

## Statement on Welfare Reform

*July 27, 1996*

Good morning. Today I want to talk with you about welfare reform, but first I want to ask you to join with me in celebrating the sixth anniversary of a landmark civil rights law that is breaking down barriers for millions of our fellow Americans, the Americans with Disabilities Act. I'm joined today by many of the advocates for people with disabilities who made this the law of the land. Because we have enforced this law vigorously and with common sense, people with disabilities now have access to places they never did before, from classrooms to restaurants.

Since 1991, 800,000 people with severe disabilities have joined the work force. Because of Federal education efforts, tens of thousands of children with disabilities have better educational opportunities. Because of Medicaid, health care for Americans with disabilities can be provided without bankrupting their families and in a way that promotes their independence.

That's a big reason why I oppose repealing Medicaid's guarantee of health care to Americans with disabilities. All these efforts are good for them, but they're good for all the rest of us, too. So today let us all rededicate ourselves to the fight against disability discrimination.

This morning I want to focus on the great welfare debate now unfolding in Washington and all across our country. This debate is really about our fundamental American values, about expanding opportunity, demanding responsibility, and coming together as a community. For decades our welfare system has undermined the basic values of work and responsibility and family, trapping generation after generation of people in poverty and dependency, exiling millions of our fellow citizens from the world of work that gives structure, meaning, and dignity to our lives. It instills the wrong values, sends the wrong signals, giving children who have children a check to set up house on their own, letting millions of fathers walk away from their responsibility while taxpayers pick up the tab.

This system does the most harm to the people it was meant to help. Children who are born to a life on welfare are more likely to drop out of school, fall afoul of the law, become

teen mothers or teen fathers, and raise their own children on welfare themselves.

I just don't believe that a nation as rich in opportunity as ours is willing to leave millions of people trapped in a permanent under class. We can't leave anyone behind. In fact, what I want for poor families on welfare is what I want for middle class families and upper income families as well: I want people to be able to succeed at home and at work. That will make America stronger and their lives richer.

When I ran for President 4 years ago, I was very clear we must end welfare as we know it. And during my time as President, I've used all the powers at my disposal to achieve that goal. We've worked with 41 States to launch 69 welfare-to-work experiments. For fully 75 percent of people on welfare, the rules already have changed. The New York Times called it a quiet revolution in welfare.

I've taken executive action to require teen mothers on welfare to stay in school, requiring mothers to identify the fathers of their children so we can hold every man accountable for the support he owes his family, ordering Federal employees to pay child support, putting wanted posters of deadbeat parents in post offices and on the Internet. I directed the Attorney General to crack down on people who owe child support who cross State lines.

All these efforts are paying off at the national and local level. Today there are 1.3 million fewer people on welfare than on the day I took office. Child support collections are up 40 percent, to \$11 billion. Paternity identification is up 40 percent, too. We're mending our social fabric and moving in the right direction.

Now we have an opportunity to finish the job and pass national welfare reform legislation. Real welfare reform should impose time limits and require work and provide child care, too, so that people can go to work without hurting their children. It should strengthen our child support enforcement laws even more and do more to protect children. I've challenged Congress to send me bipartisan legislation that reflects these principles. For example, if everyone in America who owes child support legally and

can pay it did so, 800,000 women and children would leave the welfare rolls tomorrow.

Now, 6 months ago the Republican majority in Congress sent me welfare legislation it had backwards. It was soft on work and tough on children, failing to provide child care and health care so that people can move from welfare to work without hurting their children, imposing deep and unacceptable cuts in school lunch, child welfare, and help for disabled children. That bill came to me twice, and I vetoed it twice.

Since then, I'm pleased to report, there has been considerable bipartisan progress toward real welfare reform. Many of the worst proposals I objected to have been taken out. Many of the improvements I asked for have been put in. The legislation has steadily improved as it's moved through Congress. Earlier this week, by an overwhelming bipartisan majority, the Senate passed a welfare reform bill that does provide health care and child care and took some important strides to protect our children. But we still have more work to do to promote work and

protect children, though we've come a long way in this debate and we mustn't go back.

To those who have doubts about any welfare reform, I say we will never lift children out of poverty and dependency by preserving a failed system that keeps them there. And to those who would undo the progress of recent weeks by sending me another extremist bill like the ones I vetoed, I'd say we can only transform this broken system if we do right by our children and put people to work so they can earn a paycheck, not draw a welfare check. That's the only kind of welfare reform I can sign.

We have a chance to make history. Our welfare system has nagged at our national conscience for far too long. And if we'll put politics aside and work together, we can once again make welfare what it was meant to be: a second chance, not a way of life.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: This statement was prepared for use as the President's radio address on July 27 but was not broadcast.

## Remarks to the Disabled American Veterans Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana

July 28, 1996

Thank you very much. Thank you for the exuberant welcome. I want to thank the ladies of the auxiliary for leading the applause for Hillary; that was a nice thing to do. Thank you very much. That was a very nice thing.

I want to thank Commander McMasters for that introduction. It's been so long I'd forgotten I'd done some of those things. [Laughter] And he mentioned that I was a saxophone player. I think we have a Navy band over there; I want to thank the Navy band. Thank you for being here and for playing. I'll always laugh any time someone says I'm a saxophone player now because a couple of weeks ago, Colonel John Bourgeois, the Commander of the United States Marine Band, the President's own, retired as one of the longest serving conductors of the Marine Band. And he did a television interview on national television in which he was asked about my saxophone playing, and having sworn an oath to truth, he said that I was adequate.

[Laughter] And painfully, I admit that that is about all he could say. And that's why I'm here today in this position rather than playing for you in your entertainment. [Laughter]

I'm delighted to be here with Commander McMasters; with your senior vice commander, Gregory Reed; Barbara Hicks, your auxiliary national commander; Art Wilson, your national adjutant; the other officers of your distinguished organization; and with all of you.

I'm glad to be joined today by Secretary Jesse Brown. [Applause] You know, the first time I realized that you would cheer like that—I love to kid Jesse and I was kidding him on the way in, and I said, "You think they give that kind of reaction because they love you so much or because they're glad I took you off of their hands?" [Laughter] I think it's the former, and I think you should.

I'm also delighted to be joined today by a number of State officials from the State of Lou-