

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:47 p.m. in the Beebe School District Building. In his remarks, he referred to Katherine (Missy) Kincaid, Special Assistant to the First Lady; Mayor Donald Ward of Beebe; Judge Bob Parish of White County; Kieth Williams, Beebe superintendent of schools; State Senator Mark Beebe and State Representative Randy Minton of Arkansas; and Doug Kennedy, chief, Beebe Fire Department.

Remarks on the Welfare to Work Initiative

January 25, 1999

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. This is a good way to start the day, isn't it? [*Laughter*] We're all going to feel better when we leave here.

Let me thank the previous speakers. First, I want to thank Robert Higgins and his entire organization for setting an example for corporations throughout America. And I thank his employees for coming here today and for being a vivid human illustration of how welfare reform can work at its best.

I thank my good friend of many years Governor Mel Carnahan, and Mrs. Carnahan, who is here with him. We made two of our major welfare reform announcements over the last several years in Missouri because no State has worked harder to do this right, in a both humane and effective way.

I want to thank Carlos—I was looking at him—I don't know how many—how many public speeches do you think Carlos has made in his life? [*Laughter*] Man, he stood up here, he had his head up, his shoulders back—I was thinking as I was watching him that after he does all that computer stuff and makes money for a few years, that we're always looking for a few good candidates in this business, and he looked awfully good. [*Laughter*]

I would like to thank Secretary Shalala, Secretary Herman, and Secretary Slater for their work on welfare reform. And there are two Members of the House of Representatives here today who represent very different districts, but who have a passionate interest in this whole subject: Representative Ben Cardin from Maryland and Representative

Rubén Hinojosa from south Texas. And I thank them for being here and for what they've done for this cause.

And my good friend Jane Campbell, county commissioner from Cuyahoga County, Cleveland, Ohio. And I'd like to say a special word, if I might, before I get into my remarks about Eli Segal who started our Welfare to Work Partnership.

You know, it takes a special, almost a genius, to start something that didn't exist before. And a couple of years ago, when I announced in the State of the Union we were going to have this Welfare to Work Partnership, we had five companies. A couple of years later, we have 10,000 companies.

Yesterday, you may have seen in the press, I went home to Arkansas to look at some terrible tornado damage. At each place where I went, both these places, there was a team of our young AmeriCorps volunteers from all over America—and most of them had never been to Arkansas before. And Governor, one of the teams was from St. Louis, working on the tornado damage. These young Americans give a year, sometimes 2 years of their lives; they earn credit for college. In 4 years there have been over 100,000 AmeriCorps volunteers. It took the Peace Corps 20 years to get to 100,000 volunteers. Eli Segal also started AmeriCorps. So for two great contributions to the United States, we thank him for this remarkable, remarkable thing.

One of the reasons that I ran for President in 1992 was to change the welfare system as we then knew it, to move from a system that promoted independence and had no incentives for parents who are not custodial parents to be responsible, and basically gave people a check that was almost always inadequate, in the name of being humane, which assumed, more often than not, that they had no capacity to work and support their children.

All these things were done with the best of intentions. We either assumed people couldn't do the right thing, or we assumed that they wouldn't do the right thing. And so, well, we made the best of an imperfect world by at least cutting a check once a

month and then making sure that—and I approve of this and kept it—there were nutritional and health benefits for the children.

And it seemed to me that we ought to—before we just continue to give up on this—we now had created a couple or three generations, in some places, of people who depended on welfare checks and repeated the pattern of the past—that we ought to try to develop a system that at least would try to create incentives and, where appropriate, requirements that would promote independence, work, and family responsibilities.

Now, everybody liked the idea and wanted to do it, but a lot of people, including a lot of very good people who had labored for years in this system, doubted that it could be done. And so we started working at it. And in the past 6 years, I think it's obvious that the American people have done a lot to change all that.

When I became President, I worked with 43 States—Governor Carnahan mentioned this—before we passed legislation, to just free them of Federal rules which undermined their ability to create a system that would promote work and family. There were many innovative programs that already were beginning to move large numbers of people from welfare to work, even before 1996. It was in that year that I was able to sign the landmark bipartisan welfare reform law. I said then that our Nation's answers to the problems of poverty will no longer be a never-ending cycle of welfare, but instead, the dignity, the power, the ethic of work.

Today, we can actually foresee a time when we can break the cycle of welfare for good—when welfare will literally be a support system given to people in hard economic times, or when personal misfortune occurs, but that it will not be the rule of life for large numbers of our fellow citizens.

Already we now see welfare rolls in America are the lowest they've been in 30 years—for the first time in 30 years, below 8 million people, down by 44 percent since I took office. And the same people—the number of people on welfare who are also working some, taking that first step toward responsibility, has tripled. Every State—every State—is now meeting the work participation standards required under the welfare reform

law, something I confess that even I did not believe would happen. None of us believed that they would. Every single one of them so far is meeting the work participation standards of the welfare reform law.

America is working again, and this work is transforming lives and families. The welfare system is no longer holding people back, it is helping them to move ahead.

Since the goal here—and let's not forget what the goal is; it is to empower individuals and strengthen families—we've had to do more than simply put time limits on welfare. As I said a moment ago, those who lose their welfare checks continue to get health and nutritional support for their children—and they should. It was one of the big battles we fought here when we debated this, and it led to two vetoes before we finally got a bill that I felt that I could sign.

We also have increased our support for training, for transportation, for child care for those who move from welfare to work, recognizing that there are barriers, and we shouldn't expect people to actually move from welfare to work and lower their standard of living and lower their ability to support their children. And there is more support for child care, substantially more, in this budget and for other things.

We have given more support for health care and child care for all low income working families. I think that our citizens should never forget that the largest number of poor people in America are the working poor. And we should be sensitive of that. And with the help of Congress, we have doubled the earned-income tax credit for families with children. That is a targeted tax cut that's especially generous to low-income working families. And today it's worth about \$1,000 to every family of four with an income of under \$30,000; and for families of two and three, lower incomes, it's worth quite a lot of money. So this was a major contribution of the economic plan of 1993, and it alone, along with the increase in the minimum wage, has lifted over 2 million children out of poverty.

And finally, let me say, as all of you know I am trying to raise the minimum wage again because I don't think people should work so poor children can still be in poverty.

I think it is very important, however, that we recognize that much of the success of welfare reform has come because of the growth of the economy at large—nearly 18 million new jobs in the last 6 years. I also think we have to recognize that much of the success of welfare reform has come because of the commitment of people in the private sector to do the right thing. I think that if there were no companies willing to have the example that Fleet has offered us today, this would be much, much harder.

And as we look ahead to the future, we have to assume that reaching the next 8 million people—or just under 8 million people—on welfare will be even more challenging than reaching the 44 percent reduction that we have seen achieved already. Therefore, since it's not fair to require people to work unless they have a chance to work, we have to honor and build up and work with the private sector to make sure they have that chance.

As I said, we started 2 years ago with five companies in the Welfare to Work Partnership. Today there are 10,000. They have hired, retrained, and often promoted literally hundreds of thousands of people. And as you have heard, this is not charity—it's good for families, but it's also good for the bottom line, and good for the communities.

Now, smaller caseloads, bigger paychecks, are important signs of progress. But I think it's also important that we recognize this is about more than economics. And I think you can see that. There's something intangible, even beyond the money, involved here—the sense of security of these newly-working members of our country, the sense of pride at being able to support a child, and being able to be a fully participating member of society.

So we have to do more, and we now know what works. And we've seen examples of it today. We know that long-term welfare recipients can be turned into full-time workers. Now we must ensure that we go to the next step, that we deal with the remaining people on welfare, and that we do it, recognizing that it is a challenge but also a phenomenal opportunity for the United States, and a responsibility for those of us who can do something about it.

In my State of the Union Address last week, I said that we can help another 200,000 Americans move from welfare to work with extra support in the Federal budget. To achieve that, I propose first that we renew the welfare-to-work program, which is set to expire in the year 2000. My balanced budget includes \$1 billion to help States and communities build upon their record of success. It also dedicates \$150 million of those funds to low-income fathers who fulfill their duty to work, to pay child support, to become part of their children's lives.

And I think all of us were thrilled by Carlos' statement. But I would like to make one point here that he made that I think ought to be made more explicit. There is a reason that welfare reform has worked. There is a reason that programs like this magnificent program in Minnesota, giving fathers the tools they need to support their children, has worked. And that is, most people are basically good people who want to do the right thing.

You know, we have all these programs; we talk about all these policies, and we hardly ever say that. But I think that's worth stating. You saw a good person up here talking about a child he loved. And it's so easy to forget that. The reason all this stuff can be done is that human nature will rise to the level of possibility if given the opportunity and the guidance and the support. That's the reason these rolls have reduced so much.

You know, I hardly ever—when I was Governor for 12 years, I ran a welfare system in a poor State—I don't believe I ever met—and I went to welfare offices, and I sat and talked with caseworkers and welfare recipients, and went through the details of it—and I have never met a person who has said, "You know, I really love getting this welfare check, and I hope I never have to hit a lick." [Laughter] I never met a person who said, "Gosh, I'm proud that I never paid any child support to my child." You know, there may be a few, but to pretend that that is anything like more than a small minority is a foolish assumption.

So I say this is very important. And this \$150 million to support people, so there can be more stories like Carlos Rosas', is very, very important. Many States are using some

of their welfare-to-work funds, as you heard from Governor Carnahan already, to get fathers to sign personal responsibility contracts, to do the right thing by their children. And now this extra \$150 million will help to ensure that every State can have this kind of effort, and that every community that has any substantial number of people who would fall under this category can do the kinds of things we've heard about in this Minnesota program.

But we have more to do. With the longest peacetime expansion in history, with a continually growing economy, businesses have to reach wider to get new talent. They have to bring more welfare recipients into the workplace if we're going to continue to grow.

So we have to see this as an opportunity to make permanent gains in dealing with the welfare challenge. And therefore, I think we have to do more to help those recipients who are still on the rolls. And as I said, they're often the greatest challenges to getting people into the work force.

Example number one—that's why Secretary Slater is here today—two-thirds of the new jobs in America are in the suburbs; three-quarters of the welfare recipients are in the cities or in isolated rural areas. So you've got the jobs in the middle, and the welfare recipients in the cities or in the rural areas.

Our balanced budget will double funding to get workers to the workplace—for transportation support. It also has a 50-percent increase in housing vouchers, to help families find affordable homes closer to the jobs and avoid difficult and, sometimes, actually impossible commutes.

Now, these are the kinds of things that I think we ought to be doing. We don't have any excuse not to do it. We have the example of Fleet. We have the example of Missouri and Governor Carnahan. We have the example of Carlos Rosas. We have the example of these fine women who stood up when they were introduced as employees of Fleet. And we now know that it is not only the right thing to do for our country; it is the right thing to do for our companies.

So I hope that we will have enormous bipartisan support for this new advance in the welfare budget. And I hope all of you will

do everything you can to spread the word across the country that it is good for America to do this, and it will work because most people are good people and they want to do the right thing.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:02 a.m. in the Presidential Hall (formerly Room 450) of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Robert J. Higgins, president and chief operating officer, Fleet Financial Group; Governor Mel Carnahan of Missouri and his wife, Jean; Carlos Rosas, former welfare recipient who introduced the President; and Eli Segal, president and chief executive officer, Welfare to Work Partnership.

Statement on BP Amoco's Efforts To Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions *January 25, 1999*

I commend BP Amoco and its chief executive, John Browne, for once again demonstrating the kind of corporate leadership needed to meet two of our most pressing environmental challenges—air pollution and global warming.

Last fall British Petroleum set a new standard in corporate responsibility by voluntarily pledging to reduce dramatically its emissions of greenhouse gases. Today BP Amoco extended this pledge to cover Amoco's production facilities as well. These commitments demonstrate that leading corporations can serve their investors and their customers, even as they join us in the fight against global warming.

Also today, BP Amoco announced plans to market cleaner fuels in 40 cities around the world to help improve local air quality. By using the latest technology to custom tailor fuels to address the unique pollution concerns of these cities, the company will help produce cleaner, healthier air for millions of people worldwide. And it is helping to build the kind of partnership between the fuel and automotive industries that will be needed to deliver clean, efficient transportation for the 21st century.

With today's announcements, BP Amoco offers further proof that a strong economy and a healthy environment go hand in hand. Working together, we can ensure that future