

Crystal Altenbaumer's testimony

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.R. 3815, the Presidential Historic Site Study Act. This legislation would authorize the department of the Interior to study the feasibility of designating the birthplace home of President William Jefferson Clinton in Hope, AR as a national historic site. The house at 117 S. Hervey Street in Hope, AR is known as the Bill Clinton birthplace or the first home of the 42nd President of the United States

Birthplace Foundation

The Clinton Birthplace Foundation was established in 1993 as a non-profit corporation to serve the historic preservation opportunities in President Clinton's home state. Currently, the Foundation is not affiliated with, sponsored by or otherwise supported by the President of the United States or any official agency of the federal government. One of the Foundation's primary goals is to restore and preserve President Clinton's first home.

History

In 1917, Dr. H.J.S. Garrett, who settled in Hope after living in France, built the structure located at 117 South Hervey Street in Hope, AR. Structurally, it is known as the American foursquare, a 2-½-story 2,100 square ft. building.

Virginia Cassidy's parents, Edith & Eldridge Cassidy, purchased the home in 1938, while Virginia was in high school. During the next few years she met & married William Blythe, a traveling salesman. Virginia Cassidy Blythe was three months pregnant with their first child when her husband was killed in a car wreck during a business trip. Virginia lived in the house with her parents during the remainder of her pregnancy, giving birth to William Jefferson Blythe on August 19, 1946.

Virginia raised Billy in Hope, with the help of her parents for the first two years of his life. After his second birthday she left him in her parents care to attend nursing school in New Orleans, LA, learning the trade of nurse anesthetist to support herself and young son. In 1950, Virginia married Roger Clinton.

The home on 117 S. Hervey Street is the property most directly associated with the teachings, values, and benefits that have served President Clinton throughout his life and career. The Cassidy's taught their young grandson to count by placing flash cards on the kitchen curtains and drilling him over and over the numbers while he was fed. They taught him how to read newspapers by the age of 4. It was in this house that Bill Clinton spent his formative years, learning to walk, talk, laugh, play, read & pray. President Clinton has said "he has great memories of living with his wonderful grandparents."

President Clinton's grandfather owned a small grocery store in Hope and despite the segregation laws of the time, allowed people of all races to make purchases on credit. The Cassidy's taught their grandson that everyone should be treated equally. Clinton's statement, "I still believe in a place called Hope," has given people of every race the inspiration to strive forward, while paying tribute to the place where he learned life lessons.

Foundation Mission and Purpose

Since Bill Clinton is the first President of the United States to be born after World War II, it is only fitting

that plans for this birthplace museum are different from those honoring other Presidents. While many of these homes keep visitors in hallways behind ropes, the Clinton home features interactive exhibits.

The Foundation Board of Directors completed an in-depth development feasibility study in February 1995 for a proposed \$1.5 million capital development program to restore the home. Interviews were conducted with individuals, businesses and foundations throughout Arkansas and the United States. The study indicated that the restoration program is viewed as a "win-win" situation for Hope and Arkansas with the benefits of increased tourism, positive public image, and historical preservation.

Through interpretive programs, the Clinton birthplace and visitors center will seek to stimulate an interest in history and engender an understanding of what the past means to the present and the future. It has promoted the value of education and shows what education has done for President Clinton, making it an excellent field-trip experience for schools. It is seen as a strong historical and educational project that will attract a large number of public school children throughout Arkansas, North Texas, Louisiana, and Southeast Oklahoma.

Besides chronicling the life and times of Bill Clinton, the Clinton birthplace and visitors center recognizes and promotes the rich history, achievements and legacy of the region and state to show the impact of this environment on the young Bill Clinton. It serves as a tourist attraction promoting economic development throughout Hope, Hempstead County, and Southwest Arkansas.

Restoration

Restoration of the birthplace home began in 1995, and was opened for visitation on June 1, 1997. Under the professional direction of Cromwell-Truemper-Levy-Thompson-Woodsmall, the foundation restored the home into a hands-on museum and has constructed a visitor's center. Visitors have relative open access to all parts of the home. In addition to the home serving as an interactive museum, the visitor's center features an exhibit area and educational facility. The entire complex is located on a half city block.

Funding

The financial structure for this historic treasure has come from extensive fund-raising efforts, small grants and some funding from the Arkansas government. Citizens from throughout the nation have supported the restoration program. Personal and corporate contributions of varying amounts, all of them tax-deductible, have helped sustain the foundation and the birthplace home, many of them coming with multi-year pledges.

Today, the Clinton Birthplace Foundation operates on money raised from admissions, sales from the gift shop and contributions from visitors and other interested parties. While the foundation is presently financially sound, cutbacks have been made where necessary to maintain operations while awaiting national park status. Fund-raisers are being planned to further develop the site and maintain the structure and facilities available now.

For example, the foundation is selling personalized bricks that will be placed adjacent to the Virginia Clinton Kelley Memorial Rose Garden, which will both help maintain the grounds while allowing citizens to have their names associated with the historic the site. Other fund-raising efforts will go to establish the educational facilities at the center so that the foundation can hand over to the National Parks Service a site already established as an educational, historic and tourist-friendly attraction. The foundation also has assuring that visitors will get the information about the home and family from residents of the area where

the president spent his formative years.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to answering any questions the Committee might have.

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