

Week Ending Friday, December 24, 1999

**Statement on Flooding and
Mudslides in Venezuela**

December 17, 1999

I was deeply saddened to learn of the loss of life and physical devastation caused by flooding and mudslides in Venezuela. On behalf of the American people, I extend my deepest sympathies to all those who have suffered losses. We stand ready to help with rescue and relief efforts in any way we can.

NOTE: This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

**Statement on Signing the Ticket to
Work and Work Incentives
Improvement Act of 1999**

December 17, 1999

Today I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 1180, the "Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999." This landmark legislation will remove barriers that have placed many individuals with disabilities in the untenable position of choosing between health care coverage and work. It also improves and expands vocational rehabilitation and employment service options for this talented, but as yet not fully tapped, workforce.

This new law represents one of the most important legislative advances for people with disabilities since the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act. I have urged its passage for 2 years and was proud to include full funding for it in my FY 2000 Budget. The enactment of this law well illustrates what we can accomplish when we work together on a bipartisan basis to expand employment opportunities and affordable health-care options.

The Act will ensure that individuals with disabilities have a greater opportunity to participate in the workforce and in the American Dream. It offers new ways for the Federal

Government to partner with the States and the private sector to help people with disabilities to work and to keep their health care coverage. Most significantly, H.R. 1180:

- Expands States' ability to provide a Medicaid "buy-in" to individuals with disabilities who return to work.
- Creates a new Medicaid demonstration to assess the effectiveness of providing Medicaid coverage to people whose condition has not yet deteriorated enough to prevent work, but who need health care to prevent or forestall that level of deterioration. This provision will allow States to help those individuals with diseases such as muscular dystrophy, Parkinson's Disease, diabetes, and HIV.
- Lengthens from 4 years to 8-½ years the period for which Social Security disability beneficiaries who return to work can continue to receive reduced-cost Medicare coverage.
- Provides grants to States to design and administer infrastructures to provide services that support working individuals with disabilities.
- Provides Social Security disability beneficiaries a choice of providers for employment-related services.
- Authorizes the Social Security Administration to test new and innovative ways to enable individuals with disabilities to return to work and make economic independence a reality.
- Enables individuals with disabilities to reestablish eligibility for Social Security disability benefits on an expedited basis if their attempts to return to work prove to be unsuccessful. These individuals will be able to request reinstatement of benefits without having to file a new disability benefits application—thereby reducing the risk of returning to work.

These provisions give people who want to work a chance to do so by ensuring access