AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

(4) Based on their matches with the SSA prisoner database, agencies that identify ineligible recipients shall immediately take action to suspend, reduce, or terminate benefits as permitted by law; and

(5) The agencies shall work with the Commissioner of Social Security and State and local governments, where appropriate, and take whatever actions are practicable to carry out this memorandum. The Commissioner of Social Security shall report to me within 180 days on the actions the SSA and other agencies have taken to implement this memorandum.

I believe that this coordinated governmentwide approach to terminating, suspending, or reducing Federal benefits to prison inmates will more fully carry out the intention of the Federal laws restricting payment of benefits to prison inmates and will provide savings in Federal benefit programs.

William J. Clinton

Remarks at the White House Correspondents' Association Dinner

April 25, 1998

Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. McQuillan, Mr. Powell. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

As you know, I have been traveling to other lands quite a lot lately, and I just want to say what a pleasure it is for Hillary and me to be here in your country. [*Laughter*] Since I arrived here—[*laughter*]—I've been awestruck by the beauty of your landscape, the spirit of your people, the color of your native garb. [*Laughter*]

Now, the crowds who greet me here are not quite as adoring as in other nations I've visited lately—[*laughter*]—but they seem occasionally friendly, nonetheless. I've even sampled some of your indigenous cuisine, your hamburgers, quite tasty, sort of a meat sandwich. [*Laughter*]

It appears that democracy is thriving here. There are regular elections, contested with vigor, honored by some—[*laughter*]. In the legislature, persistent coup attempts so far have failed to upend the balance of power. [*Laughter*] You have a lively, independent press, confident in its judgment and bold in its predictions. [*Laughter*] And persistent, I might add.

Yes, this Washington is a very special place, and Hillary and I will never forget our visit here. [*Laughter*]

Now, as I have come to do on these tours, I want to take just a few moments to reflect on our shared history. The past decades, indeed centuries, are filled with regrettable incidents. Mistakes were made. [*Laughter*] Injustices were committed. And certainly the passive tense was used too much. [*Laughter*]

Ladies and gentlemen, I regret so much—I regret our long neglect of the planet Pluto. [*Laughter*] It took until 1930—1930—to welcome Pluto into the community of planets, and that was wrong. [*Laughter*] And I am so sorry about disco. [*Laughter*] That whole era of leisure suits and beanbag chairs and lava lamps—I mean, we all had to endure the cheesiness of the seventies, and that was wrong. [*Laughter*]

Then there's the Susan B. Anthony dollar. [*Laughter*] It did look too much like a quarter. And that was wrong. [*Laughter*] The expression, ''happy campers.'' Oh, it was cute the first couple of times, but it got real old real fast. [*Laughter*] I recently used it at a Cabinet meeting, and that was wrong. [*Laughter*] Pineapple on pizza—some things are just wrong. [*Laughter*]

I'd also, in this moment of cleansing, like to take just a moment to reflect on past treatment of the White House press corps. I apologize for the quality of the free food you've been served over the years. [*Laughter*] At the price, you deserved better. It was wrong. [*Laughter*] For many years when the space that is now the briefing room in the White House was a swimming pool, reporters had to tread water for hours on end. [*Laughter*] And that was wrong—sort of. [*Laughter*]

And I'd really like to apologize for all the information you've had to attribute to anonymous sources over the years. Of course, that apology has to be off the record, and for that I am truly sorry. [*Laughter*] But now that we have put the issues of the past behind us, I really would like to thank you for inviting me to tonight's dinner. This is the night I get to poke fun at you. That is my definition of executive privilege. [*Laughter*]

Now, I'm at a little bit of a disadvantage this year. I've been so busy I haven't read a newspaper or a magazine or even watched the evening news since the Pope went to Cuba. [*Laughter*] What have you been writing about since then? [*Laughter*] I hardly have any time to read the news anymore. Mostly, I just skim the retractions. [*Laughter*] I've even stopped watching McCurry's briefing; I mean, he never answers a single question. [*Laughter*] I don't know how you put up with it. I've told him again and again and again he can answer any question he wants. [*Laughter*] What has he told you about that? [*Laughter*]

Seriously, I have been looking so much forward to seeing all of you this weekend. I just want to know one thing: How come there's no table for Salon Magazine? [*Laughter*] That's supposed to be funny; don't take yourselves so seriously. [*Laughter*] You'll see the light. Don't worry about it. Loosen up. [*Laughter*]

One of the things I like about this dinner is that as big as it is, it's a lot smaller and more intimate than the White House Pundits Dinner. [*Laughter*] I don't have anything against political pundits, mind you. Some of my best friends used to be political pundits, and some political pundits used to be my best friends. [*Laughter*]

Really, I'm just here to warm the audience up for Ray Romano. I feel ambivalent about it. He's the star of a show called ''Everybody Loves Raymond.'' Everybody loves Raymond? I can't stand a guy with 100 percent approval rating. [*Laughter*]

I do want to congratulate the winners tonight, Earl Lane and Andrew Smith, Mike Frisby, Ron Fournier, Peter Maer. I'd like to say something to Mike Frisby: Now that you've won this award, I think you ought to slow down, work a little less, try to enjoy the finer things of life. [*Laughter*]

And to Ron Fournier—you know, I honestly believe Ron Fournier is the only person who came to Washington with me from Arkansas who hasn't been subpoenaed. [*Laughter*] But the night is still young. [*Laughter*]

I'm also happy to see that Peter Maer is getting an award tonight for his excellent work. I was worried, since he was nearly mauled by a cheetah on our Africa trip, you probably ought to be giving him the Purple Heart. Now, come on, could you write a joke about Peter Maer? A little laugh there. [*Laughter*]

It was reported on our trip that Sam Donaldson scared away a herd of elephants with his distinctive voice. [*Laughter*] That is not fair. Elephants are very smart. The elephants knew Sam works for Disney; they thought he was trying to round them up for a new theme park. [*Laughter*]

This has been an extraordinary few months for the White House press corps. It's no wonder you've been swarming around the White House; there's nothing to cover on Capitol Hill. [*Laughter*] Now, listen to this. All over, TV executives are asking, what can possibly fill the gaping hole on Thursday night once Seinfeld goes off the air? I've got it; Congress on C–SPAN. Now, there's a show about nothing. [*Laughter*] Not that there is anything wrong with that, mind you. There's nothing wrong with that. [*Laughter*]

There are barely 40 days left in the 105th Congress as of tonight. This is a Congress with nothing to do and no time to do it in. [*Laughter*] But there will be one news item coming out of Capitol Hill next week. I met with Senator John Glenn recently to decide who should be the next distinguished Member of Congress hurled into the far reaches of the universe. [*Laughter*] And we have our man. Godspeed, Dick Armey. [*Laughter*]

On Tuesday, Speaker Gingrich is holding a press conference to proclaim that Tony the Tiger is not selling Frosted Flakes to children. [*Laughter*] Last week he said the movie ''Titanic'' glorified smoking. I couldn't believe it. This week he'll accuse it of glorifying drowning. [*Laughter*] You know, this is a—it gets funnier if you think about it. [*Laughter*]

For all of you who do not live in Washington, let me ask you to make some allowances for all of us tonight. This is a unique and rather unsettling moment in Washington. I'm not the only one who is anxiously awaiting the release of Steve Brill's new magazine. I have an advance copy here. See? It's called, ''Content.'' [*Laughter*] Now, why would anyone want to call a magazine about the news media that? Oh, McCurry says it's called, ''Content.'' Why would anyone want to call

a magazine about the news media that? [*Laughter*]

Anyway, you might be interested in what's going to be in the first edition. I have it here, the table of contents: Makeover tips, by John King. [*Laughter*] George Mitchell writes about the prospects of lasting peace between Barbara Walters and Diane Sawyer. [*Laughter*] ''Six Lip-Smacking Summertime Recipes for Harvest Burgers,'' by David Brinkley. [*Laughter*] A retrospective: CBS News, from Murrow to Molinari. [*Laughter*] ''Buddy Got What He Deserved,'' by Maureen Dowd. [*Laughter*] Here's an article called, ''Waiting in the Wings,'' co-written by Al Gore and Brian Williams. [*Laughter*] I think they're both going to make it. Here's Lanny Davis' review of ''Spin Cycle.'' He liked it. [*Laughter*]

Now, I've got to say one thing. You know, this book, ''Spin Cycle,'' it implies that this Kabuki dance between the White House and the press is some kind of a recent phenomenon. That's not true. It is a cherished part of our history. Just in preparation for tonight, I had the National Archives send over some yellowed transcripts to make this point. For example, here's some good news from the Hoover administration: Housing starts were up in the third quarter of 1931. [*Laughter*] Said a senior adviser to the President, ''These Hoovervilles reflect a commitment to private initiative instead of paternalistic big Government. The President is proud they bear his name.'' [*Laughter*]

Then in 1814 a White House official disputed the idea that the burning of the White House was a setback for the Madison administration. [*Laughter*] ''Yes, fire did consume the mansion,'' he said, ''but it was in desperate need of renovation anyway—[*laughter*]—and this salutary effort by the British actually saves us time and taxpayers' money.'' [*Laughter*]

Here's one from the Jefferson administration in 1804. A spokesman for Vice President Aaron Burr asserted, ''People don't kill people, guns kill people.'' [*Laughter*] Way back in 1773 a spokesman for Samuel Adams asserted unequivocally that the Boston Tea Party was not a fundraiser. [*Laughter*] ''No one paid to attend; there was no quid pro quo,'' he said. ''The party was just a town meeting for colonists to get to know each other and discuss details of the new tax law.''

Well, we've been at this a long time. Helen ought to know; she was there. [*Laughter*]

Let me say one serious thing: Helen Thomas is not just the longest serving White House correspondent. One of the reasons she got that award tonight in her name is that she's still the hardest working, the first to show up in the Press Office every morning about 5 o'clock, 5 days a week, for nearly 40 years. And I dare say tonight is the first time she has ever been completely scooped. By my calculation, she's had about 10,000 mornings, thousands of notebooks, thousands of ballpoint pens, thousands of cups of coffee—sometimes brought to her by White House staffers—never has it compromised her yet.

For all of us in the White House, she is a rock. For everyone here tonight, obviously a symbol of everything American journalism can and should be: the embodiment of fearless integrity, fierce commitment to accuracy, the insistence upon holding Government accountable. All of that in the spirit of the first amendment and the free press it protects.

Helen, by tradition, you always get to ask the first question at the press conference. This has been a rather long opening statement, but to honor the tradition tonight you can ask me anything you want. But remember, in an even older tradition, I don't have to answer. [*Laughter*]

Thank you, and good night.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:26 p.m. in the International Ballroom at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Larry McQuillan of Reuters, outgoing president, and Stewart Powell of Hearst Newspapers, incoming president, White House Correspondents' Association; Earl Lane and Andrew Smith of Newsday, winners of the Edgar A. Poe Award; Michael K. Frisby, Wall Street Journal, winner of the Aldo Beckman Award for 1998; Ron Fournier, Associated Press, and Peter Maer, NBC Radio/Mutual News, winners of the Merriman Smith Memorial Award for 1998; Sam Donaldson, ABC News; and Helen Thomas, United Press International.

Statement on Drug Use By Prison Inmates

April 26, 1998

The report on jail inmates released today by the Justice Department confirms the urgent need for Government at all levels to pursue a policy of coerced abstinence for drug offenders. The report shows that more than half of these criminals used drugs in the month prior to their arrest. We have an obligation to install a tough system of testing, treatment, and punishment for drug offenders to prevent them from returning to the streets with dangerous drug habits intact. Congress can take the lead by adopting my administration's proposals to promote coerced abstinence throughout the criminal justice system.

NOTE: This statement was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 25 but was embargoed for release until 4:30 p.m. on April 26.

Remarks at the Premiere of "Ragtime"

April 26, 1998

Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, when we were being ushered up the aisle and backstage and we were preparing to come up here, I was full of ambivalence, frankly. I wanted so badly to come up here and thank Garth and the magnificent cast, musicians, people backstage, everybody who had anything to do with this unbelievable gift we have been given. I wanted to thank the leaders of the Democratic Party and the staff. I wanted to especially thank all of you for being here and for making this weekend, celebrating our 150th birthday as a party, a success. But I was absolutely convinced that anything I would say would be a complete anticlimax after the ringer they have put us through today. [*Laughter*]

I was thinking on the way over here about the time when Mr. Doctorow published this magnificent novel over 20 years ago now, and Hillary and I were young law professors living in the mountains of north Arkansas. And I read the book almost immediately after it came out. I couldn't put it down. I just sat there, read right through it. And after it was over, I felt just as I felt after the show was over.

But I don't think even then I fully grasped the life force behind the stories in "Ragtime." And I think what I would like to say to you is that, yes, this is the story of America, and it reminds us that we have a good system and the best ideals, but we always fall a little short. And the story of our country has to be the continuing effort to overcome our own individual flaws and imperfections and tendency to fall into injustice and bigotry and oppression and greed and shortsightedness, or just plain tone-deafness but that there is also a part of the human condition which makes us vulnerable as people.

I was walking down the aisle and several of you said, thank you so much for what you did to try to help the Irish people process along. And then I saw the representative of my ancestors, the Irish fireman here—[*laughter*]—playing the heavy. We got a book last week, Hillary and I did, entitled "How The Irish Became White." [*Laughter*] And it basically talks about how, when the Irish immigrants first came here, they really identified with the African-American slaves because they were treated the same way, and they had much the same experience.

I say that to remind us all that there will always be the tendency of people to abuse power if they can abuse it. That's why we have a constitution which seeks earnestly to limit that. And all of us will always have our imperfection, and so will our children and grandchildren and their grandchildren. The thing that makes America great is that we have the right ideals and that through history we have constantly sought to overcome our own limitations, to stand for deeper freedom, to stand for wider opportunity, to stand for a more perfect Union.

And I hope that all of you will always remember what you saw on this stage tonight. I hope you will never, ever abandon what brought you here to this performance tonight. And I hope all of your lives you will try to create more of the joy you saw here, eliminate all the oppression you can, and be very proud to be both an American and a Democrat.

Thank you, and God bless you.