

Remarks on the Census Bureau Report on Income and Poverty and an Exchange With Reporters September 24, 1998

The President. Thank you very much. She was terrific, wasn't she? Let's give her another hand. I thought she was great. [Applause]

Congressman Cardin, welcome. I know you're proud of your constituent here. Jessica, welcome. We're glad to see you. I think Congressman Blagojevich is here. We welcome him, along with Senator Efrain Gonzalez, who is the president of National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators, and Councilman Robert Cantana of Buffalo. Let me once again thank Monique for her remarkable statement and her even more remarkable life.

I'm delighted to be joined here by our economic team—by Erskine Bowles and Secretary Rubin, Secretary Herman, Gene Sperling, Jack Lew, Janet Yellen, Larry Summers. Their tireless, often literally sleepless work has been very instrumental in sparking and maintaining what soon will be the longest peacetime boom in American history.

Officials of the Census Bureau who are here today, I want to thank all of you. We're going to be talking a little bit about some Census Bureau statistics. Sometimes we take your hard work and statistics for granted. The fact is that you ensure that our democracy is truly representative. And let me say in that connection once again, Congress must not hamstring the Census Bureau's efforts to maintain the most up-to-date, accurate scientific methods to produce the year 2000 census. They deserve the chance to succeed. Monique Miskimon has shown us today once again that every American counts. That means every American deserves to be counted.

Hurricane Georges

Now, before I get into the details of the very positive economic report which Monique and her daughter so vividly represent, I think we all want to say just a few words and reflect on the powerful impact of Hurricane Georges. In the Caribbean islands, businesses and homes have been swept away; tragically, many lives have been lost. Meanwhile, the projected track of the storm places the hurricane center over or near the Florida Keys late tonight or early

tomorrow morning. As we speak, we're helping the people of Florida prepare for the hurricane. We've already sent assistance to Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Obviously, we're working with the officials in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

James Lee Witt, the Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, has informed me that FEMA's Region VI emergency response team arrived in Tallahassee, Florida, at 10 o'clock this morning. Here in Washington, the FEMA emergency support team is operating at level one, its highest level, on a 24-hour basis.

Our support teams and our prayers are with those in the Caribbean as they begin to rebuild and those in the Florida Keys as they brace for the impact of the storm.

Income and Poverty Report

Now, as President, from my first day here, I have done my best to fulfill a commitment I made to the American people: first of all, to restore the reality of the American dream, of opportunity for all responsible citizens, of a community in which we all count and work together; and secondly, to reclaim the future for our children, to strengthen our country for the century ahead.

To accomplish that mission, we began first with an economic strategy to shrink the deficit and balance the budget, to invest in the education and skills of our people, and to expand the export of American goods. The census report released this morning represents one more year's worth of compelling evidence that this economic strategy is working and that there are lots more people out there like Monique Miskimon.

The report shows that last year the income of the typical American household grew at nearly twice the rate of inflation. Since we launched our economic plan in 1993, the typical family's real income has risen by more than \$3,500. That's an extra \$3,500 that hardworking families can put toward their children's education or a downpayment on a first home. Income for typical African-American and Hispanic families increased by more than \$1,000 last year alone.

This report also shows that our growing economy is giving more and more families a chance to work their way out of poverty. The poverty rate fell to 13.3 percent, and while we still have plenty of room for improvement, the African-American poverty rate fell to another record low. Hispanic poverty saw the largest one-year drop in two decades. Child poverty has dropped in the past 4 years, more than in any 4-year period in the last three decades. And the earned-income tax credit, which Monique spoke of a moment ago, has raised more than 4 million people out of poverty in the last year alone.

The report this morning shows that economic growth continues to raise incomes, lift millions out of poverty, and extend opportunity. It also shows that we have more to do. Since 1993, every income group has benefited from our Nation's economic growth, and the lowest 20 percent of our people in terms of income have had the highest percentage increases. That's the good news, after over 20 years of increasing inequality.

But that inequality is still too high, and it simply means there are too many American families out there working hard, doing everything we could possibly ask of them, and still having a hard time getting ahead. We have to use our prosperity and the confidence that it inspires to help our hardest pressed families and our hardest pressed communities to ensure economic growth for all Americans.

The most important thing we have to do, of course, is to maintain the economic strategy that got us here in the first place, above all, the strict fiscal discipline that has given us low interest rates, low inflation, big investments, and more jobs.

Exactly a week from today, we will have the first balanced budget and surplus since Neil Armstrong walked on the Moon in 1969. Unfortunately, this week in the House of Representatives, the Republicans are moving forward with a proposal that drains the new surplus to pay for their tax plan. We can cut taxes. Indeed, my balanced budget includes targeted tax cuts for child care, for education, for environmental cleanup. But tax cuts must be paid for in full if we are to expand opportunity in the years to come.

I say again, we have been waiting for 29 years to see the red ink turn to black. We have a huge baby boom challenge coming when all the baby boomers retire. Social Security, as pres-

ently constituted, cannot sustain that retirement. We have to reform Social Security if we want to have it for our parents—that's me, when the baby boomers retire—without undermining the standard of living of our children and grandchildren.

So I say again, let us not get into this surplus we have worked for 29 years for—or we've waited for 29 years for and worked for 6 years for. Let's don't get into that and spend it in an election year tax cut until we have saved Social Security for the 21st century, for the sake of our children and our grandchildren.

Second, we have to continue to invest in our people and lift them all up. I was deeply disappointed this week when 95 percent of the Republicans in the Senate voted not to raise the minimum wage. To reject an increase in the minimum wage when there are still so many people working full-time and raising children in poverty, when the unemployment rate and the inflation rate is so low, I believe is a mistake and sends the wrong signal to the American people.

I thank the 95 percent of the Democratic caucus in the Senate who voted for the increase in the minimum wage. Working Americans deserve it. I'm disappointed, with only a week left in the fiscal year, we rejected this, and I haven't quit fighting for it. I think eventually we will get it in the next several months. If we have to wait until next year, we will get it.

But I'm also disappointed—as I said, a week from today we end the fiscal year, and we start a new one. And there's still been no action in the Congress on our vital education investments. Indeed, what action there has been in the House of Representatives has been negative, has been a setback for education.

Congress should work with us to enact my plan, paid for in the balanced budget, to reduce class size to an average of 18 in the early grades; to hire 100,000 teachers to teach those children in smaller classes; to rebuild or to construct or repair 5,000 schools so our kids will have good, adequate, safe schools to attend; to hook up all of our classrooms—all of them, even in the poorest neighborhoods—to the Internet by the year 2000; to improve early literacy by funding the program to send volunteers in to make sure that every 8-year-old can read; to lift our children's sights with voluntary national standards and clear means of measuring them.

Now, if we hope to maintain our economic growth well into the next generation, we have to give every American child a world-class elementary and secondary education. So I say again: We've been here for months and months; there's just a week left in the budget year; let's finally have action to improve our public schools and give all of our kids a world-class education.

The third thing I'd like to say is we have to continue to lead in the global economy if we want the American economy to continue to grow. We're enjoying unsurpassed economic prosperity, but all of you read the papers every day. You see the news at night. You know there are troubles elsewhere in the world. You know our friends in Asia and Russia are facing great turmoil. You know we're trying to keep our big trading partners and friends in Latin America from having the negative effect of that turmoil reach them, even though they are pursuing good policies. That's why it's important for Congress to fund our America's share of the International Monetary Fund, because the International Monetary Fund helps the countries that are helping themselves to return to growth and serves as an insurance policy against having the financial crisis spread to the countries that are doing the right thing and keeping Americans at work by buying our products.

Again I say, there is no reason not to do this. We've only got a week left in the budget year. We've been talking about it all year long. The problem has only gotten worse. It is time now to say, we're doing this because it's what America owes as the world leader, and more importantly, we're doing it because it is absolutely necessary to keep American economic growth going.

Finally, let me say that with just a week left in this budget year, I'd still like to see the Congress pass a decent Patients' Bill of Rights, one that covers—[*applause*]. Our bill would provide protections to all Americans, simple ones: If you get in an accident, you can go to the nearest emergency room, not be hauled to one halfway across town. If your doctor tells you you need to see a specialist, you can see one. If it comes down to a dispute about whether a medical procedure should or should not be applied, the decision should be made by a doctor, not an accountant. Your medical records ought to be protected in privacy. If your employer changes health care providers, it shouldn't affect you if you happen to be in the middle of a pregnancy

or a chemotherapy treatment or some other thing that would be entirely disruptive and dangerous and damaging to your health care if you had to change doctors in the middle of the procedure.

Now, we do that for everyone. The House passed a bill on a partisan vote, completely party-line vote, that doesn't protect 100 million people and doesn't provide any of those protections to the people that are covered. The Senate majority leader actually shut down business in the Senate a few days ago to keep them from voting for it, so they wouldn't be recorded—they wouldn't be recorded as killing the Patients' Bill of Rights—but they could kill it and still satisfy the insurance companies that are doing their best to do it.

There's still time. We haven't broken for the election yet. We can still do the right thing by the American people. But we have to think about it. We have to focus on it, and we have to put our priorities where they ought to be. I think it's worth fighting for the Patients' Bill of Rights in the closing days of this congressional session.

Again, I want to thank the economic team here and our supporters in the Congress, including those who are here today, for giving more Americans a chance to live the story that Monique has told us about. I want to thank her for coming today and bringing her beautiful daughter. I know we all wish them well.

Our prayers are with the people who are about to be affected and those who have been affected by the hurricane. And I ask that all of us focus on using these last days of this congressional session to think about the American people, to think about our responsibilities, to think about what got us here over the last 6 years, and instead of departing from it, to bear down and build on it. That is my goal, and that's what we ought to do.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

Possibility of Impeachment Inquiry

Q. Mr. President, do you see any way out of an impeachment inquiry?

The President. Well, let me answer you this way: The right thing to do is for us all to focus on what's best for the American people. And the right thing for me to do is what I'm doing. I'm working on leading our country, and I'm working on healing my family.

And if you look at what we announced today, what does it tell you? It proves, number one, that the course we have followed has been the right course for America. That's what it proves. After 6 years, it can't be an accident anymore.

But the second thing it proves is that it is utterly foolish for people to be diverted or distracted from the urgent challenges still before us. I told you that we had a record—a record low in African-American unemployment and poverty; a record low in the poverty rate for children, of African-American children. Do you know what that record low is? It's about 39 percent. In other words, it's breathtakingly high. That's just one statistic.

So what does that tell me? It tells me that the right thing to do is, if we all put progress over partisanship, put people over politics, put the American people first—what would we do? Well, we would keep the budget balanced. We would save Social Security before we squan-

dered the surplus. We would improve our schools. We would clean up our environment. We would pass the Patients' Bill of Rights. And we would keep the economy going. That's what we would be focused on. That's what I am focused on. That's the way out.

The way out here—and the only way out is for people in Washington to do what the folks in America want them to do, which is to take care of their concerns, their children, and their future. That's what I mean to do, and I'm going to do my best.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:20 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Monique Miskimon, administrative assistant, Maryland Committee for Children, Inc., who introduced the President, and her daughter, Jessica; and State Senator Efrain Gonzalez, Jr., of New York, president, National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators.

Statement on the Census Bureau Report on Income and Poverty *September 24, 1998*

This morning the Census Bureau released its annual report on income and poverty. The report shows that our growing economy continues to raise incomes, lift millions out of poverty, and extend opportunity. It represents further evidence that we must maintain fiscal responsibility, investments in our people, and our global leadership on matters of finance and trade.

Last year the income of the typical American household grew by nearly twice the rate of inflation. Since we launched our economic plan in 1993, the typical family's income has risen by more than \$3,500. The overall poverty rate fell to 13.3 percent. And while there is clearly more to be done, the African-American poverty rate

fell to another record low; Hispanic poverty saw the largest one-year drop in two decades. Child poverty has dropped more in the past 4 years than any 4-year period in nearly 30 years; and the earned-income tax credit, which we have dramatically expanded and fought hard to preserve, raised more than 4 million people out of poverty last year.

All Americans have a right to be proud of these gains. But we can't let these good times lull us into complacency. We must work even harder to make sure that as our Nation races forward, we give everyone a chance to come along.

Statement on the Anniversaries of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Limited Test Ban Treaty *September 24, 1998*

Two years ago today, I was proud to be the first world leader to sign the Comprehensive

Test Ban Treaty—first proposed by President Eisenhower over 40 years ago. Since then, 150