Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____
Advanced Placement United States History Mr. Gallucci

HENRY CLAY CALLS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (1824)

Questions:

1) **Why does Clay believe that the federal government has the constitutional power to fund internal improvements? How does he respond to critics of these views?**
2) **Which region does Clay believe will benefit most from his program? Why does he think that developing this region will benefit the nation as a whole?**
3) **Was Clay correct in asserting that the federal government should promote commerce and internal improvements? Why do you think many Americans opposed Clay's economic plan? Support your answers.**

As the market economy grew, politicians explored several ways to foster national prosperity. Henry Clay [1777-1852] was one of the nineteenth century's political giants. Born in Virginia, Clay studied law and moved to Kentucky. Armed with a sharp intellect and a gift for oratory, Clay entered state politics. In 1811, he won election to the U.S. House of Representatives as a Republican. He immediately became one of the "War Hawks" who pushed the country into the War of 1812. In 1814, he served as one of the peace commissioners who drafted the Treaty of Ghent ending the conflict. Throughout his illustrious political career in the House and later the U.S. Senate, Clay earned the nickname "The Great Compromiser" for his uncanny ability to craft agreements on thorny issues.

Clay was one of the nation's staunchest advocates of economic development. His calls for an "American System" based on publicly funded internal improvements, a protective tariff, a national bank, manufacturing, and land distribution won Clay powerful allies-and enemies. In the 1824 presidential election, his decision to throw his support behind John Quincy Adams enraged Andrew Jackson. When Adams appointed Clay secretary of state shortly thereafter, Jackson's men accused the duo of striking a "corrupt bargain." After briefly retiring from public life, Clay won a seat in the U.S. Senate in 1831. The following year, he ran unsuccessfully as the Republican candidate for president. A passionate opponent of Jacksonian policies, Clay became a leader in the Whig Party. In this speech to the House of Representatives, Clay proposes federal support for an ambitious program of internal improvements.

January 16, 1824

Of all the powers bestowed on this government, none are more clearly vested, than that to regulate the distribution of the intelligence, private and official, of the country; to regulate the distribution of commerce; and to regulate the distribution of the physical force of the Union. In the execution of the high and solemn trust which these beneficial powers imply, we must look to the great ends which the framers of our admirable constitution had, in view. We must reject, as wholly incompatible with their enlightened and beneficent intentions, that construction of these powers which would resuscitate all the debility and inefficiency of the ancient confederacy. In the vicissitudes of human affairs, who can foresee all the possible cases, in which it may be necessary to apply the public force, within or without the Union? This government is charged with the use of it, repel invasions, to suppress insurrections, to enforce the laws of the Union; in short, for all the unknown and undefinable purposes of war, foreign or intestine, wherever and however it may rage. During its existence, may not government, for its effectual prosecution, order a road to be made, or a canal to be cut, to relieve, for example, an exposed point of the Union? If, when the emergency comes, there is a power to provide for it, that power must exist in the constitution, and not in the emergency. A wise, precautionary, and parental policy, anticipating danger, will beforehand provide for the hour of need. Roads and canals are in the nature of fortifications, since, if not the deposits of military resources, they enable you to bring into rapid action the military resources of the country, whatever they may be. They are better than any fortifications, because they serve the double purposes of peace and of war....

I was much surprised at one argument of the honorable gentleman [Virginia representative Barbour]. He told the House, that the constitution had carefully guarded against inequality, among the several States, in the public burdens, by certain restrictions upon taxation; that the effect of the adoption of a system of internal improvements would be to draw the resources from one part of the Union, and to expend them in the improvements of another; and that the spirit, at least, of the constitutional equality would be thus violated. From the nature of things, the constitution could not specify the theatre of the expenditure of the public treasure. That expenditure,

guided by and looking to the public good, must be made, necessarily, where it will most subserve the interests of the whole Union. The argument is, that the locale of the collection of the public contributions, and the locale of their disbursement, should be the same. Now, sir, let us carry this argument out….

The locale of the collection of the public revenue is the pocket of the citizen; and, to abstain from the violation of the principle of equality adverted to by the gentleman, we should restore back into each man's pocket precisely what was taken from it. If the principle contended for be true, we are habitually violating it. We raise about twenty millions of dollars, a very large revenue, considering the actual distresses of the country. And, sir, notwithstanding all the puffing, flourishing statements of its prosperity, emanating from printers who are fed upon the pap of the public treasury, the whole country is in a condition of very great distress. Where is this vast revenue expended? Boston, New York, the great capitals of the north, are the theatres of its disbursement. There the interest upon the public debt is paid. There the expenditure in the building, equipment, and repair of the national vessels takes place. There all the great expenditures of the government necessarily concentrate. This is no cause of just complaint. It is inevitable, resulting from the accumulation of capital, the state of the arts, and other circumstances belonging to our great cities….Internal improvements of that general, federative character, for which we contend, would also be for the interest of the whole….

But, Mr. Chairman, if there be any part of this Union more likely than all others to be benefited by the adoption of the gentleman's principle, regulating the public expenditure, it is the west. There is a perpetual drain, from that embarrassed and highly distressed portion of our country, of its circulating medium to the east. There we have none of those public works, no magnificent edifices, forts, armories, arsenals, dockyards, &c., which, more or less, are to be found in every Atlantic State. In at least seven States beyond the Alleghany, not one solitary public work of this government is to be found. If, by one of those awful and terrible dispensations of Providence which sometimes occur, this government should be annihilated, everywhere on the seaboard traces of its former existence would be found; whilst we should not have, in the west, a single monument remaining, on which to pour out our affections and our regrets. Yet, sir, we do not complain. No portion of your population is more loyal to the Union, than the hardy freemen of the west. Nothing can weaken or eradicate their ardent desire for its lasting preservation. None are more prompt to vindicate the interests and rights of the nation from all foreign aggression. Need I remind you of the glorious scenes in which they participated during the late war - a war in which they had no peculiar or direct interest, waged for no commerce, no seamen of theirs. But it was enough for them that it was a war demanded by the character and the honor of the nation. They did not stop to calculate its cost of blood or of treasure. They flew to arms; they rushed down the valley of the Mississippi, with all the impetuosity of that noble river. They sought the enemy. They found him at the beach. They fought; they bled; they covered themselves and their country with immortal glory. They enthusiastically shared in all the transports occasioned by our victories, whether won on the ocean or on the land. They felt, with the keenest distress, whatever disaster befell us. No, sir, I repeat its neglect, injury itself, cannot alienate the affections of the west from this government. They cling to it, as to their best, their greatest, their last hope. You may impoverish them, reduce them to ruin by the mistakes of your policy, and you cannot drive them from you. They do not complain of the expenditure of the public money where the public exigencies require its disbursement. But, I put it to your candor, if you ought not, by a generous and national policy, to mitigate, if not prevent, the evils resulting from the perpetual transfer of the circulating medium from the west to the east. One million and a half of dollars annually is transferred for the public lands alone; and almost every dollar goes, like him who goes to death-to a bourne from which no traveller returns. In ten years it will amount to fifteen millions; in twenty, to-but I will not pursue the appalling results of arithmetic.

Gentlemen who believe that these vast sums are supplied by emigrants from the east, labor under great error. There was a time when the tide of emigration from the east bore along with it the means to effect the purchase of the public domain. But that tide has, in a great measure, now stopped. And, as population advances farther and farther west; it will entirely cease. The greatest migrating States in the Union, at this time, are Kentucky first, Ohio next, and Tennessee. The emigrants from those States carry with them, to the States and Territories lying beyond them, the circulating medium, which, being invested in the purchase of the public land, is transmitted to the points where the wants of government require it. If this debilitating and exhausting process were inevitable, it must be borne with manly fortitude. But we think that a fit exertion of the powers of this government would mitigate the evil. We believe that the government incontestably possesses the constitutional power to execute such internal improvements as are called for by the good of the whole. And we appeal to your equity, to your parental regard, to your enlightened policy, to perform the high and beneficial trust thus sacredly reposed….

But, sir, the bill on your table is no western bill. It is emphatically a national bill, comprehending all, looking to the interests of the whole. The people of the west never thought of, never desired, never asked for, a

system exclusively for their benefit. The system contemplated by this bill looks to great national objects, and proposes the ultimate application to their accomplishment of the only means by which they can be effected, the means of the nation-means which, if they be withheld from such objects, the Union, I do most solemnly believe, of these now happy and promising States, may, at some distant (I trust a far, far distant) day, be endangered and shaken at its centre.