

Jan. 9 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1997

Tonight we come together to salute the honorees again for their profound contributions to our cultural life. At a time when so many forces seem determined to divide us, not simply here but all around the world, the arts and humanities unite us as a people in all of our rich diversity. They give voice to our collective experience and deepen our understandings of ourselves and one another.

At the dawn of a new century in a rapidly changing world, we need our artists, our writers, our thinkers more than ever to help us find that common thread that is woven through all of our lives, to help give our children the imagination they need to visualize the future they must make, and to reach across the lines that

divide us. The people we have honored today have dedicated their lives to this purpose, and I join all Americans in thanking them for their life's work.

I ask all of you now to please join me in a toast to our honorees and to the United States of America.

Hear! Hear!

[At this point, the President toasted the honorees.]

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:30 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House.

## Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Business Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

January 10, 1997

*The President.* Good morning, everybody. We are here in the Cabinet Room to meet with business leaders and members of the Cabinet to discuss what we all have to do together to provide jobs and training for people who will be making the transition from welfare to work as mandated by the new welfare reform law.

But before we talk more about this, I want to report some good economic news. The Department of Labor reported this morning—on Secretary Reich's last day on the payroll—where is he? [Laughter] He's ending with a bang. The report says that 11.2 million new jobs have now been created in the past 4 years. This is the first time in the history of our economy that over 11 million jobs have been created during one 4-year administration. It is a great tribute to the private sector in America. It is further evidence that our economy is strong, and finally, that our economic strategy to bring down the deficit, expand trade, and invest in our people is working.

I want to thank Secretary Reich for all he has done. I also want to acknowledge—there are two other outgoing members of the administration that had a great role in this economic recovery, Secretary Kantor, both as trade ambassador and as Commerce Secretary, and of

course, Mr. Panetta, who was OMB Director at the time we adopted our economic plan.

The meeting we are convening here this morning builds on the exceptional efforts that have been made over the last 4 years to allow States and local communities the freedom to test their own welfare reform strategies. Last year I signed into law an approach that revolutionized welfare and made it a national mandate to move people who are able-bodied from welfare to work within 2 years. But as I have said repeatedly since that time, that was not the end of welfare reform; it was only the next step.

Now we have to launch a national effort in every State and every community to make sure that the jobs are there for people who have to make the transition from welfare to work. As a first step in that effort, every State has to tailor a welfare reform plan that requires and rewards work, imposes time limits, increases child care payments, and demands personal responsibility. We've already given the green light to 26 of our States to carry out the welfare reform plans they have designated. Today I am pleased to announce that three more States, Louisiana, Maryland, and North Carolina, have been given approval to implement their plans.

The steps we've taken over the last 4 years, working with individual States and communities,