

Week Ending Friday, December 24, 1999

Statement on Flooding and Mudslides in Venezuela

December 17, 1999

I was deeply saddened to learn of the loss of life and physical devastation caused by flooding and mudslides in Venezuela. On behalf of the American people, I extend my deepest sympathies to all those who have suffered losses. We stand ready to help with rescue and relief efforts in any way we can.

NOTE: This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Statement on Signing the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999

December 17, 1999

Today I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 1180, the "Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999." This landmark legislation will remove barriers that have placed many individuals with disabilities in the untenable position of choosing between health care coverage and work. It also improves and expands vocational rehabilitation and employment service options for this talented, but as yet not fully tapped, workforce.

This new law represents one of the most important legislative advances for people with disabilities since the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act. I have urged its passage for 2 years and was proud to include full funding for it in my FY 2000 Budget. The enactment of this law well illustrates what we can accomplish when we work together on a bipartisan basis to expand employment opportunities and affordable health-care options.

The Act will ensure that individuals with disabilities have a greater opportunity to participate in the workforce and in the American Dream. It offers new ways for the Federal

Government to partner with the States and the private sector to help people with disabilities to work and to keep their health care coverage. Most significantly, H.R. 1180:

- Expands States' ability to provide a Medicaid "buy-in" to individuals with disabilities who return to work.
- Creates a new Medicaid demonstration to assess the effectiveness of providing Medicaid coverage to people whose condition has not yet deteriorated enough to prevent work, but who need health care to prevent or forestall that level of deterioration. This provision will allow States to help those individuals with diseases such as muscular dystrophy, Parkinson's Disease, diabetes, and HIV.
- Lengthens from 4 years to 8-½ years the period for which Social Security disability beneficiaries who return to work can continue to receive reduced-cost Medicare coverage.
- Provides grants to States to design and administer infrastructures to provide services that support working individuals with disabilities.
- Provides Social Security disability beneficiaries a choice of providers for employment-related services.
- Authorizes the Social Security Administration to test new and innovative ways to enable individuals with disabilities to return to work and make economic independence a reality.
- Enables individuals with disabilities to reestablish eligibility for Social Security disability benefits on an expedited basis if their attempts to return to work prove to be unsuccessful. These individuals will be able to request reinstatement of benefits without having to file a new disability benefits application—thereby reducing the risk of returning to work.

These provisions give people who want to work a chance to do so by ensuring access

to health care insurance and modernizing the employment services system for people with disabilities. Together, these provisions affirm the basic principle manifested in the Americans with Disabilities Act: that all Americans should have the same opportunity to be productive citizens.

The Act also contains several provisions to extend expiring tax laws. These provisions continue incentives for the advancement of several national priorities and reaffirm our commitment to help American families and businesses. Most importantly, the bill extends the research and experimentation tax credit for 5 years, encouraging companies to undertake new multi-year research activities. This crucial tax credit will help innovative American companies build on my Administration's impressive economic achievements and will lead to new products and technologies to improve people's lives. In addition, H.R. 1180 extends for 3 years the provision that allows America's middle-income taxpayers full use of important personal tax credits—such as the child credit, the Hope Scholarship and Lifetime Learning credits, and the child and dependent care credits—without limitation by the alternative minimum tax. This also will allow tens of millions more taxpayers to forgo performing complex calculations.

The Act extends a provision that will help improve school facilities in low-income communities by providing no-interest loans to school districts in needy areas for rehabilitation and repairs, educational equipment, curriculum development, and teacher training.

The Act will provide more economic opportunity to Puerto Rico by extending application of the research and experimentation tax credit to such activity undertaken in Puerto Rico, as I proposed. In response to another of my proposals, H.R. 1180 also will provide a greater transfer of excise tax revenue on rum not made in the States to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands for 2-½ years to provide aid that the islands urgently need.

Furthermore, H.R. 1180 extends through 2001 critical tax provisions to:

- Encourage employers to pay for their workers' continuing education.
- Help disadvantaged people, including welfare recipients, find jobs.

- Encourage businesses to clean up polluted "brownfields".
- Stimulate low- and no-emission production of power.
- Assist first-time home buyers in purchasing a home in the District of Columbia

It is unfortunate, however, that the revenue losses resulting from these provisions were not fully offset.

I am pleased that H.R. 1180 will do much to improve the lives of people with disabilities and will extend important tax provisions. I am deeply disappointed, however, that the bill includes a provision for a special allowance adjustment for student loans. This provision will expose the Federal Government, rather than lenders, to substantial financial risk due to the difference between Treasury and commercial paper borrowing rates, and will provide unnecessary and costly new benefits to the student loan industry with no benefit whatsoever to students.

My Administration has a deep and long-standing commitment to promote and increase the independence of individuals with disabilities. I would like to thank each individual who has been involved in the challenging work of developing this landmark legislation. Special thanks should be given to the congressional leaders, who have contributed so much to the passage of H.R. 1180, particularly Senators Jeffords, Kennedy, Roth, and Moynihan, as well as Representatives Dingell, Archer, Rangel, Stark, Waxman, Thomas, Matsui, Bliley, Shaw, Bilirakis, Nancy Johnson, Cardin, Sherrod Brown, and Lazio. I also want to acknowledge the efforts of Alexis Herman, Secretary of Labor; Kenneth S. Apfel, Commissioner of Social Security; and Donna Shalala, Secretary of Health and Human Services; as well as Tony Coelho and other members of my Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities. These individuals, as well as many others throughout my Administration, worked tirelessly to bring this legislation forward.

Many individuals with disabilities want to work and become independent, and many can work if they receive the critical support they need. For too long, the fear of losing health and cash benefits and the inability to

obtain rehabilitation and employment services has prevented such individuals' work efforts. As a Nation, we are best served when all our citizens have the opportunity to contribute their talents, energy, and ideas to the workplace. I am pleased to sign into law today this important step to empower more Americans with disabilities to take their rightful places in our Nation's workforce.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
December 17, 1999.

NOTE: H.R. 1180, approved December 17, was assigned Public Law No. 106-170. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

**Memorandum on the Use of
Information Technology To
Improve Our Society**

December 17, 1999

*Memorandum for the Heads of Executive
Departments and Agencies*

*Subject: Use of Information Technology to
Improve Our Society*

The Internet and other information and communications technologies are changing the way we work, learn, communicate with each other, and do business. These technologies are shaping our economy and our society in the same way that the steam engine and electricity defined the Industrial Age.

In recent years, information technology has driven the U.S. economy. Businesses are scrambling to use the Internet to increase productivity, boost exports, cut the time required to develop new products, and forge closer relationships with customers and suppliers. My Administration has pursued a market-led approach to global electronic commerce that relies whenever possible on private sector leadership and seeks to eliminate legal and regulatory barriers to electronic commerce while protecting the public interest.

The Internet has the potential to enhance civil society as well as to boost commerce. Used creatively, the Internet and information technology can be a powerful tool for tackling

some of our toughest social challenges as well as fostering economic growth. Information technology can and is being used to make it easier for working adults to acquire new skills, increase access to healthcare in isolated rural communities, improve the quality of life for people with disabilities, and strengthen our democracy.

My Administration has led the effort to explain and support the commercial and societal benefits of information technology to the American people. However, we can and must do more. To that end, I am directing executive department and agency heads in this memorandum to take certain actions. As they carry out these actions, they should: (a) adopt policies that will remove barriers to private sector investment in Internet applications; (b) explore partnerships with companies, State, local, and tribal governments, and other entities, such as nonprofit organizations and universities; (c) explore innovative mechanisms for fostering a national discussion on the potential of the electronic society; (d) consider other policies to promote the electronic society, such as the establishment of national goals; and (e) review the recommendations of the President's Information Technology Advisory Committee, particularly as they relate to support for information technology applications with broad societal benefits.

Therefore, to further promote the broader social benefits of the Information Age to the American people, I direct the officials in this memorandum to take the following actions:

1. The Secretary of Health and Human Services shall identify additional steps that can be taken to promote expanded access to higher quality, cost-effective health care to underserved rural communities and inner city clinics, and other health-care applications of information technology.
2. The Secretary of Education shall support and encourage States and local communities to make "school report cards" available on the Internet. The Secretary of the Interior shall make it possible for "school report cards" on Bureau of Indian Affairs schools and tribally controlled schools to be available on the Internet.