

## 5. President Bill Clinton Signs a Bill "To End Welfare as We Know It," 1996

The bill I'm about to sign, as I have said many times, is far from perfect, but it has come a very long way. Congress sent me two previous bills that I strongly believe failed to protect our children and did too little to move people from welfare to work. I vetoed both of them. This bill had broad bipartisan support and is much, much better on both counts.

The new bill restores American's basic bargain of providing opportunity and demanding in return responsibility. It provides \$14 billion for child care, \$4 billion more than the present law does. It is good because without the assurance of child care it's all but impossible for a mother with young children to go to work. It requires states to maintain their own spending on welfare reform and gives them powerful performance incentives to place more people on welfare in jobs. It gives states the capacity to create jobs by taking money now used for welfare checks and giving it to employers as subsidies as incentives to hire people. This bill will help people to go to work so they can stop drawing a welfare check and start drawing a paycheck.

It's also better for children. It preserves the national safety net of food stamps and school lunches. It drops the deep cuts and the devastating changes in child protection, adoption, and help for disabled children. It preserves the national guarantee of health care for poor children, the disabled, the elderly, and people on welfare—the most important preservation of all.

---

Remarks by the President at the signing of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, Office of the Press Secretary, the White House, August 22, 1996, at <http://www.pub.whitehouse.gov/uri-res/I2R?urn:pdi://oma.eop.gov.us/1996/8/22/1.text.1>.

It includes the tough child support enforcement measures that, as far as I know, every member of Congress and everybody in the administration and every thinking person in the country has supported for more than two years. . . .

With this bill we say, if you don't pay the child support you owe we'll garnish your wages, take away your driver's license, track you across state lines; if necessary, make you work off what you pay—what you owe. It is a good thing and it will help dramatically to reduce welfare, increase independence, and reenforce parental responsibility. (Applause.) . . .

Today, we are ending welfare as we know it. But I hope this day will be remembered not for what it ended, but for what it began—a new day that offers hope, honors responsibility, rewards work, and changes the terms of the debate so that no one in America ever feels again the need to criticize people who are poor on welfare, but instead feels the responsibility to reach out to men and women and children who are isolated, who need opportunity, and who are willing to assume responsibility, and give them the opportunity and the terms of responsibility. (Applause.) . . .

(The bill is signed.)

*Q* Mr. President, some of your core constituencies are furious with you for signing this bill. What do you say to them?

*The President* Just what I said up there. We saved medical care. We saved food stamps. We saved child care. We saved the aid to disabled children. We saved the school lunch program. We saved the framework of support. What we did was to tell the state[s], now you have to create a system to give everyone a chance to go to work who is able-bodied, give everyone a chance to be independent. And we did—that is the right thing to do.

And now, welfare is no longer a political football to be kicked around. It's a personal responsibility of every American who ever criticized the welfare system to help the poor people now to move from welfare to work. That's what I say.

This is going to be a good thing for the country. We're going to monitor it and we're going to fix whatever is wrong with it.

*Q* What guarantees are there that these things will be fixed, Mr. President, especially if Republicans remain in control of Congress?

*The President* That's what we have elections for.