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and deception. And that's my view of timetables.

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:28 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. A reporter referred to Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs James A. Kelly.

Remarks to Welfare-to-Work Graduates

January 14, 2003

The President. Thank you all for coming. Please be seated. Thanks for coming, and welcome to the White House. I'm especially pleased to welcome the—our fine fellow citizens who have lifted themselves out of poverty. I welcome you all here. You're fantastic examples of what is possible in America, what we hope happens in America.

I particularly want to thank Lorey Wilson and Pamela Hedrick. Each of them have incredible success stories, and Pam has agreed to share her story with us. I want to thank her family for being here as well. Both women show us the dignity that comes with work and the great hopes that have been realized through the welfare reform.

The welfare law of 1996 has enabled millions of Americans to build better lives—better lives for themselves and better lives for their families and, hence, better lives for our country. The time has come to strengthen that law, and that's what I want to talk about today.

Leading the charge will be Department of Health and Human Services leader Tommy Thompson. And I appreciate Tommy. Tommy, when he was the Governor of Wisconsin, was on the leading edge of welfare change. He was an innovative Governor. He's an innovative Cabinet officer as well.

And I appreciate Elaine Chao for being here as well. She's Secretary of the Department of Labor. When we're interested in jobs, we think about the Department of Labor. So, thank you for coming, Elaine. [*Laughter*] I appreciate your work.

I appreciate Bob Woodson for being here—Woody. Thanks for coming. He's the director of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise. He's one of these innovative thinkers about how to best help people help themselves in America, make sure that hope extends to all neighborhoods, not just some neighborhoods but every neighborhood in our country.

I appreciate Rodney Carroll, who is the president and CEO of the Welfare-To-Work Partnership. His job has been to gather up people who are willing to help people go from welfare to work. And he's done a magnificent job. I remember well our meeting in Chicago with the "Big Brown," UPS, which is one of the leading companies in America to—helping people find the dignity of work. And we sat there on the stage and heard the stories of those who have gone from welfare to work. It must have made you feel good, Rodney, because you had a lot to do with helping these individuals. So thanks for coming.

John Gregory is the president of TEACH, The Enrichment Association of Community Healing. I appreciate John being here and all the rest of you for coming. Welcome. Glad you're here.

The reforms of the 1990s recognized that people on welfare are not charges of the state; they're citizens of this country, with abilities and aspirations. Both parties in Congress realize that welfare system as we knew it sapped the soul and drained the spirit from our citizens. They came together, the people of both parties, to put an end to the culture of dependency that welfare had created.

The obligation of Government did not end with just mailing of a check, and that's important for our citizens to realize. Men and women deserved a chance to learn new skills. That was an obligation of Government, to help people learn, to use their talent so that they could realize dreams, to gain the fulfillment of sense of purpose that comes with striving and working and providing for their own families.

In the 7 years since welfare was reformed, millions of Americans have shared in this experience. Their lives and our country are better off. Today, more than 2 million fewer families are on welfare—2 million fewer than in 1996. It's a reduction of 54 percent. That's a number, but behind each number is a life.

And that's important to recognize. In Washington, we spend a lot of time talking about numbers. And that's okay. It's kind of a measuring tool. But we've also got to remember, with each number is somebody's aspiration and hope.

During the period from 1996 to 2001, the percentage of welfare recipients who are working tripled. That's incredibly positive news. According to the most recent census data, the poverty rate amongst Hispanic children has reached the lowest level in over 20 years. The poverty rate among African American children is the lowest ever recorded. There's a correlation, it seems like to me.

Behind these statistics are great personal achievements. Adversity has been overcome, and lives have changed forever. I met people all around our country who can share their stories of hard work and fighting odds that have been stacked against them. Moms and dads who are—battled addiction and have overcome addiction. Folks who have had trouble holding a job and found out that they could and realized their dreams.

The welfare law is a success because it puts Government on the side of personal responsibility, and it has helped people change their life for the better, helped people realize their dreams, helped people help themselves. That's the key aspect of the—one of the key principles of the law that makes a lot of sense, that has helped make this law effective.

Last year, the House of Representatives passed legislation to build on the successes of the 1996 welfare reform law. They did so because they want more Americans to know the pride and success that come from hard work. The law passed the House—that passed the House required 40 hours of work each week. There was a serious requirement for work. Of the 40 hours, 16 of those could be used for job training or education and, when needed, treatment for addiction. In other words, the 40 hours of work was—part of that 40 hours was helping people help themselves. And that's an important aspect of any law that encourages people to go from welfare to work.

The House bill set an ambitious goal for States to have 70 percent of the welfare recipients working within a 5-year period of time. We encourage them to think that way because we believe in setting a high bar. We believe in the best. We don't accept mediocrity. Some say it's asking too much. But a lot of those voices were the same ones that said the 1996 law was flawed. In other words, they have low—low expectations for what is possible in this society.

Skepticism is refuted every single day, however, when we meet the hard-won successes from former welfare recipients. That's the best case that we can make, those of us who believe in expecting the best and working hard to achieve the best.

We've got new data this month refuting skepticism as well. A study from the University of Michigan shows that in the States with the strongest work incentives, single parents have seen larger increases in income than in States with weaker work requirements.

Work is the key to success in helping families lift themselves out of poverty. It's the key to success for improving the lives of our children. And the strong incentives in the House bill will encourage work. Unfortunately, the Senate never was able to act on the House bill, so it died.

Today I want to remind the new Congress we have an obligation to reauthorize the welfare bill, welfare reform, to make it work. And so I'm calling upon both Houses to get after it. Let's get a new bill up, a bill that—in which the House and Senate have got to work closely to achieve the objectives that we have just set out, the idea of getting people to work, make them less dependent upon Government, to help people in need, so they can realize their dreams.

I also want Congress to provide $17 billion a year to help the States run their welfare programs and 4.8 billion a year to help pay for childcare. Of course, there's a funding obligation that goes with the idea of setting high goal—high standards and strong goals. And since the caseloads have fallen by half, the States will now have twice the resources to spend on welfare and job training and childcare.

See, back in 1996, they were spending $7,000 per family to help people get to work. Under this budget request, the expenditure will be $16,000 per family. If 7,000 was good enough in 1996, it seems like 16,000 is good enough into '03 to help people get ahead.

It's important for Congress to authorize funding not just for next year but for the next 5 years, so that people who are working to help people understand there's a steady stream of funds that will help with the planning.

It's also important for Congress to work with us to get a Faith-Based Initiative going. I did a lot through an Executive order the other day that said faith programs will not be discriminated against at the Federal level. But the Faith-Based Initiative is a part of welfare reform. It's one thing to help a person get the job skills necessary, but a lot of times we need to help people with their hearts and their souls. And the only place to find that help is in the faith-based community. And so, therefore, I'm still going to stay strong on the Faith-Based Initiative, because I know of the hope and promise found in our churches and synagogues and mosques—hope and promise that can't be duplicated at the Federal level.

And as we encourage work and welfare, we've also got to encourage growth in our economy. I'm aware of that. And that's why I introduced a plan to build on the economic momentum we have going for us. We've come out of recession. The enemy hit us, and that hurt our economy. We had a few of our corporate citizens thought they could fudge the numbers, not tell the truth, so there's a—kind of startled our investor class, and the American people were shocked by the fact that too many citizens weren't telling the truth. So I signed a law that's going to hold people to account, and we're after them. For those who have cooked the books, there's going to be a consequence. We're regaining the confidence in the numbers now being put forth.

We're slowly but surely coming out of the three hits to our economy, and we need to do more. And that's why I've argued the more people have in their pocket, the more they're likely to spend. And when they spend money, it's more likely to provide jobs for people. It's the strength of our economy. And it's important for Congress to work with me to encourage consumers to have more money, investors to have more money, to take care of the aged in their retirement. And the plans I laid out recognize that the money we spend here isn't the Government's money; it's the people's money. And the more money the people have in their pocket, the more likely this economy is going to grow. And as the economy grows, it's more likely we're going to have success in helping people.

And the other thing we can do is to do a better job for unemployed Americans through what I call Reemployment Accounts. These accounts will provide up to $3,000 per person to help pay for training, childcare, moving expenses, or other costs of finding a job. It is a—provides incentive for people who are looking for work. If you find a job before the 3,000 runs out, then you get to keep the remainder, the balance. In other words, it's additional money to help people find work. It's money on top of the current system.

It's money that—that will recognize that power is best when it's disbursed to the people we're trying to help. It will help States on the frontlines of where there's unemployment or chronic unemployment. It's a good idea. I hope Congress acts as quickly as possible. I mean, the idea is that we want to help people. That's what we ought to do in America. We want to help people who, in this land of plenty, have overcome some incredibly tough times because of the lack of things, sometimes the lack of love, sometimes the lack of help, sometimes the lack of education. In a land where we've got an awful lot, there are still a lot of people who hurt, too many who hurt. And the role of Government is to help those good folks realize their potential. Everybody has got potential. Everybody has got worth. Everybody has got value. And the role of this Government is to help those people realize their value and worth.

Today we've got Pamela Hedrick with us today. She can talk about this better than I can talk about it, because she's what we call a success story—somebody who is willing to share her story with the good folks here in the White House.

So, Pamela, thank you for coming. I look forward to hearing what you have to say.

[*At this point, Pamela Hedrick made brief remarks.*]

The President. Thank you all for coming. Thanks for coming. I appreciate you all coming. For those of you who have got some influence up on Capitol Hill, remind them, it works. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:44 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Robert L. Woodson, Sr., founder and president, National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise; and John Henry Gregory, founder and chief executive officer, The Enrichment Association of Community Healing (TEACH).

Proclamation 7639—National Sanctity of Human Life Day, 2003

January 14, 2003

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Our Nation was built on a promise of life and liberty for all citizens. Guided by a deep respect for human dignity, our Founding Fathers worked to secure these rights for future generations, and today we continue to seek to fulfill their promise in our laws and our society. On National Sanctity of Human Life Day, we reaffirm the value of human life and renew our dedication to ensuring that every American has access to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

As we seek to improve quality of life, overcome illness, and promote vital medical research, my Administration will continue to honor our country's founding ideals of equal dignity and equal rights for every American. Every child is a priority and a blessing, and I believe that all should be welcomed in life and protected by law. My Administration has championed compassionate alternatives to abortion, such as helping women in crisis through maternity group homes, encouraging adoption, promoting abstinence education, and passing laws requiring parental notification and waiting periods for minors.

The Born-Alive Infants Protection Act, which I signed into law in August 2002, is an important contribution to our efforts to care for human life. This important legislation helps protect the most vulnerable members of our society by ensuring that every infant born alive, including one who survives abortion, is considered a person and receives protection under Federal law. It helps achieve the promises of the Declaration of Independence for all, including those without the voice and power to defend their own rights.

Through ethical policies and the compassion of Americans, we will continue to build a culture that respects life. Faith-based and community organizations and individual citizens play a critical role in strengthening our neighborhoods and bringing care and comfort to those in need. By helping fellow citizens, these groups recognize the dignity of every human being and the possibilities of every life; and their important efforts are helping to build a more just and generous Nation. By working together to protect the weak, the imperfect, and the unwanted, we affirm a culture of hope and help ensure a brighter future for all.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim Sunday, January 19, 2003, as National Sanctity of Human Life Day. As we reflect upon the sanctity of human life, I call upon all Americans to recognize this day with appropriate ceremonies in our homes and places of worship, to rededicate ourselves to compassionate service, and to reaffirm our commitment to respecting the life and dignity of every human being.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this fourteenth day of January, in the year of our Lord two thousand three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-seventh.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., January 16, 2003]

NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on January 17.