

Week Ending Friday, March 14, 1997

The President's Radio Address

March 8, 1997

Good morning. This week we learned that America's economy continues to grow steady and strong, creating almost 600,000 new jobs in the first 2 months of this year alone and about 12 million in the last 4 years. We can make this time one of enormous promise for America, but only if we make sure that all Americans who are willing to work have the chance to reap the rewards of our prosperity.

This morning I want to talk to you about what we can do to lift the permanent underclass into a thriving and growing middle class and to announce new steps the National Government will take to move people from welfare to work.

Four years ago, when I became President, I pledged to end welfare as we know it. We worked with States to launch welfare reform experiments to require work. We cracked down on child support enforcement, increasing child support payments by 50 percent. We required teen mothers to stay at school and live at home if they wanted to receive welfare. Today I'm pleased to report that due to these efforts and our growing economy, we've already moved 2.6 million people off the welfare rolls, a record number.

Last summer, we took the most dramatic step of all when I signed the bipartisan welfare reform legislation that imposed time limits, required work, and extended child care and health care so that people can move from welfare to work without hurting their children. The new law ended the old welfare system when we said to those on welfare: Responsibility is not an option; it must be a way of life.

Now, all the rest of us have our responsibility, indeed, our moral obligation, to make welfare reform work, to make sure that those who now must work, can work. We must move another 2 million more people off the welfare rolls in the next 4 years. And frankly,

we must recognize that many of these people will be harder to reach and will need more help than those who moved off the rolls in the past 4 years.

This cause must engage the energy and the commitment of everyone in our society, of business, houses of worship, labor unions, universities, civic organizations, as well as government at every level. Above all, we must harness the private sector to bring jobs and hope to our hardest pressed neighborhoods. We are working with leaders of American business to help mobilize other businesses to hire people off welfare. My balanced budget plan would give businesses tax incentives to hire people and would give job placement firms a bonus for every person they place from welfare into a job.

States can do more, too. I have called upon every State to use the power that has now been given to them under the new welfare law, to turn welfare checks into private sector paychecks. And the National Government must do its part and set an example. Our National Government is now the smallest it has been in three decades, but it is still the Nation's largest employer. We must do our part. So today I am committing a National Government action plan to hire people off welfare.

I am formally directing the heads of each agency and department of our Federal Government to do everything they can to hire people off the welfare rolls into available jobs in Government, consistent with the laws already on the books for hiring Federal workers. Because this effort is so important, I am asking Vice President Gore, who has led our reinventing Government effort and done so much to make our Government work better as it costs less, to oversee this endeavor.

I want these agencies to use the worker-trainee program, which the Government already has in place, to train workers quickly and move them into entry-level jobs. Then if the people do well for 3 years, they can

join the civil service. And I am asking every member of my Cabinet to prepare a detailed plan for hiring welfare recipients, what jobs they will fill, how they will recruit welfare recipients, how they will make sure these people have the chance to work hard, perform well and, thereby, deserve to keep their jobs. The members of the Cabinet will present these plans to me in one month at a special Cabinet meeting.

The job of moving people from welfare to work as the law requires will not be easy. But we must help them as they help themselves. And we need to help all low income Government workers. We need to make sure they take advantage of the earned-income tax credit, the tax cut that already has helped 15 million of our hardest pressed working families. We should give these workers help with transportation to work, and we must help them to find affordable child care.

Government can help to move people from welfare to work by acting the way we want all employers to act, demanding high performance from workers but going the extra mile to offer opportunity to those who have been on welfare and want to do something more with their lives. If we all do that, we can move into the 21st century strong, united, and with the American dream alive for all our people.

Thanks for listening.

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

Memorandum on Government Employment for Welfare Recipients

March 8, 1997

*Memorandum for the Heads of Executive
Departments and Agencies*

Subject: Government Employment for
Welfare Recipients

Since I signed the historic welfare reform law, I have urged businesses, nonprofit organizations, and religious groups across the Nation to help make its promise of opportunity real by offering jobs to welfare recipients. We are making great progress, but there is more to do. And today, I take action to ensure that the Federal Government, as the Nation's

largest employer, contributes to the greatest extent possible to this national effort.

I therefore direct each of you, as head of an agency or department, to use all available hiring authorities, consistent with statute and prior executive memoranda, to hire people off the welfare rolls into available job positions in the Government.

In particular, I direct you to expand the use of the Worker-Trainee Program and other excepted service hiring authorities. The Worker-Trainee Program allows agencies to quickly and easily hire entry-level persons for up to 3 years, with the ability to convert the appointment to career status if the employee has performed satisfactorily. Though recently underutilized, the program allows agencies to bypass complex Federal personnel hiring rules and procedures to bring people into the junior grades of the work force.

I further direct you, in recognition of the different characteristics of the various agencies' work forces, to prepare an individualized plan for hiring welfare recipients and to submit that plan to me within 30 days. This plan should have three principal components:

- The plan should contain a survey indicating in which divisions and for which categories of positions your agency can most easily hire welfare recipients, both in the Washington, D.C. area, and in the field.
- The plan should describe in detail how the agency intends to recruit and hire qualified welfare recipients. This description should include a proposed local outreach program, and utilize Federal Executive Boards and Federal Executive Agencies to bring Federal job opportunities to the attention of welfare offices, State and private employment offices, nonprofit organizations, and others that work with welfare recipients on a regular basis. This program should build upon the Government's existing nationwide employment information systems.
- The plan should describe in detail how the agency will assist welfare recipients, once hired, to perform well and to keep their jobs. The agency should include in this aspect of the plan proposals for