

The President's Radio Address *April 25, 1998*

Good morning. This morning I'd like to talk to you about one way we are working to restore Americans' faith in our National Government, in our efforts to shore up Social Security and other vital benefits by cracking down on fraud and abuse.

For 60 years, Social Security has meant more than just an ID number on a tax form, even more than a monthly check in the mail. It has reflected our deepest values, the duties we owe to our parents, to each other, to our children and grandchildren, to those whom misfortune strikes, to those who deserve a decent old age, to our ideal of one America.

That's why I was so disturbed some time ago to discover that many prisoners, who are by law barred from receiving most of these Federal benefits, were actually collecting Social Security checks while locked up behind bars. Inmates were, in effect, under our law, getting away with fraud, primarily because it was so difficult to gather up-to-date information on criminals in our Nation's more than 3,500 jails. But thanks to an unprecedented Federal, State, and local cooperation, as well as new, innovative incentive programs, we're now finishing the job.

The Social Security Administration has produced a continually updated database that now covers more than 99 percent of all prisoners, the most comprehensive list of our inmate population in history. And more important, the Social Security Administration is using the list to great effect. By the end of last year we had suspended benefits to more than 70,000 prisoners. That means that over the next 5 years we will save

taxpayers \$2.5 billion—that's \$2.5 billion—that will go toward serving our hard-working families.

Now we're going to build on the Social Security Administration's success in saving taxpayers from inmate fraud. In just a few moments I will sign an Executive memorandum that directs the Departments of Labor, Veterans Affairs, Justice, Education, and Agriculture to use the Social Security Administration's expertise and high-tech tools to enhance their own efforts to weed out any inmate who is receiving veteran's benefits, food stamps, or any other form of Federal benefit denied by law.

We expect that these comprehensive sweeps by our agencies will save taxpayers millions upon millions of more dollars, in addition to the billions already saved from our crackdown on Social Security fraud. We will ensure that those who have committed crimes against society will not have an opportunity to commit crimes against taxpayers as well.

The American people have a right to expect that their National Government is always on guard against every type of waste, fraud, and abuse. It is our duty to use every power and every tool to eliminate that kind of fraud. We owe it to the American people to ensure that their Social Security contributions and other tax dollars are benefiting only those who worked hard, played by the rules, and are, by law, eligible to receive them. That's exactly what we're trying to do.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.