

Because of work requirements and time-limited benefits, welfare caseloads have dropped by more than half. Today, 5.4 million fewer people live in poverty, including 2.8 million fewer children than in 1996. Yet, the real success of welfare reform is not found in the number of caseloads that have been cut but in the number of lives that have been changed.

I've traveled all across our Nation, and I've met people whose lives have been improved because of welfare reform. I have heard inspiring stories of hope and dignity and hard work and personal achievement. Yet, there are still millions of Americans trapped in dependence, without jobs and the dignity they bring. And now Congress must take the next necessary steps in welfare reform.

Compassionate welfare reform should encourage strong families. Strong marriages and stable families are good for children, so stable families should be a central aim of welfare policy. Under my plan, up to \$300 million per year will be available to States to support good private and public programs that counsel willing couples on building a healthy respect for marriage.

Compassionate welfare reform must allow States greater flexibility in spending welfare money. Today, confusing and conflicting regulations are keeping people from getting help. My proposal would give States the freedom to redesign how Federal programs operate in their States. This will allow States to be more innovative in providing better job training, housing, and nutrition programs, and better childcare services to low-income families.

Most of all, compassionate welfare reform must encourage more and more Americans to find the independence of a job. Today, States on average must require work of only 5 percent of adults getting welfare. I am proposing that every State be required within 5 years to have 70 percent of welfare recipients working or being trained to work at least 40 hours a week. These work requirements must be applied carefully and compassionately.

Because many on welfare need new skills, my plan allows States to combine work with up to 2 days each week of education and job training. Our proposal allows for 3 months

in full-time drug rehabilitation or job training, and adolescent mothers can meet their work requirements by attending high school. A work requirement is not a penalty; it is the pathway to independence and self-respect. For former welfare recipients, this path has led to a new and better life.

When I was in North Carolina earlier this year, I met Ella Currence, a mother of four who was on welfare for 7 years. She knew change would be difficult, but she also knew change was best. Ella began participating in the State's Work First Program. She has been working for the last 5 years, and she put her life in order. Ella says, "You can do anything you want to do if you put your mind to it." This is the spirit and confidence encouraged by work.

Everyone in America benefits from compassionate welfare reform. Former welfare recipients gain new hope and know the independence and dignity of an honest day's work. As our recovery continues, business will need more motivated and trained workers. Good welfare reform laws can break dependency and help the American economy.

My administration has worked closely with Congress in writing the new welfare legislation. It's an excellent bill that will provide hope and promise, dignity and opportunity to millions of Americans. I urge the House to pass it and the Senate to then act on it.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9:10 a.m. on May 9 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on May 11. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 10 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks on Signing the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002

May 13, 2002

The President. Good morning, and welcome to Washington's grand old building, the Eisenhower Executive Office Building—or as we now call it, the Ike. [Laughter]

Today's event is being broadcast by Farm Radio to farmers and ranchers all across our country. Hardworking farmers and ranchers, whether they be from Texas or Maine, from Mississippi or California, are up early and are working hard. And this morning I want to talk about the tremendous contributions that they make, that our farm and ranch families make to America, the support they deserve, and why I am pleased to sign the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002.

I want to thank the Members of Congress who are here: Senator Harkin, Congressman Combest, the leaders in both the House and the Senate. I appreciate you all coming. And when I sign this bill, I'd like for you all to come up here and watch me sign it.

I appreciate Secretary Ann Veneman, who is here. I want to thank her for her hard work and her staff for their hard work as well.

And I want to thank the members of the farm and agricultural groups who represent the people who work the land. I want to thank you all for your efforts and for your concern.

American farm and ranch families embody some of the best values of our Nation: hard work and risktaking, love of the land, and love of our country. Farming is the first industry of America, the industry that feeds us, the industry that clothes us, and the industry that increasingly provides more of our energy. The success of America's farmers and ranchers is essential to the success of the American economy.

I was honored to be the Governor of the second-biggest farm State in the Union. I understand how hard farmers have to work to make a living. I know they face tough challenges.

I recently spent some time with some of my neighbors at the coffee shop in Crawford, Texas. I know how hard many struggle. Their livelihood depends on things they cannot control, the weather, crop disease, uncertain pricing. They need a farm bill that provides support and help when times are tough. And that is why I'm signing this bill today.

This bill is generous and will provide a safety net for farmers, and it will do so without encouraging overproduction and de-

pressing prices. It will allow farmers and ranchers to plan and operate based on market realities, not Government dictates.

In the past, loan rates and the minimum price farmers and ranchers received for some of their commodities were set too high. This practice made the problem worse by encouraging surplus production, thereby forcing prices lower. This bill better balances loan rates and better matches them to market prices.

It reduces Government interference in the market and in farmers' and ranchers' planting decisions. The farm bill supports our commitment to open trade and complies with our obligations to the World Trade Organization.

Americans cannot eat all that America's farmers and ranchers produce, and therefore, it makes sense to sell more food abroad. Today, 25 percent of U.S. farm income is generated by exports, which means that access to foreign markets is crucial to the livelihood of our farmers and ranchers. Let me put it as plainly as I can: We want to be selling our beef and our corn and our beans to people around the world who need to eat.

My administration is working hard to open up markets. I told the people, I said, "If you give me a chance to be the President, we're not going to treat our agriculture industry as a secondary citizen when it comes to opening up markets." And I mean that. I understand how important the farm economy is to the future of our country.

To help, this new law helps keep our international trade commitments, and that's important for America to understand. And because I believe the best way to help our farmers and ranchers is trade, I need trade promotion authority, particularly from the Senate. The House has passed it; I need it from the Senate—soon. [*Laughter*]

This bill offers incentives for good conservation practices on working lands. For farmers and ranchers, for people who make a living on the land, every day is Earth Day. There's no better stewards of the land than people who rely on the productivity of the land. And we can work with our farmers and ranchers to help improve the environment.

To help them live up to the newer and higher environmental standards, this bill expands the ECP program, which provides financial assistance to our farmers and ranchers to encourage sound conservation. And the bill will greatly enhance the abilities of our farmers and ranchers to protect wetlands, water quality, and wildlife habitat, and that's important.

This bill breaks a bad fiscal habit. In the past, Congress would pass a multi-year farm bill and then every year after continue to pass supplemental bills. These unpredictable supplemental payments made it difficult for Congress to live within its budget. It also created uncertainty for farmers and ranchers and their creditors. This bill is generous enough—the bill I'm going to sign is generous enough to eliminate the need for supplemental support later this year and in the future and therefore adds the kind of reliability that farmers and ranchers need.

This bill is also a compassionate bill. This law means that legal immigrants can now receive help and food stamps after being here for 5 years. It means that you can have an elderly farm worker, somebody here legally in America who's worked hard to make a living and who falls on hard times—that person can receive help from a compassionate Government.

It means that you can have a head of a family who's been working hard, been here for 5 years, been a part of our economy, been legally working, and that person falls on hard times—our Government should help them with food stamps, and this bill allows that to happen.

It's not a perfect bill, I know that. But you know, no bill ever is. There's no such thing as a perfect bill; otherwise I'd get to write every one of them. *[Laughter]*

You know, for example, I thought it was important to have what they call farm savings accounts to help farmers and ranchers manage the many risks they face. I thought that should be an important part of the bill. It didn't happen; I'm going to continue to work for it, work with the Members here on it.

I also believe strongly there's more that we should do for our farm community. You know, one of the best things we have done for ranchers and farmers is to eliminate the

death tax. It's a really important part of making sure that farms and ranches stay in our families. The death tax needs to be—the repeal of the death tax needs to be made permanent. That happened in the House; I hope it happens in the Senate soon. It's a good signal that we care deeply about those who live on the land and make a living.

The farm bill is important legislation, and it meets important needs. The bill will strengthen the farm economy, and that's important. It will strengthen the farm economy over the long term. It will promote farmer independence and preserve the farm way of life for generations. It helps America's farmers, and therefore, it helps America.

It is now my honor to sign the bill. And for any of the Members who dare have their picture taken with me—*[laughter]*—I welcome.

Senator Leahy. Or vice versa.

The President. Yes, or vice versa. *[Laughter]* That wasn't just—for those listening on radio, that wasn't just some quack yelling out. That was a Member of the United States Senate. *[Laughter]*

Please come for the bill signing. Welcome.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:46 a.m. in Presidential Hall in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) administered by State and county Farm Service Agency committees. H.R. 2646, approved May 13, was assigned Public Law No. 107-171.

Statement on Signing the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002

May 13, 2002

I am today signing into law H.R. 2646, the "Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002." This Act will provide a safety net for America's farmers, who feed America and much of the world. The Act also will expand nutrition programs and improve the conservation and effective use of our natural resources.

A few provisions of the Act raise constitutional concerns. The method of appointment of the board of trustees of the fellowship program prescribed in section 4404 of the Act