

need to go. Let us remember that the arts and humanities are a necessity, not a luxury, and that every American deserves to have access to them. And let us resolve to sustain America's national commitment to the arts and humanities so that we may preserve for the generations

to come the great artistic and intellectual life of our nation.

BILL CLINTON

NOTE: This message was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 29.

Remarks on the Income and Poverty Report and an Exchange With Reporters

September 29, 1997

The President. I don't know if I can go on. [Laughter]

Good morning. This Friday will mark the sixth anniversary of the day I announced my intention to run for President of the United States. On that day, I challenged America to embrace an urgent mission for the 21st century, to preserve the American dream, restore the hopes of the forgotten middle class, and reclaim the future for our children.

As President, I have worked hard to set America on that track, to fulfill that mission, putting in place a bold strategy to shrink the deficit, invest in our people, and expand the sales of America's products and services abroad. I am pleased to announce today that we have more evidence that our economic strategy is succeeding.

This morning the Census Bureau released its annual Survey of Income and Poverty in America. It shows that last year the typical family benefited from a significant increase in income for the third year in a row. Since we launched our economic plan in 1993, the typical family's annual income has risen by nearly \$2,200 a year. That's an extra \$2,200 that hard-working families can put toward their children's education, a downpayment on a home, or even a much needed vacation. After years and years of stagnant family incomes, today's report proves that America's middle class, no longer forgotten, is rising fast.

It should be noted that these figures do not reflect several other dividends of prosperity we have delivered for the American people. They don't reflect the \$500-per-child tax credit, the \$1,500 HOPE scholarship, the education IRA's, the real benefits of lower interest rates and

mortgage costs worth \$1,000 a year or more to millions of homeowners.

And rising incomes are also lifting families out of poverty. The report shows that while there is clearly much more to be done, the African-American poverty rate has fallen to its lowest level ever. The income of the typical Hispanic household grew more last year than in any single year on record. The child poverty rate has dropped, in the past 3 years, more than in any 3-year period since the 1960's. And the earned-income tax credit, which we have dramatically expanded and then fought hard to preserve, has raised more than 4 million people out of poverty last year.

The report also shows we have more to do to extend opportunity to all Americans. Starting in the 1970's, income inequality rose sharply. Now it has stabilized. Since 1993, every income group has seen its income rise, with those in the lowest 20 percent showing the fastest gains, thanks in part to the minimum wage, to more jobs, and to the earned-income tax credit, which is not measured in the statistics. But we still have to do more to grow together in the 21st century.

Let me say that this report also underscores another important challenge, one that I have been concerned about for a long time. Last year there were 800,000 more children without health insurance than the year before. However, thank goodness, many of these children will now be eligible for coverage under the balanced budget's historic \$24 billion child health initiative, which takes effect this week.

Two years ago we were fighting hard to save Medicaid's guarantee to 4 million children. Now we're looking forward to extending child health insurance to another 5 million children. We have

to work together to encourage the States to take full advantage of this opportunity and to make sure that the funds are spent actually insuring children who do not have health insurance today.

To ensure that all our people benefit from the growing economy, we also have to make sure that our people have access to the world's best education, with high standards in the basics. And we have to address the pressing issue of child care. That is another thing that would help to alleviate pressures on middle and lower income working families' households. The first-ever White House Conference on Child Care will be held later this fall. It will focus on how we can help parents to succeed at home and work through quality, affordable child care.

In all these ways we can continue to fulfill what I started out to do 6 years ago, preserving the American dream, restoring the middle class, reclaiming the future for our children. But this is good news. And now, Janet Yellen and Gene Sperling will be able to answer questions about the details of the proposals.

Thank you.

Campaign Finance Reform

Q. What do you think is the chance of getting campaign finance reform through this session this year?

The President. Well, I hope it's good. It's certainly better than it was a month ago. Obviously, there is still strong opposition to it in the leadership of the Republican Party, and they're in the majority in Congress. But I've seen some encouraging signs in the Senate, and frankly, I've seen some encouraging signs in the House with some Republican Members willing to speak up and say that we ought to do something. So I'm quite hopeful that we will get something.

I know this—if we just—the way these things work, if we can succeed in keeping the public spotlight on the debate, then the pressure will build to come out with something positive. And I have done what I could, and I'm very proud of our caucus in the Senate for doing what it has done. The Democrats have clearly come out unanimously for some—for campaign finance reform. And we've just got to keep the public spotlight on this and keep going until we get legislation.

Welfare Reform

Q. Mr. President, many States, California, Texas, Florida, acknowledge that they're going to fail the first real test of the new welfare law, the requirement that they have 75 percent of two-parent welfare families in jobs and job training by next week. Will HHS impose the fines that it is allowed to do on the States? And what—does it shake your confidence, this failure—shake your confidence in the new welfare law?

The President. No, because, first of all—let me answer the second question first. It doesn't shake my confidence in the law, because we have succeeded, I think, beyond anybody's expectations, partly from the growing economy and partly from welfare reform efforts, in reducing the welfare rolls more than they have ever been reduced in a comparable time period, ever.

We've had 20 years of immigration in our country at high levels, many of the immigrants coming here come without many resources, and they want to work their way into the American dream. So we've had a lot of people coming in here, and yet we've been successful in having the smallest percentage of our people on welfare since 1970.

So my answer to you is, I want to keep high standards, and I want them enforced, because we block-granted the money to the States they asked for. After all, they supported the law. They said we could keep the Federal guarantee for health care and food stamps, nutrition, which I insisted on, but they pointed out that they already had the freedom to set different welfare reimbursement levels every month, so they wanted control of that pot of money so they would have more flexibility to move people from welfare to work. And in return, they agreed to these targets.

So I think we just need to keep pushing ahead. In terms of what should be done, obviously I want to consult with our people at HHS and others to do what is best. But I think most States really are working hard and in good faith to try to do this. I think that they know that's what the voters want and, most importantly, that's what the people on welfare want. So we don't want to just forget about our high standards, especially when we've proven we can hire a lot more people than we ever thought we could.

Campaign Finance Reform

Q. You mentioned Republicans in the House. This weekend Speaker Gingrich was unusually caustic, accusing your staff and your lawyers of blocking pursuit of the truth in law. Have you looked back at your records and the phone calls that you have made and come to any new conclusion about your own involvement?

The President. First of all, I think—no, I have not come to any new conclusion. But I think the remarks this weekend were an attempt to divert the public attention from the fact that the leadership of the Republican Party in the

House opposes campaign finance reform, and has consistently, and continues to do so.

But I am encouraged that along with our Democrats who are supporting it, there are an increasingly vocal band of brave Republicans willing to stick up and be for it. And again, this is our chance to pass this bill, and I think we'd all be making a mistake to be diverted. I don't intend to be.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:03 a.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House.

Remarks at the National Arts and Humanities Medals Dinner
September 29, 1997

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to begin the dinner by saying a special word of welcome to all of you.

Frequently in this room, it is my privilege on behalf of the people of the United States to offer a toast to a visiting leader of another nation or to showcase our culture to the world. Tonight it is my privilege to honor the leaders of that culture, our artists and scholars and those who support their work.

Our economy is measured in numbers and statistics, and we got some more good numbers today, and for that I'm very grateful. But nonetheless, in our childhood, at the end of our lives, and in the most important moments in between, we know that our own enduring worth and the enduring worth of our Nation lies in our shared values and our soaring spirit.

Lewis Mumford once wrote, "Love, poetry, disinterested thought, the free use of the imagination—here are the sustaining values of a living culture." Through the work you do and the lives you lead, you are sustaining our living culture and swelling the chorus of American voices.

I have to note, sadly, as many of you must doubtless know now, that we lost one of those great voices today when Roy Lichtenstein passed away. Two years ago I had the great privilege

of giving him the award that I was able to bestow on several of you today. He was especially valuable and treasured by us here in the White House because of his support for our Arts in Embassies program.

The point I think he would like me to make tonight is that every one of us, each in our own time, has just a little time, whether we live a short or a long life by conventional standards. Therefore, it falls to every one of us to make sure that there is a next generation of artists and scholars who have the opportunity to learn and to create, so that the next generation of ideas can take root and grow.

So tonight, as we celebrate the remarkable accomplishments of the men and women we honor here, let us also rededicate ourselves to that future mission.

Now, I ask you all to join me in raising our glasses in a toast to the 1997 National Medal of Arts and National Humanities Medal recipients.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:43 p.m. on the State Floor at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to artist Roy Lichtenstein, 1995 National Medal of Arts recipient.