

and Congress over the NEH and the NEA. It's important to recognize we've got some good supporters there, too.

Let me invite you to enjoy the Marine Orchestra, to enjoy each other, to enjoy this beautiful day and the rich gifts our honorees have given us.

Thank you very much for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:45 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Lois Capps, wife of Representative Walter Capps.

Message on the Observance of National Arts and Humanities Month, October 1997

September 29, 1997

America celebrates October as National Arts and Humanities Month to recognize the unique role that the arts and humanities play in the lives of our families, our communities, and our country.

For more than 200 years, the arts and humanities have distinguished us as individuals and united us as a nation. The arts empower us to express ourselves and to understand and appreciate the expressions of others. Through the study of literature, history, and philosophy, we learn to build on the riches of our past to create a firm foundation for a better future. Together, the arts and humanities teach us to celebrate the cultural diversity unique to America, while transcending differences in race, ethnicity, age, or creed.

Each day our world evolves further from our notion of the familiar, and we must adapt to its changing nature. In this challenging time, we look to our artists and scholars to inform our decisions and our actions. Musicians, actors, philosophers, playwrights, painters, writers, sculptors, dancers, and historians share with us their talent and training, inspiring our finest achievements and giving voice to our deepest aspirations.

Because we discover our greatest possibilities through the exploration of the human spirit, we must encourage our young people to build on this cultural legacy and seek their highest potential in the arts and humanities. Children inspired by their own creative

achievements excel in other areas of learning, developing the skills and the confidence to create better lives and brighter futures.

As we observe National Arts and Humanities Month this year, let us reflect on the role of these vital pursuits in our individual lives and in the life of our democracy. Today, on the threshold of a new millennium, they are more essential than ever to the endurance of our values of tolerance, pluralism, and freedom; to our understanding of where we are and where we need to go. Let us remember that the arts and humanities are a necessity, not a luxury, and that every American deserves to have access to them. And let us resolve to sustain America's national commitment to the arts and humanities so that we may preserve for the generations to come the great artistic and intellectual life of our nation.

Bill Clinton

NOTE: This message was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 29.

Remarks on the Income and Poverty Report and an Exchange With Reporters

September 29, 1997

The President. I don't know if I can go on. [Laughter]

Good morning. This Friday will mark the sixth anniversary of the day I announced my intention to run for President of the United States. On that day, I challenged America to embrace an urgent mission for the 21st century, to preserve the American dream, restore the hopes of the forgotten middle class, and reclaim the future for our children.

As President, I have worked hard to set America on that track, to fulfill that mission, putting in place a bold strategy to shrink the deficit, invest in our people, and expand the sales of America's products and services abroad. I am pleased to announce today that we have more evidence that our economic strategy is succeeding.

This morning, the Census Bureau released its annual Survey of Income and Poverty in America. It shows that last year the typical family benefited from a significant increase

in income for the third year in a row. Since we launched our economic plan in 1993, the typical family's annual income has risen by nearly \$2,200 a year. That's an extra \$2,200 that hard-working families can put toward their children's education, a downpayment on a home, or even a much needed vacation. After years and years of stagnant family incomes, today's report proves that America's middle class, no longer forgotten, is rising fast.

It should be noted that these figures do not reflect several other dividends of prosperity we have delivered for the American people. They don't reflect the \$500 per child tax credit, the \$1,500 HOPE scholarship, the education IRA's, the real benefits of lower interest rates and mortgage costs worth \$1,000 a year or more to millions of homeowners.

And rising incomes are also lifting families out of poverty. The report shows that while there is clearly much more to be done, the African-American poverty rate has fallen to its lowest level ever. The income of the typical Hispanic household grew more last year than in any single year on record. The child poverty rate has dropped, in the past 3 years, more than in any 3-year period since the 1960's. And the earned-income tax credit, which we have dramatically expanded and then fought hard to preserve, has raised more than 4 million people out of poverty last year.

The report also shows we have more to do to extend opportunity to all Americans. Starting in the 1970's, income inequality rose sharply. Now it has stabilized. Since 1993, every income group has seen its income rise, with those in the lowest 20 percent showing the fastest gains, thanks, in part, to the minimum wage, to more jobs, and to the earned-income tax credit, which is not measured in the statistics. But we still have to do more to grow together in the 21st century.

Let me say that this report also underscores another important challenge, one that I have been concerned about for a long time. Last year, there were 800,000 more children without health insurance than the year before. However, thank goodness, many of these children will now be eligible for coverage under the balanced budget's historic

\$24 billion child health initiative, which takes effect this week.

Two years ago we were fighting hard to save Medicaid's guarantee to 4 million children. Now we're looking forward to extending child health insurance to another 5 million children. We have to work together to encourage the States to take full advantage of this opportunity and to make sure that the funds are spent actually insuring children who do not have health insurance today.

To ensure that all our people benefit from the growing economy, we also have to make sure that our people have access to the world's best education, with high standards in the basics. And we have to address the pressing issue of child care. That is another thing that would help to alleviate pressures on middle and lower income working families' households.

The first ever White House Conference on Child Care will be held later this fall. It will focus on how we can help parents to succeed at home and work through quality, affordable child care. In all these ways we can continue to fulfill what I started out to do 6 years ago, preserving the American dream, restoring the middle class, reclaiming the future for our children. But this is good news. And now, Janet Yellen and Gene Sperling will be able to answer questions about the details of the proposals.

Thank you.

Campaign Finance Legislation

Q. What do you think is the chance of getting campaign finance reform through this session this year?

The President. Well, I hope it's good. It's certainly better than it was a month ago. Obviously, there is still strong opposition to it in the leadership of the Republican Party, and they're in the majority in Congress. But I've seen some encouraging signs in the Senate, and frankly, I've seen some encouraging signs in the House with some Republican members willing to speak up and say that we ought to do something. So I'm quite hopeful that we will get something.

I know this—if we just—the way these things work, if we can succeed in keeping the public spotlight on the debate, then the pressure will build to come out with some-

thing positive. And I have done what I could, and I'm very proud of our caucus in the Senate for doing what it has done. The Democrats have clearly come out unanimously for some—for campaign finance reform. And we've just got to keep the public spotlight on this and keep going until we get legislation.

Welfare Reform

Q. Mr. President, many States, California, Texas, Florida, acknowledge that they're going to fail the first real test of the new welfare law, the requirement that they have 75 percent of two-parent welfare families in jobs and job training by this week. Will HHS impose fines that—[inaudible]—allowed to do, on the States? And what—does it shake your confidence, this failure—shake your confidence in the new welfare law?

The President. No, because, first of all—let me answer the second question first. It doesn't shake my confidence in the law, because we have succeeded, I think, beyond anybody's expectations, partly from the growing economy and partly from welfare reform efforts, in reducing the welfare rolls more than they have ever been reduced in a comparable time period, ever.

We've had 20 years of immigration in our country at high levels, many of the immigrants coming here come without many resources, and they want to work their way into the American dream. So we've had a lot of people coming in here, and yet we've been successful in having the smallest percentage of our people on welfare since 1970.

So my answer to you is, I want to keep high standards, and I want them enforced, because we block-granted the money to the States they asked for. After all, they supported the law. They said we could keep the Federal guarantee for health care and food stamps, nutrition, which I insisted on, but they pointed out that they already had the freedom to set different welfare reimbursement levels every month, so they wanted control of that pot of money so they would have more flexibility to move people from welfare to work. And in return, they agreed to these targets.

So I think we just need to keep pushing ahead. In terms of what should be done, ob-

viously I want to consult with our people at HHS and others to do what is best. But I think most States really are working hard and in good faith to try to do this. I think that they know that's what the voters want and most importantly, that's what the people on welfare want. So we don't want to just forget about our high standards, especially when we've proven we can hire a lot more people than we ever thought we could.

Campaign Finance Legislation

Q. You mentioned Republicans in the House. This weekend, Speaker Gingrich was unusually caustic, accusing your staff and your lawyers of blocking pursuit of the truth in law. Have you looked back at your records and the phone calls that you have made and come to any new conclusion about your own involvement?

The President. First of all, I think—no, I have not come to any new conclusion. But I think the remarks this weekend were an attempt to divert the public attention from the fact that the leadership of the Republican Party in the House opposes campaign finance reform, and has consistently, and continues to do so.

But I am encouraged that along with our Democrats who are supporting it, there are an increasingly vocal band of brave Republicans willing to stick up and be for it. And again, this is our chance to pass this bill, and I think we'd all be making a mistake to be diverted. I don't intend to be.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:03 a.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House.

Remarks at the Arts and Humanities Medal Awards Dinner

September 29, 1997

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to begin the dinner by saying a special word of welcome to all of you.

Frequently in this room, it is my privilege on behalf of the people of the United States to offer a toast to a visiting leader of another nation or to showcase our culture to the world. Tonight it is my privilege to honor