

Statement on Welfare Reform August 22, 2000

On August 22, 1996, I signed landmark bipartisan welfare reform legislation, transforming our Nation's welfare system into one that requires work for time-limited assistance. Four years later we see strong evidence that this historic change is working: Welfare caseloads have been cut in half; a record proportion of people on welfare are working; and the businesses in the Welfare to Work Partnership alone have hired more than one million people off welfare.

New data released today show that welfare rolls are just half of what they were 4 years ago, and the percentage of Americans on welfare is at the lowest level in 35 years. My administration will send a report to Congress today that shows all States have met the welfare reform law's overall work requirements in 1999. Moreover, individuals remaining on welfare are nearly 5 times more likely to be working than they were in 1992.

I am pleased that since its launch at the White House in May 1997, the Welfare to Work Partnership has enlisted more than 20,000 businesses who have hired an estimated 1.1 million former welfare recipients. As many of these companies have learned, welfare recipients are productive workers who want a hand up, not a handout. With Vice President Gore's leadership, the Federal Government has also done

its part, hiring nearly 50,000 former welfare recipients at a time when the Federal Government is the smallest it has been in 40 years.

In 4 short years, we have seen a new emphasis on work and responsibility, as welfare recipients themselves have risen to the challenge and made welfare what it was meant to be: a second chance, not a way of life. As we celebrate how far we've come, we must not forget that there is still more to do. Working together, we must build on our progress and help even more families become self-sufficient. That is why I am challenging the Welfare to Work Partnership to link even more welfare recipients, community-based organizations, and employers in communities around the Nation—helping more businesses find qualified workers and more welfare recipients and other new workers succeed in our booming economy. I urge State and local officials to use the resources and flexibility provided through welfare reform to invest in supports for both current recipients and low-income working families. And I call on Congress to join me in promoting work and responsibility by enacting my budget proposals to make work pay, encourage savings, promote responsible fatherhood, and expand access to child care, housing, transportation, and health care.

Remarks at a Reception for Senatorial Candidate Representative Debbie Stabenow in Bingham Farms, Michigan August 22, 2000

Thank you very, very much. I want to begin by saying thank you to Brian and Jennifer for opening their home. This is such a beautiful place. And the backyard is wonderful, and the weather has cooperated. It's an omen, Debbie.

I want to thank Senator Carl Levin for being here. I wish I could tell you all the times over the last 8 years that I have seen Carl Levin time and time again stand up on the floor of the Senate and do the right thing, not only for Michigan but for the people of the United

States. He is a magnificent United States Senator, and he deserves a good fight—[inaudible].

I don't know if John Conyers is here. I heard he was coming. Hello, John; it's nice to see you. Let me say that one of the corollary benefits of electing five more, six more Democrats to the House of Representatives is that John Conyers will be the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, and it will be a credit to the United States. And I thank you.

Millie, I'm glad to see you. You look good in that Medal of Freedom. [Laughter] And you

earned it. And I want to say a special word of thanks to Doreen and David Hermelin for 9 years of friendship and support, for doing such a magnificent job in Norway, and David has made me laugh from Michigan to Washington to Oslo. And I suspect I'm not the only person in this crowd besides your family that feels deeply indebted to you for being a magnificent human being. And I thank you so much.

Now, this is an unusual election for me. It's the first time in 26 years they've had one that I'm not running for something. [Laughter] Most days I'm okay about it. [Laughter] My family has a new candidate, making Debbie my second favorite Senate candidate who is a woman running in America today. [Laughter] And I thank the Hermelins for helping her, as well.

My party has a new leader, and I thought he did a magnificent job last Thursday night. And Michigan is very, very important to what happens this year. It is not an accident that early Tuesday morning Hillary and I got up in Los Angeles and flew across the country to drive to Monroe, Michigan, for the symbolic handoff with the Vice President and Tipper Gore. It is profoundly important. It's also important because of this Senate race.

I admire Debbie Stabenow. I admire her for the work she's done in the Congress. I admire her for standing up for what she believes. I admire her for leaving the confines of a safe House seat and the prospect of being in the majority in the House of Representatives to take a step of challenging an incumbent Senator. I want her to win, and she can win, and she should win if all of you will do what you can to help her between now and November.

Now, as I said the other night in Los Angeles, this is a big election. And every Senate seat, every House seat is important, and obviously the White House is a profoundly important thing. But the only thing I'm worried about in this election is that we might get all the way to November, and people might not understand because things are going so well that it is a big election with big choices and big differences.

I am absolutely convinced if the people of Michigan understand what the choices are and what the consequences to them and their families are, that Debbie will be elected and that Al Gore and Joe Lieberman will be elected. That's what I believe. I believe that, and so I thank you for your contributions; I thank you

for coming here. But I just want to take 2 minutes to say what I tried to hammer home last night and to make a couple of other points—or last week.

Number one, we started 8 years ago with a simple vision that America in the 21st century ought to be a place where opportunity is alive for every responsible citizen, where without regard to our backgrounds and our differences, we are coming together, not being driven apart, and where we're still the world's leading force for peace and freedom.

Now, we had a strategy: prepare people for this new era by creating the conditions and giving the people the tools to make the most of their own lives and giving everybody a chance. Get the roadblocks out of the way and give people a hand up who needed it. We just got fresh evidence today that that's working. Today we got the 4-year results on our welfare reform efforts. Welfare rolls now are at a 35-year low in the United States of America, something you can all be proud of.

But I want to reiterate something else I said. I believe all the best things—for all the good things that have happened in America the last 8 years, even greater achievements are out there if, but only if, we focus on the big challenges and make the right choices. And there's some big challenges out there. If we have the longest economic expansion in history, how are we going to keep the prosperity going and extend its benefits to people in places left behind? How are we going to get America out of debt for the first time since 1835? How are we going to meet the challenge of the aging of America? When the baby boomers like me are all over 65, there will only be two people working for every one person drawing Social Security.

How are we going to meet the challenge of the children of America, the largest and most diverse group of children we have ever had? Will they all get a world-class education, or not? How are we going to meet the challenge of balancing work and family in a world where most parents have to work?

How are we going to meet the challenge of staying ahead in science and technology and protecting our values? When all your medical and financial records are on the Internet, when all of us have a little gene card that says everything that's wrong with us, how are we going to protect our privacy and keep people from depriving others of health insurance or a job?

How are we going to meet the challenge of global warming and still keep the economy going? How are we going to deal with even greater racial, religious, ethnic, and other diversities? And what will it take for us to continue to lead the world toward the kind of peace I've worked so hard for, from the Middle East to Northern Ireland to the Balkans? What will it take?

Now, don't let anybody tell you there are no big issues in this election. This is big stuff. And how a country deals with its prosperity, its good times, is just as stern a test of its judgment, its values, its character as how you deal with adversity. After all, when I came to Michigan in 1992 and asked the people to vote for me, it didn't take a stroke of genius to understand that we had to do something different. As Al Gore used to say, "Everything that should be up was down. Everything that should be down was up." We couldn't keep doing the same things.

Now we have to think about how to meet these challenges. And I just want to mention two or three things that I think are profoundly important. I could talk about a dozen, but I'll just mention three.

First, on health care: This United States Senator would vote for, not against, the Patients' Bill of Rights, would vote for a Medicare drug program that all of our seniors who need it could have access to. That is important.

The second thing I want to talk about a little bit is the economy, and that relates to the attack that's been leveled against her by her opponent. I saw the other day—I was reading the papers, getting ready to come here, that her opponent says, "Well, you know, she'll go vote for that big drug program, she and Carl Levin. There's just going to be like a \$600 million tax or a billion dollar tax. It's just going to be terrible." I heard all that. It's like, we're going to spend too much money.

Now, I want you to listen to this because this is the most important distinction that will affect everybody that I think is not well understood. What are we going to do with our surplus, and how is it going to affect the economy? Here's our position. Our position is, we have a large projected surplus; we should, however, not spend it all today, first, because it hasn't come in; it's a projected surplus. So what should we do with it? Here's what we say. We say we want to give the American people a tax cut

we can afford that includes marriage penalty relief, college tuition deduction, help for child care, for long-term care for an elderly or disabled relative, for saving for retirement.

We think we have to save some money back to invest in education and in health care, including this Medicare prescription drug program. We think we have to save some money back so that we can lengthen the life of Social Security and Medicare, to get it out beyond the life expectancy of the baby boom generation, so that when we retire we don't bankrupt our kids and their ability to raise our grandchildren. And if we do it that way, we can get this country out of debt over the next 10 or 12 years, for the first time since 1835, a year before Arkansas and Michigan became States.

Now, that's our position. Their position sounds better the first time you hear it, and it doesn't take as long to say it. Their position is, "Hey, we've got this big projected surplus. It's your money. Vote for us. We're going to give it all back to you." Sounds great. Doesn't take as long to say. Here's the problem.

It is literally true that their combined tax cut promises spend all the projected surplus and then some, leaving nothing for education, health care, the environment, nothing for emergencies, nothing for their own spending promises, their Star Wars promise, their promise to partially privatize Social Security, which alone would cost a trillion dollars. And most important of all, the money is not there yet.

Now look, this is a big deal. The Council of Economic Advisers has estimated that even if all this money comes in, the plan that Debbie and Carl would vote for would keep interest rates one percent lower every year for a decade than their plan, if all the money comes in. In other words, best case. You know what that's worth to you? Two hundred fifty billion dollars in lower home mortgages, \$30 billion in lower car payments, \$15 billion in lower college loan payments. In other words, another \$300 billion tax cut.

Our plan costs way less than half of what theirs does and gives more money to two-thirds of the American people. Now, nearly everybody in this room would be better off under their plan the first year, because it helps people who can afford to go to fundraisers like this. [Laughter] And I hope I'll be one of them next year. [Laughter] But what's the problem? Every one of you will be worse off as soon as those interest

rates started going up and the stock market started going down and the economy started getting weaker.

This is a huge deal, not widely understood. You have to find a way to tell your friends and neighbors: We have worked too hard to get this country out of the ditch; we have worked too hard to get rid of this deficit; we can't show up next year and say, "Here's our projected surplus. Let's give it all away in a tax cut." And the drug program that she supports can easily be funded to help every senior citizen who needs it in this country and still have a tax cut and still get us out of debt. And if all the money doesn't come in, we've got a cushion built into ours.

Now, you've got to hammer this home. Think how hard we've worked together as a country to turn it around economically, to get interest rates down, to make investments pay off, to generate jobs and create hope and opportunity. And in some blinding flash should we just throw it away by giving away all of our projected income?

I say all the time, it really reminds me of these letters I used to get, back when I was a civilian, in the mail from the Publishers Clearing House, those sweepstakes letters signed by Ed McMahon: "You may have won \$10 million." That's what your projected income is: "You may have won \$10 million." Well, if you spent the money the next day, you probably shouldn't vote for her. [Laughter] But if you didn't, you should vote for Debbie Stabenow; you should vote for Al Gore and Joe Lieberman and support Carl Levin and keep this prosperity going. This is a profoundly important issue.

The last thing I want to say is this: A United States Senator has to cast important votes that are more important than economics, that go to the heart of who we are as a people and how we live and whether we're going to be one America, whether we're going to respect everybody's privacy and everybody's rights and everybody's diversity—the hate crimes legislation, the employment nondiscrimination legislation, and maybe most important of all, ratifying or failing to approve Justices appointed to the United States Supreme Court.

Now, the next President of the United States will have between two and four appointments to the Supreme Court. I had two in my first term, and I'm proud of the job they're doing. And I never asked them to reflect every view

I had, but I do think it is important that we have a President who will appoint Justices that will stick up for basic civil rights, including the right to choose, and Senators who will vote to ratify such judges.

And if this is an important issue to friends and neighbors of yours and people you know, you cannot let them pretend that the vote in the Senate race or the vote in the President's race is not going to have an impact on this.

So I will say again, if you believe in the Patients' Bill of Rights and the Medicare drug benefits that all seniors can afford, you've got to vote for Debbie and Al and Joe. If you believe that we should get this country out of debt and keep the prosperity going and save some money to invest in education and health care and have a tax cut we can afford, you've got to vote for Debbie and Al and Joe. If you believe in a woman's right to choose and if you believe in the hate crimes legislation and building one America that we can all be a part of, you've got to vote for Debbie and for Al and Joe.

That is clear. And you have to do what you can. This is the most important thing of all. I know I am, if I might use an expression out of my faith, I know I am preaching to the saved today. But what I'm trying to say to you is, it is not good enough even for you to come here to this fundraiser. Every one of you, every one of you, has friends who may not even be Democrats, but they certainly aren't as interested in politics as you are. They never come to fundraisers like this. They don't think about this stuff all the time. But they're good citizens, and they will show up and vote. And they have to understand it's a big election with big choices, with big differences that have huge consequences to the lives our children will have.

So I implore you, if you believe in what you did in coming here today, go out there and tell people if they want to keep the prosperity going and extend it, if they want to get this country out of debt, if they want to see all our seniors have the medicine they need as more and more of us grow older, if they want to preserve a right to choose for a woman and the right to build one America without regard to all the differences that make this a great and interesting country, there is only one choice in this election: Debbie Stabenow, Al Gore, and Joe Lieberman.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:55 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to reception hosts Brian Hermelin, president, Active Aero, Inc., and his wife, Jennifer; former U.S. Ambassador to Norway David B. Hermelin and his

wife, Doreen; and political activist Mildred (Millie) Jeffrey, who was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom on August 9. Representative Stabenow was a candidate for U.S. Senate in Michigan.

Remarks at a Dinner for Senatorial Candidate Representative Debbie Stabenow in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

August 22, 2000

Thank you. Well, first I'd like to thank Bill and Michelle for letting us come into their home while it's still new. [Laughter] It might have been built for this event, who knows? [Laughter] It's a really beautiful place, and they're really good people. They've been so good to me and Hillary and the Vice President and Tipper. And thank you for helping Debbie, and thanks for being my friend all these long years. I'm very grateful to you.

I want to thank all your officeholders who are here—Jennifer Granholm, whose husband was giving me some tips on how to be the spouse of a candidate. [Laughter] And I listened very carefully. I don't want to blow this. [Laughter] I thank Dale Kildee for being my friend and for working with us for 8 years for the interests of the families of Michigan and the United States. It's been really great.

And I can't say enough about Carl Levin. He and Barbara rode over here with us, and we were talking about the last 8 years, and I was thinking about all the things that he has educated me on. But I can tell you that he is one of the handful of people that is universally respected in the Senate by everybody, and when he talks, everybody listens.

I want to thank all of you who worked on this event. I see Peter Buttenweiser back there. Thank you, sir, and all the rest of you who helped to make this successful. And I'd like to say my special word of appreciation to Jane Hart for being here tonight. You know, when I was a young man in college, I worked for Senator Bill Fulbright, who was then the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, and it was a very long time ago. But I remember vividly when I was there, one of the most tumultuous times in modern American history. We had big struggles over civil rights, big struggles

over riots in the streets, big struggles over Vietnam. And I remember very vividly how Senator Phil Hart conducted himself, how he spoke, what he said, and how other people respected him.

And one of the reasons that Debbie Stabenow ought to go to the Senate, apart from the fact that she will vote more like Phil Hart would have voted and speak more like he would have spoken, is that we in the Democratic Party have tried our best to work in good faith with the Republicans, and we have tried to end the politics of personal hostility and negativism. And I think almost as important as anything else, Debbie will restore, along with Hillary and President Gore and Vice President Lieberman, a sense of real humanity to our national political life. The American people will say one more time, "We don't like that stuff. We sent you up there to do a job. We want you to treat each other with respect, and we want you to show up for work every day." That is the legacy of Phil Hart that I remember and one I will always remember. And I'm very honored that you're here tonight, Jane, and I thank you very much.

I'd also like to say at the last meeting—I don't even know if he's here tonight but—if he came over here—but I saw Matt Frumin, who was one of the original cochairs of my Saxophone Club who is now running for Congress in the 11th district. [Laughter] And he's really doing a good job, and I hope you'll help him as well.

Now, if you heard what I said in Los Angeles, I don't know that I have much more to say about—[laughter]—about what I think this election is all about. But I will try to be briefer and more colloquial. First of all, I am profoundly grateful to the people of Michigan for