

Statement on the White House Initiative on Welfare Reform December 8, 1994

Today, after meeting with a group of Governors from both parties, I am announcing that the White House will convene a national bipartisan working session on welfare reform next month.

Welfare reform is a top priority for my administration, for the Governors, for the new Congress, and above all, for the American people. Americans have asked their elected officials to put aside politics as usual and begin earnest work to solve our Nation's problems, and welfare reform is at the very top of our agenda.

I have called for this session as a first step in an honest dialog about our country's broken welfare system and what we must do to fix it. Washington doesn't have all the answers, and Government doesn't, either. Every one of us in this country has to begin taking individual responsibility for turning this country around.

I have worked on this issue for my whole career in public life. When I was a Governor,

I worked closely with President Reagan and Senator Moynihan to develop the bipartisan consensus that led to passage of important legislation to strengthen families and move people from welfare to work.

I believe we must end welfare as we know it, because the current welfare system is a bad deal for the taxpayers who pay the bills and for the families who are trapped on it. The American people deserve a Government that honors their values and spends their money judiciously and a country that rewards people who work hard and play by the rules.

People want their leaders to stop the partisan bickering, come together, and roll up their sleeves and get to work. This meeting will be the beginning of a new day, not just for the welfare system but for how our Government works.

Remarks to Summit of the Americas Volunteers in Miami, Florida December 8, 1994

The President. Thank you. Thank you. Well, ladies and gentlemen, the first thing I want to say is a hearty thank-you for letting the "he-coon" stay in the tree in Tallahassee for 4 more years.

I am delighted to be here and Hillary is delighted to be here with Lawton and Rhea, with Buddy and Anne, and with Bob and Adele Graham and so many of our friends here in Florida.

You know, I was trying to remember just exactly how I got talked into having this summit in Miami, and it—

Audience member. The weather!

The President. Yeah—[laughter]—when I got out of the airplane tonight I remembered why I was smart enough to want to come here in December. Actually, I have very vivid memories of this sort of one-two punch that I got not all that long ago. We decided to have this summit after NAFTA was successfully concluded,

and it wasn't long before I started hearing from all my friends from Florida. And it wasn't long before Lawton and Buddy said that they had to see me about a matter of dire importance—[laughter]—reminding me not once but 500 times of all the things they had done for me—[laughter]—and for Al Gore and for our administration. And then when they got through, I got a call from Bob Graham, who reminded me about how many years we sat together in the Governors Conference when he taught me how to be a Governor. [Laughter] And by the time they got through with me, I couldn't see anyplace else on the map. [Laughter]

I want to thank you all for the magnificent job you have done. The leaders have all been recognized, and I thank all of them all over again. I thank our team who's worked so hard on this, the Secretary of the Treasury and our Trade Ambassador, Secretary Bentsen and Ambassador Kantor. I want to say a special word

of thanks to Mack McLarty who coordinated this for the White House; he did so much work.

I appreciate the way you cheered for Janet Reno. I don't know if you all know this—I didn't know it myself, or I'd forgotten it until I picked up the Miami Herald this morning, but I now have three Cabinet members from Dade County. They say we've got to get away from any sort of quotas—that's what the Republicans are telling us—and so I just "over-quota-ed" Dade County. [*Laughter*] Janet Reno and Carol Browner, and there's a wonderful article in the Miami Herald today about the Secretary of Treasury-designate, Bob Rubin, who grew up here and went to high school. And so we are delighted to be here.

Let me just say one serious word to all of you, those of you who have worked so hard for months and months and months, this is basically a celebration, a chance for us to say thank you. It was urged on me by some quarters that the appropriate thing to do, if we were going to have leaders from all over the hemisphere here, was to have this meeting in Washington. And I said, the last time I checked, most Americans were somewhere else—[*laughter*—and that when deciding where we ought to have this, that Miami was the place that was most representative of our whole hemisphere in the United States.

I hope that you can fully grasp the significance of what we are here doing. Every country in the world today, at the end of the cold war and the emergence of an exploding global economy with all sorts of opportunities but profound problems, every country is fighting a battle within itself between hope and fear, between reaching out and drawing back, between believing in the best of its potential and giving in to the worst, or at least walking away from the challenge.

This morning at the magnificent headquarters of the Organization of American States, the Vice President and I went there to the auditorium, and I signed the legislation adopting the GATT world trade treaty. In the last 2 years, our administration has relentlessly pursued an economic strategy designed to make sure Americans could compete and win and be rewarded for their work in the 21st century, not by withdrawing from the world and hunkering down but by reaching out to the world and embracing it. We have reduced our deficit. We have in-

creased our investment in education and training. We have focused on the needs of every region of our country. We worked hard here, for example, to try to help rebuild after the things that happened to Homestead and the rest of south Florida in the hurricane.

But we know, we know no matter what else we do, unless we have people around the world who buy our products and services, people who will join with us in combating the problems of the world from environmental problems to terrorism to organized crime to the drug problems, unless we have people who will be our partners in democracy and freedom, we can never be fully what we ought to be. That is the significance of this summit.

It builds on what happened with NAFTA. It builds on this GATT agreement. It builds on our efforts to reach out to the world. This is the largest summit of world leaders ever hosted here, 34 democratically elected leaders from this entire hemisphere joining hands together, not because we agree on everything but because we agree on the important things and because we believe in the promise of freedom; we believe in the promise of democracy; we believe in the promise of open, free trade; we believe in the promise of the human potential of the people of the United States and every other country here.

And so we come here representing people from the tip of Alaska to the tip of Argentina, to plan and to build and to dream for all of you and for your children. Because we believe in the promise of America, we are elated that others have embraced the challenge and the promise of freedom and democracy and free enterprise. I know you wish us well, and if this meeting turns out to have the profound historic significance that it should, I hope for the rest of your life you will remember how hard you worked on it and be justly proud.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:15 p.m. at the Sheraton Bal Harbour. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Lawton Chiles of Florida and his wife, Rhea; Lt. Gov. Buddy MacKay and his wife, Anne; and Senator Bob Graham and his wife, Adele.