

Statement on the National Economy *December 5, 1997*

The November employment report shows the economy is the strongest it has been in a generation, with the lowest unemployment rate in a quarter century, nearly 14 million new jobs in the last 5 years, and real wages rising again. Today's good news—strong job creation and higher incomes—shows that the American economy continues to work for working families. It is clear that our three-part economic strategy—reducing the deficit, investing in people, and opening foreign markets to American goods—is the right strategy for America.

Most importantly, this economic prosperity is helping all Americans; for example, the unemployment rate among Hispanics fell to one of its lowest levels ever recorded. And over the past year we had more new manufacturing jobs than during any other year in nearly three decades. While the economy is growing steady and strong, we still have more to do to keep our Nation on the right track and ensure that all Americans have the opportunity to benefit from this growth.

The President's Radio Address *December 6, 1997*

Good morning. Yesterday the community of West Paducah, Kentucky, came together to remember the three young girls struck down at school in a terrifying act of violence. Our entire Nation has been shaken by this tragedy. West Paducah, on the southern shore of the Ohio River, is at the center of our circle of prayers. America has lost three beautiful daughters. We mourn deeply with the Steger, James, and Hadley families, with those students who were wounded and their families, and with all those whose lives were changed forever by a 14-year-old with a stolen gun.

We may never know what drove the son of a respected church elder to extinguish the lives of classmates bowed in prayer. But in the aftermath we've seen great heroism, generosity, and love: a courageous act by a classmate to head off more violence, an outpouring of understanding for the sister of the alleged killer, the donation of organs for patients desperately in need, an entire nation reaching out in support. One terrible act could not poison the deep well of goodness West Paducah has drawn upon in this moment of grief.

Now the rest of us must do everything in our power to prevent such things from happening again. At a time when we're trying to prepare our children for the opportunities of the 21st century, high school seniors are more likely to take weapons to school than to take

calculus in school. This is unacceptable. We simply cannot educate our children, and they cannot learn and live up to their full potential, when violence and drugs threaten their safety in school.

One thing we must do right away is to gain a much clearer view of the problem. Sadly, our national picture of school violence is neither complete, nor up to date. We know more about the overall patterns of car theft in America than we do about the harm that comes to our children at school.

So today I'm directing Attorney General Reno and Education Secretary Riley to launch a major initiative to produce for the first time an annual report card on school violence. This report card will contain the data we all need in order to boost efforts to prevent violence from happening in the first place.

School safety is a challenge not only for police and parents, teachers and school officials; the scourge of young violence poses a challenge to every American. It demands that we do everything possible to find safe places for our children to learn and play and grow. It demands that schools follow a policy of zero tolerance for guns. It demands that we teach our children basic values, the unblinking distinction between right and wrong. It demands that we exercise responsibility when we create images for our