In terms of upgrading our employment and attracting new investment, the Community Colleges in our area have been a crucial factor in recent success. Unfortunately, at the very moment where we are at the brink of success, budget constraints may force institutions like Coahoma Community College in Clarksdale and Mississippi Delta in Moorhead to lay off training personnel. For a number of years, the Committee has supported a modest but crucial program called the Delta Rural Revitalization Program or "Delta Project". Managed jointly by Mississippi State University and the Development Department of Delta Council, this appropriation has provided massive productivity improvement training for companies such as Viking Range, La-Z-Boy, and Irvin Industries. As a result of this innovative work, Viking has expanded five times and now is recognized as the leader in quality and product flexibility. Even more importantly, these funds have led to the creation of the Delta Data Center. The Data Center, staffed by one person, operates on the premise that in the field of economic development, accurate data and timely response equals success. This operation has been instrumental in providing real-time data resulting

in the location of companies like Dollar General, Royal Vendors and numerous others. In addition, the Center provides fast, accurate information to public and private partners resulting in new water and sewer systems, workforce training grants, public infrastructure, and economic development marketing analysis.

We sincerely hope that any effort by the Congress and the Administration to bring a higher degree of emphasis to the needs of the Delta region will use our existing and proven public-sector institutions such as Mississippi Valley state University, Delta state University, Coahoma Community College, Mississippi Delta Community College and the Mississippi Department of Transportation as the primary delivery mechanism for our growth.

Southern Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community Forum Delta Regional Initiative Priorities

The Southern Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community (EZ/EC) Forum was formed in 1995 by EZ/ECs in Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi. Subsequently, the Forum expanded to include all EZ/ECs located in the 219-county/parish area constituting the Lower Mississippi Delta region—Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee.

On April 16, 1998, the work of the Forum culminated with the signing of the Southern EZ/EC Forum Partnership Agreement, (Delta region Initiative) by 13 Forum members (including one community from Alabama), 3 regional partners, and a host of Delta mayors. The signing ceremony took place in New Orleans, Louisiana and was witnessed by Vice President Al Gore, Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman and Secretary of Transportation Rodney Slater. As a result of the Forum's strategic planning process, members agreed to formally organize as a nonprofit corporation and subsequently seek federal commission status. The Forum's Delta regional Initiative goals/priorities are as follows:

Establishment/Recognition of Infrastructure (federal authority/commission) to Facilitate the Initiative Process:

There must be federal recognition of the 219-county/parish Lower Mississippi Delta region as a dynamic, functioning region of the United States with common challenges and opportunities for regional development.

In order for the federal government to provide a more effective response to the needs of the Delta region, the existing system of federal departments must be allowed to transcend regional divisions and boundaries. This process has already started under the leadership of Secretary Rodney Slater; however, an executive order or congressional act could mandate the appropriate changes.

Health care and Nutrition: Access to affordable health care by all Delta residents must be a priority if we are to see eventual improvement in education, workforce development, productivity, and many other areas.

Education and Workforce Improvement: Upgrading the Delta's workforce through improved educational institutions and intensive workforce development initiatives is essential to revitalization of the Delta region's economy.

Studies suggests that better equipped schools, well-trained and better paid teachers, smaller teacher/pupil ratios and introduction of technology in the learning/teaching environment are some factors that could significantly improve test scores for students and

better prepare them for entry into the workforce or institutions of higher learning. Rural schools unable to attract certified teachers in critical areas such as math, science, arts, etc. should be linked with other institutions through distance learning programs.

Safe and Affordable Housing: Affordable and safe housing must be a priority for every Delta community. Substantially increasing the number of Section 8 vouchers and providing low interest loans to builders will facilitate the movement of significant numbers of low-income residents from substandard housing. Notwithstanding, a primary goal should focus on increasing the rate of home ownership in the Delta region as a form of wealth building. Accordingly, new and more creative ways must be found to improve homeownership for Delta residents.

Agribusiness-Value Added and Export Opportunities: Agriculture and agribusiness remains the largest single economy in the Delta region.

USDA and other agencies should convene a Delta conference of Business and Agricultural leaders to explore value-added opportunities for the Delta. Additional topics of discussion are reforestation of some Delta croplands and export opportunities for Delta products.

Transportation: Finally, the Delta regional Initiative must recognize the necessity of connecting the Delta region to the Nation and the World with a highly efficient and functional system of land, air and water transportation. The I-69 corridor must be fully funded and, where appropriate, improved I-69 access roads should run along both sides of the Mississippi River (Great River Roads as outlined in *The Delta Initiatives*).

DELTA COMPACT

The Delta Compact is a non-profit organization committed to enhancing the economic, social and organizational capacity of the Delta. Initially, the Compact's leadership came from the states of Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi with organizational support from the Housing Assistance Council and the United States Department of Agriculture. As the Compact matured, its members invited the Delta states of Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois and Missouri to join.

Participants come from the non-profit and for-profit sectors and include grass roots community based organizations, governmental agencies, educational institutions, financial institutions, corporations and concerned individuals.

The Compact works to enhance the quality and availability of resources to the region through collaborative relationships among its members. The Compact brings together organizations and individuals in a region that suffers endemic poverty. The Compact serves as a rural voice for public policy and shares expertise and capacity among its members to mitigate problems caused by isolation, lack of access to information and race.

The Compact's members believe that development must be holistic to be effective. The compact unites organizations and individuals committed to articulating rural public policy concerns, stimulating economic development and agriculture, increasing the availability of affordable housing, improving access to health care and health status, upgrading the quality of education and building the skills of the region's human resource.

J. Wayne Leonard, Chief Executive Officer, Entergy Corporation
Excerpt from Address at Entergy's Low Income Summit
November 19, 1999, New Orleans, Louisiana

(NOTE: The following is an excerpt of a major address delivered by J. Wayne Leonard, CEO of Entergy and Chair of the Delta region's BusinessLinc program, a government-private business partnership encouraging large businesses to mentor and provide technical advice to small Delta region businesses. The "Low-Income Summit" of November 1999, attracted low-income customer advocates, regulators, public officials and others from a four-state area, including the Delta states of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. It was the first summit of its kind for this area and for Entergy, which is the third largest power producer in the United States.

The address refers to a \$5 million investment from Entergy in the Enterprise Corporation of the Delta (ECD), a business development and finance organization serving poverty-stricken areas along the Mississippi River Delta. It is projected that the investment by Entergy will enable ECD to make more than 300 loans and investments in Delta firms, generating more than 2,500 jobs.)

Welcome, and thank you for making time in your busy schedules to be with us today for the Low Income Summit....

We are looking forward to working with you to identify some of the most pressing issues that face our low-income customers and developing solutions that we can all support.

I've spent my adult life in the electricity business. I can tell you that the people who produce and deliver electricity take pride in providing something that's so important to the quality of life we enjoy today. And I believe that no one in this country should have to worry about whether they can afford electricity for their home. As the third biggest power producer in the U.S., our question is how do we make that the public policy of this region and this country?

As the CEO of the company, I have fiduciary obligations to our shareholders that I cannot ignore. And I can certainly defend why that's in the shareholders' best interest, but my concerns go well beyond that and well beyond affordable electricity, which is the topic we're here to discuss.

Making electricity affordable to everyone in this country is only one small part of the overall problems facing people with low income, but it will be difficult to satisfactorily address without creating the overall climate of goodwill.

We are a society today that is fascinated with movie scripts about intrigue, conspiracy theories, and individuals fighting the corrupt powerful government. We're fascinated with wars on communism, wars with drug lords, Good vs. Evil, and Tom Clancy stuff. And the greatest story of this type never told in commercial theaters is the war on poverty that this country fought in the 60's and 70's, but the war on the poor themselves that we have been fighting ever since.

As a society we are demonizing the poor in the most shameless way imaginable. In many circles, poor people are being made the scapegoats for societal problems they didn't cause and cannot change. Society's problems can be traced—at least in part—to poor

public education, lack of universal health care and, more fundamentally, lack of success in creating good, above-minimum wage jobs.

In order to justify our actions we have created a logic that says (1) there are fewer poor people today than ever, (2) benefits to the poor are generous and widely available to the deserving, but (3) most are undeserving. They are labeled as the underclass. They are undeserving because they practice “bad” values. They are lazy. They refuse to work. They are immoral—children having children. Therefore (4) in order to correct this societal deficiency, we must practice what amounts to “tough love” by cracking down on slackers and cutting back on public assistance.

Most people tend to accept the story that poor people

- Don’t want to work,
- Stay on public assistance their whole lives, and
- Put themselves in this situation by dropping out of school or through drunkenness or the practice of low morals.

Yet, the facts are these:

- 70% of the people are off welfare in less than two years.
- Of the homeless, one third have mental or physical disabilities and one third are children.
- 25% of those who drop out of high school do so to take care of family members or work to support family.
- The percentage of children living in poverty has increased from 15% to 23% in 20 years, until today 40% of the nation’s poor are children.
- Inflation-adjusted AFDC has decreased by 30% in the last 20 years.
- Middle-class and upper-income people spend far more of their food and drink budget on alcohol than poor people.

And for the closet racists who would suggest, for example, that public assistance to dependent children is disproportionate among the races, the fact is, for example, there are just as many white mothers as black on welfare. And the numbers of children born out of wedlock are also comparable between the races.

Even though, by almost any definition, we are the richest nation in the world, even among those who have sympathy for the poor, there is a growing belief there isn’t anything we can do about it. The fact is, among the well-developed industrial nations, America’s percentage of poor is two to three times that of the other nations included in that group.

And whatever poverty-related statistics you want to cite for the nation, the statistics for the region, particularly the Delta, are multiples of the national average. For example, in Mississippi and Louisiana one in every three children is poor. And as for federal assistance to make energy available to all, we have already seen almost a 50% cut in federal government assistance for low-income energy programs.

We are fighting a social climate that sometimes seems utterly devoid of goodwill toward the less fortunate. We are fighting a war that we claim to be on the undeserving, the lazy, the immoral. But fact is, it’s a war largely fought against the children and the disabled. How do we create a public policy for energy that is more compassionate than we have established for food and housing?

I cite these facts because I want to make it clear that Entergy is prepared to fight with you in the war on the larger issues of food, housing, health care, and jobs for the poor. In

September, Entergy made a \$5 million contribution to the Enterprise Corporation of the Delta. In November 1999, Entergy added a quarter of a million dollars to the Foundation for the Mid-South for 1999. These are organizations with missions and track records of improving the quality of life for the less fortunate in the region.

I have accepted the Chairmanship of the BusinessLinc Program for the Delta region, part of the President's New Markets Initiatives designed to improve the economic climate in the areas of high poverty.

Beyond those kinds of things, what can Entergy do to help shape public policy or what can we do or change in our own policies and procedures in order to make a difference? I know we can't solve all the ills of society today or by ourselves.

For all the statistics I cite about how society has turned its back to the less fortunate, we know Entergy has not been much better. We have had credit and collection policies, shut-off policies, and rate design methodologies that, seen in retrospect, have been insensitive, if not harsh. We have closed local offices where many of our low-income customers pay their bills so we no longer have to put a face behind that desperate voice on the other end of the line. We have sat in silence as these issues have been debated and then pointed to regulators or elected officials as to the reasons nothing gets done.

These times are behind us. We will no longer take a passive role as minorities or low-income people or any other group that doesn't have a legitimate voice is victimized by the few who are willing to simply shout everybody else who disagrees with them. But, we need your help. Your ideas. We can make a difference. As the richest nation in the world we should expect more from our leaders. As the third biggest power producer in the United States serving some of the poorest areas of the country, at Entergy, we should expect more of ourselves. We know you do. Starting today, our goal is to exceed your expectations.

Let's get started.

MISSISSIPPI COUNTY, ARKANSAS: Adjusting to a Military Base Closure and Diversifying the Local Economy

(Presented by Blytheville, Mississippi County, Arkansas Gateway Committee, Mayor Barrett Harrison, Chairman)

Since the late 1980s, political, business and civic organizations in Mississippi County, Arkansas have learned the value of collaborative, federal, state, public and private sector partnerships to plan and promote local economic development initiatives. At the turn of the century, Mississippi County's economy was in many ways characteristic of most high-poverty, low-wage, low-education attainment, agrarian-based county-level economies in the Lower Mississippi Delta. The county had the mitigating influence of employment and related economic opportunity from the Eaker Air Force Base.

In the late 1980s, local municipal, county, civic and Chamber of Commerce leadership negotiated a partnership with state government and the private sector that resulted in the construction of the first Nucor Steel Mill in the Arkansas Delta. Today, through continued state government and expanded collaboration with various federal agencies, including the Department of Commerce and the Department of Transportation, a cluster-based network of steel mills and satellite businesses has evolved. According to the

Blytheville-Gosnell Area Chamber of Commerce, this network currently provides 4,000 jobs with average salaries of \$15 per hour.

Confronted with the 1992 closure of Eaker Air Force Base, the Blytheville-Gosnell Regional Airport Authority successfully established collaborative state, federal, and private-sector partnerships that have led to the redevelopment of the base into the Arkansas Aeroplex. The Aeroplex is now a multi-faceted campus-like complex with an industrial park, fiber optic park, office park, distribution center, housing complex for the elderly and aviation park with the longest runway—11,600 feet—in Arkansas. Currently, the Aeroplex provides 700 jobs at an average salary of \$10 an hour.

Mississippi County is rich in Native American and geological, historical, cultural, and archeological sites because of proximity to the Mississippi River and the New Madrid Earthquake fault-line. Negotiations are underway with state and federal agencies, particularly the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior, to establish the Mississippi Valley Historical and Archeological Park for the Lower Mississippi Delta region in Mississippi County.

In recognition of Mississippi County's multi-modal air, surface, rail and water infrastructure and strategic "gateway" location for north-south surface and water access to Arkansas, the Arkansas Delta and Memphis, the Blytheville/Mississippi County Regional Intermodal Facilities Authority currently has underway, in conjunction with the Army Corps of Engineers, a feasibility study for construction of the Blytheville slackwater harbor; and has recently published, under the auspices of the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department, a highly promising analysis of *Blytheville/Northeast Arkansas' Intermodal Transportation and Freight Shipping Needs*. The potential for a comprehensive surface, air, water and rail intermodal freight and passenger complex in Blytheville is great.

Delta Race Relations Consortium

The Mississippi Delta has a notorious history of racial discrimination and oppression of African-Americans. From this ominous background, the North Delta Mississippi Enterprise Community (NDMEC), through its Strategic Plan, Benchmarks and programs, is determined to create a new day of equal opportunity and understanding between people of diverse backgrounds. Our race relations programs include:

1. Delta Race Relations Consortium – Convened by the EC the Consortium is comprised of two Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Mississippi Valley state University and Jackson state University), two traditionally white universities (the University of Mississippi or "Ole Miss" and Delta state University), the Mississippi Delta Empowerment Zone Alliance, NDMEC and community representatives. The Consortium aims to overcome barriers to communication between blacks and whites in the delta by specific, community-driven development projects. A research component will be included to find out what best facilitates solutions to communication barriers.
2. Community Training Seminars – In conjunction with our Community Training Institute, the EC conducts two (2) race relations day-long events per year. Past speakers have included former USDA Secretary Mike Espy, Sen. Thad Cochran, Gov. Ronnie Musgrove, Lawrence Guyot, former Chair of the Mississippi

Freedom Democratic Party and other business, religious, and non-profit stakeholders.

3. Credit access testing and Fair Housing – As a partner in a HBCU grant with Coahoma Community College, the EC conducted a first-ever commercial credit/housing development test of area banks that showed wide spread violations of federal housing and lending laws. We have also conducted seminars on Fair Housing and are now applying to be a HUD Fair Housing - Private Enforcement Agency.

**MID-SOUTH DELTA LOCAL INITIATIVES SUPPORT
CORPORATION (LISC)
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

(Submitted by Mid-South Delta Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), a nonprofit organization with headquarters in Greenville, Mississippi. Mid-South Delta LISC invests in revitalizing communities by channeling private resources from corporations and foundations to community development corporations for housing, community development, and job creation projects.)

The country's robust economic engine in this remarkable decade has all but bypassed the Delta. But, there is hidden good news: a growing record of achievements by local community development corporations—neighborhood-based, nonprofit organizations that have produced impressive results in towns up and down the Delta. There are many signs of this progress: families have bought new affordable homes, child care centers have been built, affordable rental units have been constructed, and jobs have been created. Beyond the small towns that each group works in, the impact of each development, standing alone, is not great. But, given the region's unusual handicaps, they are significant. The Delta is not bereft of initiative and ideas, but of capital. Far from the centers of media, commerce and government, their achievements, like their problems, get scant notice. The best investment in the Delta would be dollars, technical assistance, training and organizational support for these groups that have worked successfully, in virtual obscurity and under oppressive handicaps, to improve opportunities in the region.

PROPOSAL FOR A ‘NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER’

**Presented by Tulane-Xavier Center for Bioenvironmental Research, New Orleans,
Louisiana, John A. McLachlan, Director**

Tulane University is pleased to be leading a partnership of public and private organizations that intend to create “The National Museum of the Mississippi River: A center for exploring river science, culture, and technology.” Other institutional partners include the Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans, Xavier University, and the Audubon Institute.

The center, to be located in New Orleans, will include several components: the museum proper, a world-class scientific research arm, a think-tank, and an educational element.

All of these will relate to the entire river, and we believe the project will have a dramatic impact not only on New Orleans and Louisiana but on the entire Delta region.

The museum itself will examine everything from geology to the blues, from engineering and economic development to the cultures that developed along the river. We believe it will be a major tourist attraction, and we intend to build linkages between it and other tourist attractions the entire length of the river, and particularly in the Delta.

Potentially more important will be the research the center conducts. It will investigate the business of water. This includes, for example, everything from regional economic development issues addressed by the think-tank, to soil engineering for levees, to the so-called “dead zone” in the Gulf of Mexico, a multi-billion dollar question that involves nearly every entity along the river, from agribusiness in the upper Midwest to the great fisheries in the Gulf.

In addition, through its focus on river systems (and particularly the Mississippi system) and the convergence of the humanities and sciences, the center can create a new, rich learning model for students and scholars, for tourists and in-depth researchers. The center will sponsor a permanent program of interchange of students, faculty, and interested visitors from other institutions throughout the Delta and for that matter the world.

In short, the National Museum of the Mississippi River will be a world-class multi-purpose venue, a major tourist destination and a resource for local and international research, education, and policy studies on rivers around the world, but especially on the Mississippi itself. We are excited about the impact of such a facility on the region, and are in the process of engaging partners throughout the Mississippi Valley and elsewhere to make it a reality.

Greening the Delta: Strengthening the Economy Through Ecological Restoration

This statement is presented by Cynthia R. Brown, Mississippi River Project Director of The Nature Conservancy, an international conservation organization founded in 1951.

The challenge of our society in this new century is to recognize the interdependency of a healthy environment and robust economy in the Delta and to implement strategies that integrate resource conservation with compatible economic development. Leaders throughout the Delta are responding to this challenge, recognizing that environmental and economic issues can no longer be considered independent of each other. One strategy that offers promise for hundreds of Delta landowners is to restore forests to areas that are only marginally profitable in conventional row-crop production. Through politically popular incentive programs like the Wetlands Reserve Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program, and Partners for Wildlife, farm equipment once used to plant soybeans, corn, and cotton is now putting thousands of acres of trees back into Delta soils. Up-front payments make this economically possible in the near-term for farmers, and strong hardwood prices promise substantial economic returns on timber far into the future.

Conservation easements ensure that timber will be harvested in a sustainable manner and that established forests will provide all the amenities society values. Private companies

are also becoming increasingly interested in forest restoration and have invested millions of dollars to establish forests that will sequester thousands of tons of carbon and thus offset greenhouse gases produced by their operations. In short, reforestation is correcting many of the environmental problems facing the Delta while also providing an income for landowners.

Reestablishment of the bottomland hardwood forest and improving water quality also promises to increase local revenues generated from hunting and fishing the Delta's forests and water bodies. Tens of millions are spent each year on hunting and fishing licenses in Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana, with much of this being contributed by out-of-state visitors. Millions more are spent on tackle, bait, shells, and fuel. In addition, reestablishment of the hardwood forest in the Delta is enhancing nature-based tourism. The lure of the Delta's swampy setting, coupled with its unique culture and history, provides an opportunity for tourism perhaps unparalleled anywhere in the country. In the 1990s, vacationers were visiting the Mississippi River more than 12 million times each year, generating billions of dollars and supporting tens of thousands of jobs.

The Delta's people will always depend on its agricultural economy. But a sustained quality of life also depends on clean water, protection from floods, soil conservation, opportunities for recreation and tourism, wildlife habitat, and opportunities for education and research - all amenities provided by the Mississippi River's forested wetlands.

Today, public and private entities - including thousands of landowners, non-profit organizations, federal, tribal, state, and local agencies, private companies, and private foundations - are creating partnerships that emphasize common solutions and find creative economic mechanisms for restoring bottomland hardwood forests. In the past eight years, nearly half a million acres of marginally productive farmland have been restored to bottomland hardwood forest through these partnerships.

This on-the-ground implementation sends a powerful message. People from throughout the Delta are committed to creating a secure and healthy future for our children. And, we look forward to the day when mature forests and clean rivers provide important habitat for native wildlife of every sort.

LOWER MISSISSIPPI DELTA DEVELOPMENT CENTER—STATEMENT ON NATURAL RESOURCES

(The Lower Mississippi Delta Development Center is a major nonprofit organization that promotes economic development and conservation of natural resources in all seven states of the Delta region.)

The soil, water and related natural resources have made the Delta region a world class agricultural area, contributing, in a major way, to the overall economy of the region. The economic impact of the natural resources of the Delta is almost impossible to calculate since so much of the total economy utilizes the soil, water, minerals, rivers, uplands and wetlands and all of their complex ecosystem components. The major concern of the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Center is that these basic resources need to be wisely used and conserved so that this generation and future ones can continue to utilize and receive the benefits that these resources offer the Delta. The LMDDC has developed a list of recommendations that it believes would assist in satisfying its concerns for these

resources. This list includes the creation or naming of a Delta entity that would coordinate or lead the overall economic development of the region; maintaining or accelerating programs of point and non-point pollution control for the Mississippi River system; and expansion of the Conservation Reserve Program and Wetland Reserve Program to reverse the loss of valuable coastal wetlands along the Gulf of Mexico.

COMMENTS FROM SOUTHEAST MISSOURI DELTA, EAST PRAIRIE ENTERPRISE COMMUNITY

The area around East Prairie, Missouri will be freed from backwater flooding by the completion of the approved Enterprise Community Strategic Plan to implement the St. John's Bayou and New Madrid Floodway Project. The completion of this project will make it possible for residents of East Prairie and the surrounding area to move freely to jobs in the community or to go to work in other places.

For more than 60 years, residents had struggled to complete the flood control plan for their area. Over these years, persistent flooding increased the urgency to control these floods that have severely impacted agriculture, disrupted utility services and businesses, closed schools, dislocated families and flooded roads. Correcting this became possible in December 1994 with the Presidential designation of East Prairie as an Enterprise Community, having met eligibility criteria regarding size, poverty, unemployment and general distress—conditions typical of the rural Mississippi Delta. The approved Enterprise Community strategic plan includes implementation of the St. John's Bayou and New Madrid Floodway Project as a means to help improve the economic status and overall quality of life throughout the region. The first phase of the project has been completed.

Related to the flood control project are tourism, transportation and economic revitalization components of the Enterprise Community strategic plan. Tourism goals include the connection of several adjacent natural resources: Ten Mile Pond Conservation Area (3,800 acres); Big Oak Tree state Park; No. 7 Wildlife Refuge Area, Hickman-Dorena Ferry (a new ferry re-establishing transportation across the Mississippi); and Towasahgy (Mississippian Indian era mound builders encampment). Economic revitalization includes the preservation of older business buildings and a reduction in the local unemployment rate. Transportation goals include the completion of Highway 60 east across southeast Missouri into Kentucky. Completion of these projects will help to highlight existing resources and promote the region's development.

A View Regarding Kentucky Delta Region Development Issues

(Submitted by Robert Coleman, Paducah, Kentucky City Commissioner)

Funding to support the following activities would promote community and economic development in the Mississippi Delta region:

Transportation

- Develop additional four-lane routes to serve as feeder routes to the Interstate system. These routes should be designed to accommodate 48' – 102' trucks.

- Provide support for the development of additional public transportation operations. The lack of transportation is often cited as a barrier to employment for low-income residents in rural areas.
- Place an emphasis on the development of existing riverports and efforts to increase commercial air service

Infrastructure

- Installation or repair of on-site wastewater treatment systems.
- Extend public water and wastewater service to rural areas in an effort to sustain economic development.
- Designate water and wastewater treatment consolidation projects as a higher priority for funding.

Workforce Development

- Develop programs that provide worker training and retraining to improve the skills so the region's workforce is able to compete in world economy. Efforts should be made to focus resources on the under trained.
- Efforts to recruit employers that offer a livable wage.
- Increase opportunities for access to the Internet for the marketing of products and telecommuting where appropriate.

Health care

- Develop a health care system that makes quality care available in rural areas.
- Place an emphasis on wellness/preventive care.

Housing

- Increase resources for low income housing rehabilitation.
- Increase opportunities to obtain affordable new homes.
- Increase efforts to develop alternative living arrangements for region's elderly and disabled.

Each program should have a mechanism to expedite implementation. These measures will increase job opportunities and improve the quality of life for residents of the Delta region.

THE INTERSTATE 69 INITIATIVE

(Statement of Terry Sherwood, Chairman of the I-69 Initiative, a Delta organization that promotes the development of Interstate 69.)

The critical link to Interstate 69 is the Great River Bridge. The potential economic boost which this bridge, coupled with proposed routing of I-69, will ultimately have on the severely depressed sector of the Arkansas/Mississippi Delta is difficult to measure. Suffice it to say, it will undoubtedly serve to provide unparalleled opportunity to the some eighteen counties impacted by the economic significance this international trade corridor will anchor as it establishes its route through south and east Arkansas to the crossing point of the Mississippi River.

The impact and its significance for fostering economic growth and development is multiplied through the potential this bridge crossing will provide in opening up intermodal opportunities to meet the diversified and growing demands of both our intra-national and international sectors comprising our worldwide economic markets.

The Great River Bridge connected to I-69, an international corridor, will connect the southern and eastern sector of Arkansas to the heartland of the United states, which represents a market of 16 million people strong and serves as a predominant production center responsible for generating the vast majority of all manufactured items in the United states.

Hopefully, this location will not only be cleared as the approved site for the Great River Bridge, but construction will be allowed to commence in the immediate future in support of anchoring the route location of I-69 through Arkansas and beyond.

Statement of Zachary Taylor Parkway Commission, Louisiana

The Zachary Taylor Parkway Commission was created by the Louisiana Legislature for the purpose of promoting the construction of a modern four-lane parkway between I-49 near Alexandria, Louisiana and I-59 near Poplarville, Mississippi.

The centerpiece of the Parkway is the bridge that is to be constructed across the Mississippi River between St. Francisville and New Roads, Louisiana at an estimated cost of \$150 million in state funds. Perhaps I should point out that the high cost projected for this project reflects the fact that the cost of constructing the approaches to a bridge in Louisiana sometimes exceeds the cost of the bridge itself.

I am pleased to state that the Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development last year agreed to provide sufficient funding from the TIMED program to complete the necessary engineering to site the bridge and to subsequently acquire the right of way to preserve the corridor. TIMED is an acronym use to designate the Louisiana transportation improvement program that is funded by a 4 cent per gallon fuel tax approved by Louisiana voters in 1989.

The Parkway will go through 8 Louisiana Parishes and 1 Mississippi County. All eight of the Louisiana parishes are among the 219 counties and parishes determined by Congress in 1988 to comprise the Lower Mississippi Delta Region.

As might be expected, poverty and high unemployment have characterized the area that will be served by the Zachary Taylor Parkway.

We commend President Clinton for the role he played as Chairman of the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission when he was Governor of the state of Arkansas.

We commend the Secretary for the key role he played in the development of the Report issued in 1990 by the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission when he was serving as vice chair of the Arkansas state Highway Commission. And we express appreciation (a) for his work in connection with the issuance of the 1995 interim Report entitled "*Linking the Delta Region with the Nation and the World,*" and (b) for his continuing interest in the effort to provide substantial federal support of the Delta Region. The Delta Region is long overdue in receiving the level of federal funding that has been provided for many years to the Appalachian Region. We urge the President to press for this action and we urge the Congress to begin appropriating the funds.

We believe that the enactment by Congress of a law authorizing such tax credits is the single most effective short-term action that can be undertaken to improve the Delta Region. And we believe that the lending of money to state governments by financial institutions which participate in such a program of tax credits is the most important role for the private sector

in the Delta's future. We suggest that the wise utilization by state governments of such funds in connection with transportation projects is the most important role for state in the initiative to improve social and economic conditions in the Delta Region.

A FARM SAFETY NET PROPOSAL: THE MARKETING LOAN CONCEPT

(By Jim Dupree, Presidential Appointee to the Commission on 21st Century American Production Agriculture, and Harvey Joe Sanner, an Arkansas farmer active in the Delta Compact, the Delta Caucus, and head of the Arkansas American Agriculture Movement)

Efforts to devise a mechanism that can be incorporated into a comprehensive farm bill that will provide a basic safety net to family farmers eventually lead one to the marketing loan concept. We are not aware of any other plan, currently being offered as a replacement to current legislation, that meets the criteria as well as the marketing loan plan.

The marketing loan concept recognizes the importance of prices paid to farmers while acknowledging the budget concerns, consideration to exports, trade implications and a policy objective of having a truly counter-cyclical program.

Being a true safety net leaves no room for arguing that program benefits will lead to farmer cannibalism or inflated land or rental values. Any benefits received by farmers would be during times of disastrous price levels. Most years would require no federal outlays.

The concept could also be styled to provide a safety net feature to serve as a disaster program in times of production losses. This program could be developed with far greater efficiencies and serve as a more constructive relief measure than attempts to expand crop insurance. Two concerns could be addressed here: reducing federal costs while restoring integrity to the disaster programs.

The policy objective of preserving a family farm system as the chief production sector for American agriculture is not only laudable but also obtainable. This marketing loan concept is a very straightforward, uncomplicated, easily administered program.

At this juncture we are confident that this proposal can withstand any honest policy assessment. Farmers designed this plan for farmers and the level of acceptance has been overwhelming. Producers interpret this as a workable program that can be applied to all crops and regions of the country. They—along with farm program administrators—understand the practicality of this program. They also appreciate the fairness related to producers being the beneficiaries when conditions warrant program disbursements.

We find no obstacle that can't be overcome in the implementation of this program while adhering to the policy objectives identified as worthy goals for the next farm bill.

Fiscally responsible, properly directed benefits, and counter-cyclical—all are undeniable traits of the marketing loan concept.

ARKANSAS FARM BUREAU STATEMENT ON ECONOMIC AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA REGION

(Submitted by the Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation)

Farm Bureau is a private, non-governmental organization of farm and ranch families united for the purpose of influencing public policy for the betterment of agriculture and rural communities. The general goal of the organization is the improvement of net farm income. The Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation is the 9th largest state Farm Bureau in America, and is affiliated with the American Farm Bureau Federation, which is the nation's largest farm organization with over 4.5 million member families. In Arkansas, Farm Bureau has more than 215,000 member families.

Agriculture is Arkansas' largest industry and the largest component of Arkansas' economy. Gross sales of agricultural commodities total over \$5 billion annually. Including the value of agriculture and food processing, the industry accounts for approximately 25 percent of Arkansas' economy. Over one-half of Arkansas' total land is devoted to agricultural production. The state's 14.4 million acres of agricultural land are divided among 44,000 farms, with an average farm size of about 320 acres. The crop production component of Arkansas agriculture is concentrated in the state's Delta area. Sustainability of Arkansas' agricultural industry is vital to future economic and rural development. There are numerous current issues that will impact the sustainability of agriculture. These include water availability, acceptance of biotechnology, world market access, future direction in federal farm programs, and regulatory issues.

Arkansas is America's largest rice-producing state, with over 1.6 million acres accounting for approximately 45 percent of all U.S. rice. Arkansas ranks 4th nationally in irrigated cropland with 12 eastern counties in the nation's top 100. Water availability has been a primary reason for the growth in agriculture, particularly in the eastern part of the state. Continued availability of water will largely determine the continuance of this growth. Developmental needs to provide for the continued availability of water include incentives for the development of surface water systems to reduce dependence on ground water resources.

Exports are vital to Arkansas agriculture. Access to world markets is essential to allow the state's agriculture to reach its full potential. Approximately 50 percent of the world population is subject to some trade-restrictive policy such as tariffs or embargoes, and approximately 95 percent of the world's consumers live outside the United States. Global food demand is increasing and the ability to meet this growing demand depends upon trade reforms to allow for market access to Arkansas farmers.

The current commodity price situation facing U.S. farmers is bleak, with most prices at or near 20 year lows. U.S. farm policy must address this situation in order for U.S. agriculture to survive. Future farm programs must provide for a safety net for producers in times of low prices, and also provide export incentives to allow movement of U.S. commodities into world markets. Failure to provide for a means of producer survival in times of low prices will prohibit the sustainability of Arkansas agriculture and limit its potential in providing for economic development in the state.

Expansion of the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

(Submitted by supporters of the National Association of Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs in the Delta region, both within and outside of the Delta region, including Moses Williams of the Southern EZ/EC Forum.)

The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) provides participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) with vouchers to purchase locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets during the local growing season. FMNP vouchers enable WIC participants to obtain nutritious fresh produce in addition to the other foods WIC provides. Local fruit and vegetable farmers participating in the FMNP are reimbursed for the value of the vouchers, thereby increasing their farm income and expanding their customer base. In fiscal year 1998 (the latest year for which program data is available), the program reached 1.35 million WIC participants and 9,600 farmers selling at over 1,500 market locations. Farmers received in excess of \$12.4 million through FMNP sales.

Most states in the Mississippi Delta region administer the FMNP. Kentucky and Missouri began their FMNPs in 1994. Illinois initiated a program in 1995, as did the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. The states of Arkansas and Mississippi joined the FMNP in 1998. In these locations, the FMNP is administered either by the state health department or the department of agriculture. The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program should be expanded into the only remaining states in the Delta where it still does not exist: Louisiana and Tennessee. It should also be gradually expanded within the five states where it currently exists.

Highlights from Delta Listening Sessions, 1999

This memorandum reflects broad themes that were dominant in all listening sessions. The attachments contain excerpts from the proceedings of the sessions organized by the open space topics (Human Capital Development, Environmental, Natural and Physical Assets, Business and Industrial Development, and Diversity, Equality and Social Issues).

THEMES

There were a number of strong themes that were common to all the listening sessions and often prevalent across several of the open space topics. Three of the recurring themes are discussed below:

Regional Planning and Development: There is strong support for a regional planning commission, similar to other federally sanctioned and funded regional commissions.

However, attendees were quite specific that this commission should be "owned" by the region. In other words, its members should be the regional stakeholders.

While current regional efforts were acknowledged, it was believed that the time is right to create an entity that has clear responsibility for the region's planning. In most cases, it was recommended that a formal strategic plan be developed for the region that includes the active input of all partners—individuals, local, state, and federal. In addition, the

commission’s membership should be diverse, inclusive and representative of the Delta population.

Suggested roles and responsibilities for this entity would be as the primary clearinghouse and coordinator for collaborative efforts. In some cases, this was interpreted as an information provider so that all organizations interested in the common goals of the region could access current, up-to-date information. Others suggested that the commission could also spearhead technology advances and linkages to further the goals of the region.

Collaboration: Collaboration was predominately featured as key to the success for any further efforts to promote progress and prosperity for the Delta region. It was not identified just as a means to an end, but both as a means **and** an end.

In one session, collaboration was called “active inclusiveness”. Whatever the term, participants described it as a very deliberate effort on the part of individuals, agencies, departments, or even a Delta Commission that can ensure that grassroots stakeholders, who are the intended beneficiaries of efforts to improve the region, are integrally involved in all discussions and decisions.

Collaboration was also understood to mean partnering. This included expanding the current coalitions as well as exploring some options for non-traditional or creative partnerships to leverage community resources and funding opportunities. Finally, facilitating meaningful and productive collaboration is thought to be a significant role for a Delta Commission.

Education: Education meant different things to each open space topic but was critical to success in all. Of course, quality in Kindergarten through 12 education should continue to be pursued, but life-long learning in the form of trade skills, leadership development, and community capacity building were all part of the expanded definition of education.

There were very few ideas for progress in the Delta that did not include education and learning. It was stated again and again that this learning should not be bounded by any artificial barriers but should and could occur at many levels—department to department, agency to agency, federal to federal, and state to state, community to community, industry to small entrepreneur, university to schools, and on and on. Mentoring in its many forms was a frequently mentioned method for learning and capacity building. The following charts summarize the priorities, as stated by the participants near the end of each listening session.

(These charts and the above summary were prepared by Janna Evans, a nonpartisan consultant who helped organize the sessions.)

HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

Top Three Priorities (from presenters’ notes)

WEST MEMPHIS	BATON ROUGE	VICKSBURG	CAPE GIRARDEAU
Comprehensive and economic development	Quality education for workforce development	Access for all	Education: Increase # of students graduating, and/or passing skill measurements and

			getting credit for life skills and experience
Improved Education (early childhood through adult education)	Capacity building of Delta region by identifying and developing leaders at local levels	Convergence of resources	Housing: More high quality/affordable housing appraised in an unbiased manner constructed by more local involvement
	Establish a legislative/Congressio nally created Delta region Commission to oversee Delta enhancement projects, implement recommendations resulting from these listening visits and Delta study	Coordination of leadership	Health Care: Improve access to health care in underserved areas by cooperative transportation programs, changes in state policy and insurance practices so mid-level practitioners can make more decisions Methods to Achieve: Collaboration and keeping people (at all levels) involved.

ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL AND PHYSICAL ASSETS

Top Three Priorities (from presenters' notes)

WEST MEMPHIS	BATON ROUGE	VICKSBURG	CAPE GIRARDEAU
Delta image and unity of goals and objectives	Reexamine federal policies and funding to achieve economic and environmental sustainability in the delta, particularly those related to water quality and quantity, air quality, and habitat restoration, preservation, conservation. Include within this the roles of the various agencies, relationships to issues, need for partnerships and federal/state task forces/funding to address issues, and streamline processes for wetlands and	Improved integrated planning and implementation	Transportation: Complete I24 to I57 to US60; Technology transfer to all schools and communities in upper Delta; complete Birds Point/New Madrid Flood control project

	water-related issues (e.g., see National Academy of Sciences report on the COE)		
Effective intermodal transportation system	Implement policies to aid survival of family farms	A sustainable institutional mechanism to ensure follow-up and implementation of this initiative	Agriculture: World market competitiveness, i.e., no sanctions on agricultural trade; Sustain viable, independent family farms, both large and small. Increase value of farm commodities before they leave the north Delta area.
Delta Regional Authority (as a vehicle to pass resources to region)	Develop region wide and coordinated, multimodal transportation plan	Stress the quality, quantity, and coordination of water issues and projects	Environmental: Protection and improvement of water resources; Improve wildlife and fish habitat, continue Farm Bill Incentive Programs; Integrate structural and non-structural water controls

BUSINESS AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Top Three Priorities (from presenters' notes)

WEST MEMPHIS	BATON ROUGE	VICKSBURG	CAPE GIRARDEAU
Education: Add access to public education; Training in trade skills and immediate employable jobs and how to build a successful business	More involvement by all; more awareness, and firmer commitment to the Delta program; better advertising dollars, invite business and university representatives— involve students, CEO's and presidents	Education for school-aged children; education to the community as to what resources (federal/state/local) that are available as well as training for entrepreneurs; People need to know how to access programs, leverage dollars, etc.	Develop master (regional) plan with local input— grassroots up
Infrastructure: Highway maintenance to sustain tourism (Route 69); Basic services for industry,	Common ground: operate on the similarities that their projects have with other communities;	Financial support: which includes access to capital from our financial institutions for business start-ups	Formalize entity that will take the leadership role; create a Delta Foundation/Caucus;

including housing, not just water & sewer; access to technology to overcome barriers that rural creates	Accentuate the positives of the community and encourage support for one stop control information access having a point person to champion issues and share information where dollars may be transferred by an agency rather than go back unused— networking	and expansions	emphasize with cost benefit analysis
Access to capital: Target banks to help make credit available in small towns/markets; focus on value-added to agricultural products	Access to capital/funding: Make it economically feasible; Give incentives to venture capitalists and other agencies who support these efforts	Political Input: Elected officials show commitment and time devoted to training and leveraging with others (i.e., chambers of commerce, etc.)	Fully fund a regional leadership entity

DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Top Three Priorities (from presenters' notes)

WEST MEMPHIS	BATON ROUGE	VICKSBURG	CAPE GIRARDEAU
Establish ongoing think tank opportunities for genuine communication	Develop more communication links with grassroots people; get their ideas and input in developing their communities, increasing opportunity. We also need to develop capacity for these residents to take control of their destiny	Fund and require the involvement of grassroots input in the planning and decision process with an assurance that the decisions will actually translate into funding actions with specific measurable results	Leadership development & mentorship: information transfer critical to this
Address issue of distribution of and access to property, economic resources, and political power	Racism is a problem but economic disparity is an even greater problem; develop wealth building initiatives with input from the community	Fund capacity building activities	Foster a positive image and perception of the entire Delta region

Maintain and strengthen legislative mandates and guidelines designed to insure equity in access to and representation in all areas of community improvement	Infrastructure development for Louisiana that will include transportation, education, health care, etc.	Address the breakdown of the public school system and the inadequacy of any predominately single race school in our mixed race society of the MS Delta	Active inclusiveness in planning the entire region
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For verbatim records of all the listening sessions, contact:
U.S. Department of Transportation
Office of Inter-Governmental Affairs
400 7th and D Streets, S.W.
Room 10405
Washington, D.C. 20590
(202) 366-1524

CONCLUSION

President Clinton encourages all the supporters of the Mississippi Delta regional Initiative to persevere in this movement to assure that the people of this region can participate fairly and fully in the unprecedented prosperity America faces at the beginning of the new millennium. The Delta Initiative will continue to support the bipartisan, fundamental recommendations advocated in this Report, from the establishment of a permanent regional commission, to the President's budget proposal for additional funding for the region, to the "circuit rider" proposal for technical aid to the poorest and smallest communities.

In the "information age" of the 21st Century, it is critical to listen to the voices of the Delta and disseminate information as widely as possible. The Delta Initiative encourages all people interested in the region that lies at America's heart to provide us with your ideas and recommendations for the region's future progress. We invite communications to the Department of Transportation's Website at <http://www.dot.gov/delta>. The recommendations in this Report are part of a continuing process. A compendium will be published shortly after the May 2000 *Delta Vision, Delta Voices* conference in Washington, D.C. to summarize the results of that meeting. There are many "Voices of the Delta," of course, in addition to those included in this Report, and we invite all of those voices to provide their thoughts for the compendium and the Delta Website.

Secretary Slater and other leaders of the Initiative will continue to hold listening sessions in the region and consult with the people of the Delta.

As the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission wrote eloquently a decade ago, "If there is one common plea of the people from the Delta it is this: 'What about us?'" The quest to respond to that plea requires a holistic, integrated strategy supported by the bipartisan coalition of forces emphasized throughout this Report—Federal, State, local, private business, faith-based organizations, nonprofit foundations, and grassroots organizations. The value of ethnic diversity and cooperative race relations must always be kept foremost as we pursue the lofty goals of working for the Delta's progress. We must always promote sound environmental policies that will assure and strengthen economic development for future generations. As Vice President Gore urges in the opening of *Delta Vision, Delta Voices*, "Let us all join together to push for the continued success of this initiative and bring the economic prosperity of America to all Americans."

APPENDICES

Appendix A

LOWER MISSISSIPPI DELTA STATES, COUNTIES AND PARISHES

Arkansas (42 Counties): Arkansas, Ashley, Baxter, Bradley, Calhoun, Chicot, Clay, Cleveland, Craighead, Crittenden, Cross, Dallas, Desha, Drew, Fulton, Grant, Greene, Independence, Izard, Jackson, Jefferson, Lawrence, Lee, Lincoln, Lonoke, Marion, Mississippi, Monroe, Ouachita, Phillips, Poinsett, Prairie, Pulaski, Randolph, St. Francis, Searcy, Sharp, Stone, Union, Van Buren, White, Woodruff

Illinois (16 Counties): Alexander, Franklin, Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Jackson, Johnson, Massac, Perry, Pope, Pulaski, Randolph, Saline, Union, White, Williamson

Kentucky (21 Counties): Ballard, Caldwell, Calloway, Carlisle, Christian, Crittenden, Fulton, Graves, Henderson, Hickman, Hopkins, Livingston, Lyon, Marshall, McCracken, McLean, Muhlenberg, Todd, Trigg, Union, Webster

Louisiana (45 Parishes): Acadia, Allen, Ascension, Assumption, Avoyelles, Caldwell, Catahoula, Concordia, E. Baton Rouge, E. Carroll, E. Feliciana, Evangeline, Franklin, Grant, Iberia, Iberville, Jackson, Jefferson, Lafourche, La Salle, Lincoln, Livingston, Madison, Morehouse, Orleans, Ouachita, Pointe Coupee, Plaquemines, Rapides, Richland, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. Helena, St. James, St. John the Baptist, St. Landry, St. Martin, Tangipahoa, Tensas, Union, Washington, W. Baton Rouge, W. Carroll, W. Feliciana, Winn

Mississippi (45 Counties): Adams, Amite, Attala, Benton, Bolivar, Carroll, Claiborne, Coahoma, Copiah, Covington, DeSoto, Franklin, Grenada, Hinds, Holmes, Humphreys, Issaquena, Jefferson, Jefferson Davis, Lafayette, Lawrence, Leflore, Lincoln, Madison, Marion, Marshall, Montgomery, Panola, Pike, Quitman, Rankin, Sharkey, Simpson, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Tate, Tippah, Tunica, Union, Walthall, Warren, Washington, Wilkinson, Yalobusha, Yazoo

Missouri (29 Counties): Bollinger, Butler, Cape Girardeau, Carter, Crawford, Dent, Douglas, Dunklin, Howell, Iron, Madison, Mississippi, New Madrid, Oregon, Ozark, Pemiscott, Perry, Phelps, Reynolds, Ripley, St. Genevieve, St. Francois, Scott, Shannon, Stoddard, Texas, Washington, Wayne, Wright

Tennessee (21 Counties): Benton, Carroll, Chester, Crockett, Decatur, Dyer, Fayette, Gibson, Hardeman, Hardin, Haywood, Henderson, Henry, Lake, Lauderdale, McNairy, Madison, Obion, Shelby, Tipton, Weakley

Appendix B

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

1987: The Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission was envisioned by former Senator Dale Bumpers (AR) and former Congressman Mike Espy (MS), who drafted the legislation authorizing the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission (commonly called The Delta Commission).

1988: Congress enacted *Public Law 100460*, establishing the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission, to assess the needs, obstacles, and goals of the people living in the Lower Mississippi Delta region. The region includes 219 counties and parishes within the states of Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee. The Delta Commission was chaired by then-Arkansas Governor William Jefferson Clinton, and was headquartered in Memphis, Tennessee.

1989: The Delta Commission studied, and made recommendations on the economic needs, problems, and opportunities of the Region, developing a 10-year economic development plan for the Delta. The first Report of The Delta Commission, *Body of the Nation: The Interim Report of the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission*, was released.

1990: The final Report was prepared and submitted to President Bush and the 101st Congress by The Delta Commission, entitled *The Delta Initiatives: Realizing the Dream...Fulfilling the Potential*.

1994: In the Clinton-Gore Administration's Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community program (EZ/EC), approximately one fourth of the rural EZs and ECs in the entire national program were located in the Delta—seven ECs as well as the Mississippi Delta Empowerment Zone Alliance (MDEZA).

1994: The Congress enacted *Public Law 103-433*, directing the Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt to undertake a comprehensive program of studies on the heritage of the Lower Mississippi Delta to identify resources and recommend methods to preserve and interpret the natural, cultural, and recreational resources of this region with economic development through enhanced tourism as the primary goal.

1994: On his extensive "border-to-border" tour, then Federal Highway Administrator Rodney Slater traveled through much of the Delta, and discussed with State officials the potential and timing for updating the 1990 Report.

1995: The Federal Highway Administration released *Linking The Delta region With The Nation and The World*, which updated progress in improving transportation and employment in the Lower Mississippi Delta region.

1996: The U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Interior (National Biological Survey), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USGS) cosponsored a Delta technical conference on agricultural/environmental issues, opportunities, and technology transfer.

1996: In its guidance on the 1996 Farm Bill, the U.S. Department of Agriculture committed to pursuing special initiatives, based upon partnerships and collaborations, to address the persistent poverty found in the Mississippi Delta. USDA, in collaboration with the Housing Assistance Council, began an initiative to pull together existing expertise to create a comprehensive community development strategy for the Delta.

1997: President Bill Clinton proposed in his FY1998 budget to commit \$26 million to revitalization efforts in the Delta region and proposes a Delta regional Commission.

1998: President Bill Clinton requested that Congress renew the Federal government's commitment to the region by creating the Delta region Economic Development initiative.

1998: U.S. Congressmen Harold Ford, Jr. (TN) and Marion Berry (AR) joined forces to gain congressional approval of the \$26 million plan by President Clinton to promote economic revitalization of the Lower Mississippi Delta region. Ford and Berry responded to the President's call by seeking full funding for the initiative. Twelve members of Congress—including Democratic Minority Leader Richard Gephardt—who represent congressional districts in the Lower Mississippi Delta region joined Ford and Berry in a letter to the House Appropriations Committee to gain approval of the initiative. Congress did not pass the plan.

1998: Vice President Al Gore announced a major initiative to combat the Delta's chronic poverty. The new initiative—the Delta regional Initiative—is a combined effort of the Southern Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Community Forum and the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Center. Vice President Gore, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, U.S. Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater, and U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Andrew Cuomo were signatories to this Memorandum of Understanding with the community development organizations.

1998: U. S. Transportation Secretary Rodney E. Slater convened "The Delta Beyond 2000" Conference in Memphis, Tennessee, where the Department of Transportation was joined by nine other Federal agencies, as well as a number of State and local leaders to discuss economic development challenges and other issues pertaining to the region. The Federal partners signed a Memorandum of Understanding, and agreed to assess Federal accomplishments toward fulfilling the goals and recommendations of the 1990 Delta Commission Report. In addition to Transportation, the initial nine Federal agencies included: Agriculture, Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Labor, Education, Interior, Small Business Administration, and the Environmental Protection Agency. In 1999, the MOU was expanded to include the Departments of Defense, Justice, Treasury, Veterans Affairs, Energy and the National Office of Drug Control Policy.

August 1998: On August 11, thirty regional organizations signed a “Delta Compact”, pledging \$40 million in resources and technical assistance for community economic development and committing to draft and implement a regional strategy.

January 1999: In Round II of the EZ/EC program, the new Southernmost Illinois Delta EZ was designated.

February 1999: In February, Transportation Secretary Slater traveled to the east Arkansas Delta region, and announced two DOT-funded projects: \$450,000 in Federal-aid funds for a highway feasibility study between Pine Bluff and Memphis and a Crowley Ridge Parkway dedication in Jonesboro highlighting the efficient and effective use of over one million dollars in FY99 discretionary funds. The trip, in which Secretary Slater had the opportunity to interact with State, county and local officials, and business and community leaders, specifically served as a reminder not only of how much has been accomplished in the Delta region but also how much work remains to be done.

March 1999: At his March 3 Cabinet meeting the President discussed accomplishments in the Delta region and the need for re-energized cooperation of all Federal Departments in achieving further improvement for the residents of the Delta region under the initiative.

July 1999: In July, as part of his New Markets Tour, President Clinton visited Clarksdale, MS to meet with local representatives and business leaders to encourage investment in the region.

September 1999: *The Mississippi Delta: Beyond 2000 Interim Report* is released. This document reviewed the progress achieved in fulfilling many of the 400 recommendations of the Delta Commission's 1990 report.

1999: In September, U.S. Senator Blanche Lincoln (AR) and U.S. Congressman Marion Berry (AR) introduced legislation to establish a Delta Regional Authority, “To provide economic, planning and coordination assistance needed for the development of the lower Mississippi River region.”

September-October 1999: Continuing President Clinton's effort to extend the nation's economic prosperity to underdeveloped regions such as the lower Mississippi Delta, U.S. Transportation Secretary Rodney E. Slater held four listening sessions in West Memphis, Arkansas; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Vicksburg, Mississippi; and Cape Girardeau, Missouri. These sessions brought together stakeholders in the region and solicited their views as part of the "Voices of the Delta" section in the Clinton Administration report *Delta Vision, Delta Voices* to be published in early 2000. The sessions, hosted by Transportation Secretary Slater, were an agency-wide collaborative effort of the Clinton-Gore Administration.

November 1999: President Clinton made a "New Markets Initiative" trip to Hermitage, Arkansas, to praise the Hermitage Tomato Cooperative as a model for small farmers and local economic development. USDA Rural Development funded the tomato cooperative, and it helped small tomato producers stay in farming, as well as creating jobs for a local tomato processing plant.

1999: In December, President Clinton visited West Memphis, Arkansas and announced support for the creation of a permanent regional commission, a "circuit rider" technical assistance program for rural areas, rural health care initiatives, and other policies aimed at addressing the economic problems of the region.

January 2000: In his State of the Union Address, President Bill Clinton announced a proposed package of targeted funding to address social and economic development needs in the Delta.

2000: President Bill Clinton proposed more than \$159 million for additional targeted funding in his FY2001 budget for the Delta region.

May 2000: President Bill Clinton convened a national conference in Washington, D.C. to address the future of the Delta's social and economic progress.

Appendix C

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

between the

**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING and URBAN DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF VETERAN AFFAIRS
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY
SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION**

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is made and entered into by and between the Department of Agriculture; Department of Commerce; Department of Defense; Department of Education; Department of Energy; Environmental Protection Agency; Federal Emergency Management Agency; Department of Health and Human Services; Department of Housing and Urban Development; Department of the Interior; Department of Justice; Department of Labor; Office of National Drug Control Policy; Small Business Administration; Department of Transportation; Department of the Treasury; Department of Veterans Affairs; Office of Personnel Management; Social Security Administration and the General Services Administration (collectively, "participating agencies").

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this MOU is to establish a general framework for cooperation between the participating agencies on economic revitalization initiatives in the Delta region. The participating agencies propose to work together to coordinate and support a broad-based government wide review and assessment of the Delta State region. This effort will build upon the work of President Clinton and Vice President Gore to strengthen rural communities for the 21st Century.

In particular, the participating agencies desire to work together in providing a review and update of the Delta Initiatives: "Realizing The Dream - Fulfilling The Future." This 1990 Report listed 400 recommendations and 68 goals. The participating agencies will establish the parameters of the assessment. They will work separately and together with State and local entities in developing channels for accessing research. The participating agencies will coordinate an appropriate final Report response and mechanism or medium for response.

This collaborative effort will promote the continued revitalization of the seven State Delta Region as discussed in the 1990 Report. The Lower Mississippi Delta Region of

the United States is an area flanking the lower Mississippi River, including parts of seven states: Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri and Tennessee. This Delta region has long been considered one of the poorest regions in the Nation. In addition, the purpose of this collaboration is to provide assistance in furthering the implementation of the 1990 Delta Initiative recommendations.

II. BACKGROUND

In 1988, Congress established the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission—providing for a bipartisan commission to study and make recommendations regarding economic needs, problems and opportunities in the Delta region, and to develop a 10-year regional economic development plan.

The Commission completed its work in 1990 and produced a final Report, which was submitted to then-President George Bush under the signature of the Commission's Chairman, then-Governor Bill Clinton. The Report was an aggressive, ambitious plan for the development of a large and integrally important region of our Nation. The Report focused on transportation; human capital development (education, job training, health and housing); natural and physical assets (agriculture and natural resources); private enterprise (entrepreneurial development, technology development and tourism); and the environment.

In 1995, the Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administrator Rodney E. Slater commissioned the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to update the 1990 Report with regard to the transportation element. A most important finding of the update was that the improved transportation facilities of the region had led to the creation of more jobs and more opportunity. In fact, there was a gain of 252,000 jobs from 1990 to 1995 and job growth in the Delta region has outperformed the rest of the Nation on a percentage basis since 1990.

III. APPLICABLE LAWS

All assistance provided under this MOU and subsequent interagency agreements shall be in accordance with U.S. laws and regulations. All contract work undertaken by the parties in furtherance of this MOU shall be performed in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

IV. STATEMENT OF MUTUAL INTEREST AND MUTUAL BENEFITS

The participating agencies are dedicated to providing assistance for the sustainable development of American communities. The complexity of the Delta's needs warrants a continued effort of examination and action. Solutions require participation at every level of government.

These agencies recognize the Delta region is rich with natural resources and physical assets. The Delta is positioned to help the Nation as a whole increase its competitiveness in a global economy.

V. THE PARTICIPATING AGENCIES AGREE TO:

Work together with State and local leaders at developing a thorough assessment and plan of action to the extent authorized by law, and continue throughout the process of review to provide appropriate assistance when and where needed in the Delta region to the extent appropriations are available.

VI. IT IS MUTUALLY AGREED AND UNDERSTOOD BY AND BETWEEN THE PARTICIPATING AGENCIES:

Each agency will develop and be responsible for its own portion of the review process.

The participating agencies will form a Working Group Task Force and meet as needed to coordinate activities and share information, and to help each agency more effectively perform its mission.

The formulation of a final review and presentation will be determined by this task force. Each agency understands that the intention of this MOU is to foster cooperation and streamlining among the participating agencies.

Specific work projects or activities that involve the transfer of funds, services, or property between the parties to this MOU will require the execution of separate agreements or contracts, contingent upon the availability of funds as appropriated by Congress. Each subsequent agreement or arrangement involving the transfer of funds, services, or property between the parties to this MOU must comply with all applicable statutes and regulations, including those statutes and regulations applicable to procurement activities. This MOU in no way restricts the participating agencies from participating in similar activities or arrangements with other public or private agencies.

Nothing in this MOU shall obligate the participating agencies to expend appropriations or to enter into any contract or other obligation.

This MOU may be modified or amended upon written request of any party and the concurrence of the others. Participation in this MOU may be terminated with a 60-day written notice of any party.

Additional agencies may be added to this MOU.

Unless terminated under the terms of section VI, this MOU will remain in full force and in effect until January 1, 2001.

VII. PRINCIPAL CONTACTS

To provide for consistent and effective communication between the participating agencies, each of the participating agencies shall appoint a representative to discuss and consider activities that may be pursued under this MOU.

VIII. SIGNATORIES

(20 signatures supplied on disk to be inserted here – in same order as at top of MOU)

Appendix D

EMPOWERMENT ZONES & ENTERPRISE COMMUNITIES IN THE DELTA REGION

RURAL EMPOWERMENT ZONES

Mid-Delta Mississippi Empowerment Zone, Mississippi

14000 Highway 82 West
P.O. Box 7275
Mississippi Valley State University
Itta Bena, Mississippi 38941
PH: 601-254-9957
FX: 601-254-9941

Southernmost Illinois Delta Empowerment Zone, Illinois

219 Rustic Campus Drive

Ullin, Illinois 62992
PH: 618-634-2284
FX: 618-634-2287

RURAL ENTERPRISE COMMUNITIES

North Delta Mississippi EC, Mississippi

215 South Pocahontas Street
Sardis, MS 38666
PH: 601-487-1968
FX: 601-487-0088

Northeast Louisiana Delta EC, Louisiana

400 East Craig Street, Suite B
Tallulah, LA 71282
PH: 318-574-0995
FX: 318-574-3132

Macon Ridge EC, Louisiana

903 Louisiana Avenue
P.O. Drawer 768
Ferriday, LA 71334
PH: 318-757-3033
FX: 318-757-4212

Mississippi County EC, Arkansas

205 South Second Street
Blytheville, AR 72316
PH: 870-532-2348

FX: 870-532-2625

East Central Arkansas, Arkansas

1000 Airport Road
Forrest City, AR 72335
PH: 870-630-2005
FX: 870-630-2035

City of East Prairie, Missouri

Susanna Wesley Family Learning Center
207 North Washington Street
P.O. Box 249
East Prairie, MO 63845
PH: 573-649-3731
FX: 573-649-5028

Fayette/Haywood EC, Tennessee

157 Poplar, Room B150
Memphis, TN 38103
PH: 901-545-4610
FX: 901-545-3519

URBAN ENTERPRISE COMMUNITIES

Pulaski County, Arkansas

400 West Markham, Suite 703-704
Little Rock, AR 72201-2424
PH: 501-340-5675
FX: 501-340-5680

Ouachita Parish, Louisiana

P.O. Box 4268
Monroe, LA 71211
PH: 318-329-4031
FX: 318-329-4034

New Orleans, Louisiana

Office of Federal and State Programs
1300 Perdido Street, Room 2E10
New Orleans, LA 70112
PH: 504-565-6414
FX: 504-565-6423

Memphis, Tennessee

Center for Neighborhoods
619 North Seventh Street

Memphis, TN 38107
PH: 901-526-6627
FX: 901-523-9388

Jackson, Mississippi
Office of City Planning/Minority
Business
218 South President Street
Jackson, MS 39205
PH: 601-960-1908
FX: 601-960-2192

APPENDIX E

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL ON HOUSING ISSUES

URBAN HOUSING ISSUES

In the early part of this century, Beale Street in Memphis, Tennessee, was vibrant with juke joints and clubs, serving as one of the cultural centers of the Mississippi Delta region. W. C. Handy, Blind Lemon, Robert Johnson and countless other Delta performers found solace, an audience and opportunity on Beale Street. In the 1970s and early 1980s, this vibrancy was but a shadow of years past. In the late 1980s and 1990s, Beale Street experienced an economic and cultural revival, due, in part, to significant public investment. For example, an investment of \$2.5 million in HUD Community Development Block Grant Funds is helping the Gibson Guitar Company build a State-of-the-art guitar manufacturing facility not far from Beale Street in downtown Memphis. The Gibson Guitar project—like other projects HUD has worked on in the Delta region—is about more than just bricks and mortar. It is built upon the rich tradition of the Delta itself. Opportunity for the future of the Delta can be found in its history and traditions. For too long, the people and communities of the Mississippi Delta region have lived in the shadows of our nation's economic success. For the past ten years, the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development has supported regional development initiatives in the Lower Mississippi Delta, working in partnership with people and communities to create a more promising future.

Secretary Andrew Cuomo, like Secretary Henry Cisneros before him, has given steadfast support to the regional development initiative in the Delta, during the period 1993-2000. HUD has encouraged regional efforts to carry out programs, and has partnered with other organizations such as the Foundation for the Mid South, State and local governments, and other Federal agencies.

HUD's new "Community Builders" play a particularly useful role in the Delta region. Secretary Cuomo launched the Community Builders Fellowship in March 1998 as a major element of HUD's management reform plan, which calls for a new focus on community outreach and direct customer service for the public. HUD Community Builders have been working in the Delta region since the fall of 1998. Examples of work assignments for Community Builders include meeting with community leaders, business owners, educators and elected officials to help them design effective plans for utilizing funds from government, the private sector, and foundations; helping a small business owner obtain a loan or grant or open a business; working with a group of developers to find financing for a shopping center; scouting out a location for a new park with the neighborhood association; and developing ways to increase homeownership in neighborhoods. The Community Builders in all of the offices that are involved in supporting the Delta Initiative are collaborating to address problems in a coordinated way.

Safe, Affordable Owner-Occupied Housing

Homeownership is an important part of the American dream, and HUD has worked to increase the national homeownership rate by targeting its efforts to traditionally underserved populations. In 1990, the homeownership rate was 63.9 percent for the nation, and this has increased 2.9 percentage points to a record high of 66.8 percent in 1999. Six of the seven states in the Mississippi Delta have homeownership rates above

the national average. Of course, it should be kept in mind that for the northernmost Delta (Missouri, Kentucky, and especially Illinois), the Delta regions represent relatively small parts of their states. (*Note: Homeownership statistics are available at the statewide but not the county level.*)

- 73.9 percent of Kentucky's households were homeowners in 1999, an increase of 7.8 percentage points.
- 72.9 percent of Missouri's households were homeowners in 1999, an increase of 8.9 percentage points.
- 74.9 percent of Mississippi's households were homeowners in 1999, an increase of 5.5 percentage points.
- 67.1 percent of Illinois' households were homeowners in 1999, an increase of 4.1 percentage points.
- 71.9 percent of Tennessee's households were homeowners in 1999, an increase of 3.6 percentage points.

The remaining two states, Arkansas and Louisiana, have rates of 65.6 percent and 66.8 percent, respectively, while having experienced small declines of 2.2 and 1.0 percentage points.

In June 1995, President Clinton committed the Nation to increasing the homeownership rate to 67.5 percent by the year 2000. He brought together a partnership of 58 key public and private organizations to forge a National Homeownership Strategy. The efforts of these national partners to reduce the financial, information, and systemic barriers to homeownership are amplified by local partnerships at work in over 100 cities, including several communities in the Delta.

HUD has taken a number of specific steps to expand homeownership opportunities in the Delta and across the nation:

Housing Counseling

The 1990 Commission recommended that HUD should create homeownership and maintenance courses for low-income and moderate-income families who will benefit from government assisted homeownership programs. HUD's Housing Counseling program is one example of the Department's efforts to help these families learn more about the process of finding, financing, and maintaining a home.

HOME Program

HUD's HOME program is a block grant for housing that participating local jurisdictions and states can use to further their homeownership goals. This is an important source of funds for small cities in the Delta. HOME funds invested in homeownership activities are most commonly used for down payment assistance, generally in the form of a subordinate, non-amortizing mortgage. Many hard working low-income families lack the savings necessary for a home down payment despite stable employment. A single, up-front investment of HOME funds often provides the assistance necessary for such a family to obtain and maintain homeownership (it should be noted that housing counseling, mentioned above, has proven a strong complement to HOME-funded homeownership projects).

Homeownership Programs and Escrow Accounts for Public Housing Residents

The 1990 Commission recommended that HUD, working with local housing authorities, should establish escrow accounts of a percentage of monthly rent for high-end rent

paying tenants to be used later for down payments on homes. A draft rule to implement the voucher homeownership program has been published; a final Rule is expected soon. Additionally, Public Housing Agencies (PHA) in the Delta may apply for a number of homeownership programs for low-income families. One program, Section 5(h) homeownership, allows PHAs to sell public housing properties to public housing residents. Other PHAs operate their own homeownership programs, building or buying homes that can be sold to public housing residents. It is possible for PHAs to serve as lenders, insuring mortgages for lower interest rates or offering silent second mortgages to allow families to buy down the mortgage amount. Interested families must contact the housing authorities for information regarding programs offered in their area.

An example of these programs at work in the Delta can be seen in Tennessee, where the Memphis Housing Authority administers a Family Self-Sufficiency Program for residents of both public housing and Section 8 certificate and voucher programs. Sixteen public housing residents and eighteen section 8 residents have escrow accounts.

Increases in FHA Loan Limits and Volume Cap

In 1998, President Clinton signed legislation increasing the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loan limit so that more middle-income city residents and minorities, who have traditionally tended to rely on FHA mortgage insurance, can enjoy the benefit of FHA single-family mortgages; this enables more families to qualify for FHA mortgages by raising the limit on home mortgages. Additionally, Secretary Cuomo asked Congress in March 1999 to let the Federal Housing Administration insure up to \$130 billion in home mortgages this year and another \$130 billion next year—at no cost to taxpayers. Increasing FHA loan limits—and potentially increasing the volume cap—will allow HUD's FHA to assist more and more families in the Delta achieve their dreams of homeownership.

Fighting Housing Discrimination

Finally, although overt discrimination has been driven underground, minority Americans, persons living with disabilities, families with children, religious minorities, and other groups continue to suffer when denied housing opportunities as a result of discrimination. HUD has bolstered its homeownership efforts in the Delta by aggressively enforcing the Fair Housing Act, supporting a network of public agencies and nonprofit fair housing organizations.

Housing for the Elderly and People with Disabilities

HUD has two programs—Section 202 Housing for the Elderly and Section 811 Housing for Persons with Disabilities—that provide capital advances to finance the construction and rehabilitation of structures that will serve as supportive housing for very low-income elderly and disabled persons. These programs provide rent subsidies for the projects to help make them affordable. This program provides low-income elderly and disabled persons with options that allow them to live independently but in an environment that provides support activities such as cleaning, cooking, transportation, etc.

HUD's fiscal year 2000 (FY 2000) budget lays out a plan to meet the changing housing needs of our nation's elders and to provide security and peace of mind to coming generations of senior citizens, proposing \$660 million for Section 202, including reforms to allow conversion of existing buildings where seniors need assisted living, and \$87 million for 15,000 housing vouchers targeted to elderly persons.

Moratorium on Multi-Family Mortgage Subsidy Pre-Payments

Because of the threat prepayment posed to affordable housing stock nationwide, the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act of 1990 extended the moratorium on prepayment of these mortgages. The Act also included a program that provided financial incentives to owners in lieu of prepayment. This moratorium lasted until 1996 when Congress lifted it because of extremely high program costs of providing these incentives. While some of these mortgages have since been prepaid, HUD has been able to protect eligible tenants with Section 8 vouchers. The Department continues to work with owners to prevent this type of prepayment.

Assistance for Homeless Persons

The Clinton Administration has made addressing homelessness one of its top priorities. That has included an emphasis on new approaches which better serve homeless persons in rural areas, such as the Delta region. Nationally, funding for HUD's homelessness assistance programs has increased dramatically from \$284 million in 1992 to \$975 million in 1999, and \$1.02 billion in 2000.

Continuum of Care and Emergency Shelter Grants

While the Commission's goal to eliminate homelessness has not been achieved in the Delta, these funds, coupled with the implementation of the Continuum of Care approach to addressing homelessness, have provided the resources and tools needed to significantly impact the problem. The Continuum of Care approach calls for comprehensive and collaborative local planning to ensure the availability of the range of services, from emergency shelter to permanent housing, needed to meet the complex needs of homeless persons. The new approach has made it possible for rural areas to be more competitive in the annual grant-making process by ensuring funds for areas if they meet the quality standards of Continuum of Care competition. In addition, the Department has provided significant technical assistance to rural communities to assist them in crafting quality Continuums. As a result, in 1999, 240 rural projects were funded nationwide, representing approximately 8 percent of HUD's homelessness assistance budget. These funds provided an array of emergency, transitional, and permanent housing and services throughout the region that are gradually reducing the numbers of homeless men, women and children.

The success of the Continuum of Care can be seen at Our House, Inc., which operates an emergency homeless shelter in downtown Little Rock, Arkansas, along with a HUD-funded transitional living facility, training center, and daycare center. Our House pioneered a bold new concept that the total community, through volunteerism, would provide the necessary training and supportive services which would help the homeless re-enter productive society, versus the previous method of warehousing the homeless first at one shelter, then another. Our House's programs have been such a success that the month of December 1990 was declared "Our House Month" in the State of Arkansas by then Governor Bill Clinton in recognition of its accomplishments.

Housing for the Homeless

Under the State Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG) program, states provide funds to smaller communities for use in revitalizing neighborhoods, expanding affordable housing and economic opportunities and improving community facilities. A significant portion of these funds is used to reconstruct or rehabilitate housing and other property including homeless shelters and single-family homes in rural areas.

Housing Vouchers for the Homeless

Additionally, HUD's FY2000 budget proposed 100,000 new vouchers to meet the needs of the poorest renters; 18,000 will be for homeless persons, to ensure the availability of permanent housing solutions at the end of the Continuum of Care. These vouchers will be available in both urban and rural areas, and can be a significant resource to assist in reducing homelessness in the Delta.

HUD's Rural Housing Activities

The Delta region can also significantly benefit from HUD Rural Housing and Economic Development funds to produce and/or rehabilitate housing in rural areas. In FY 1999 and FY 2000, \$25 million per year was appropriated for HUD's Rural Housing and Economic Development Program, which funded innovative housing and economic development activities.

Community Substance Abuse

The Commission recommended that drug intervention, education and prevention programs be improved and/or created to make all local communities and schools in the Delta drug-free.

Drug Elimination Grants

The Drug Elimination program was authorized initially by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, as amended by the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act of 1990 and the Housing and Community Development Act of 1992. The Act authorizes HUD to make grants available to Public Housing Authorities for the purpose of eliminating drug-related crime in and around public housing developments. The funds can be used for reimbursement of local law enforcement or additional services, security contracts, investigators, and training residents for volunteer resident programs. Recent appropriations acts have expanded the use of funding to include patrols, physical changes to enhance security, drug prevention, intervention and treatment strategies, allowing PHAs greater scope in targeting crime and developing successful alternatives. For example, from fiscal years 1994 to 1998, the Memphis Housing Authority received over \$8.5 million under HUD's Drug Elimination Program. Over \$671,000 of those funds was budgeted for prevention programs, including Summer Youth Sports Camps, Residents Against Crime Programs, and Boys and Girls Clubs.

Enforcing the Fair Housing Act

On September 30, 1997, at the direction of President Clinton, Secretary Cuomo launched a Departmental attack against housing discrimination nationwide, including discrimination in the Mississippi Delta region. As part of that attack, Secretary Cuomo pledged to double the number of fair housing enforcement actions taken during the President's second term. HUD is working tirelessly to achieve that benchmark by aggressively invoking its authority under the Fair Housing Act, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to investigate, settle, and when necessary, prosecute cases of housing discrimination.

Partnering with Fair Housing Groups

As part of its mission to fight for fair housing, the Department also has continued to fund the Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP), which provides support to private non-profit organizations, State and local governments and others to enforce and enhance compliance with the nation's fair housing laws. These funds are used in the Delta region to undertake

testing and other enforcement activities to prevent and eliminate discriminatory housing practices.

“Report Card” on Housing Discrimination

Finally, HUD has launched a rigorous, independent study of racial and ethnic discrimination in housing rental and sales in the nation’s urban, suburban and rural communities. The study will be used to establish a new benchmark of housing discrimination—a “report card.” The report card will allow HUD to target future efforts to enforce fair housing protections and assess the effectiveness of such enforcement in reducing the level of discrimination across the nation, including the Delta region.

THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA REGIONAL INITIATIVE

The Mississippi Delta regional Initiative is interested in receiving comments and suggestions regarding the overall social and economic development of the Lower Mississippi Delta region. The Initiative will publish a compendium that will include this Report, in addition to a summary of the results of the *Delta Vision, Delta Voices* conference in the Washington, D.C. area on May 10-11, 2000. We invite comments at the Delta Website, <http://www.dot.gov/delta>, or written comments may be directed to:

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Delta Vision, Delta Voices: The Mississippi Delta Beyond 2000 (Main Report of the Clinton-Gore Administration's Mississippi Delta regional initiative)

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