

think I made a mistake when I signed the welfare reform bill, and I don't. But one thing that we all ought to be able to agree on is, the bill will not succeed—the bill does nothing, it just changes the rules. It doesn't put anybody to work. In 4 years we have reduced by 2.1 million the number of people on welfare, the biggest reduction in history, by doing the kinds of things that now this bill requires every State to do. We just went out and worked with the States and came up with innovative ways to get around old rules and regulations and do them anyway. Now every State has got to try to do that for every person.

My objective here is, once and for all, to take the politics out of poverty and to treat all able-bodied people the same at the community level. What I long for is a system of community-based support for people who are out of work through no fault of their own but a system of community-based norms that require people who can work to work when there is work. Now, if you say that everybody who is able-bodied can only stay on welfare 2 years continuously unless the State decides to continue to support them for some other reason—and we did give a fund so that hardship cases could be treated in that way—then every community has to have a system for putting those people to work.

Now, let me pause at this; you can all think about this. This new law gives every State the right to give the welfare check to any employer, including a church, as an employment and training subsidy, who will hire someone from welfare. If every church in America just hired one family, the welfare problem would go way down. If every church in America challenged every member of that church who had 25 or more employees to hire another family, the problem would go away, and we would really have a system in which in times of recession we'd have more people unemployed at the community level. In good times we'd have fewer people, but we would always have a community-based commitment that crossed party lines and religious lines and every other line to give able-bodied people the dignity of work and support them in the most important work they do, which is raising their children.

The second thing I wanted to talk about a little bit is this whole business of immigration. The things I don't like about the welfare law have nothing to do with welfare and everything

to do with the way we tried to save money, I thought unfairly, on legal immigrants. Our administration has done a lot to cut down on illegal immigration, but we believe that legal immigration has served our country well. It has, however, made us more diverse. And so immigration is really the touchstone where we deal with not only what are we going to do but how are we going to do it.

I believe that we have learned a lot in 220 years—really more than 300 years—about how hard it is for people of different races to get along. We know that that is difficult in all societies and all times, and it's something you just have to keep working at. But now America is not a white and black America. America is a country with scores, hundreds of different racial, ethnic, and religious groups. Our biggest county, Los Angeles County, now has over 160 different racial and ethnic groups within one county. But it's all over America. Wayne County, where Detroit, Michigan, is, has now over 140 different racial and ethnic groups. Detroit was a place where we used to think of where you basically had white ethnics who immigrated from Central and Eastern Europe and African-Americans and white Southerners who immigrated out of the South because they couldn't make a living in places like my home State in the Depression and later—now, 140 different racial and ethnic groups.

How are we going to deal with that? Against the background of what you see in Bosnia, Rwanda, Northern Ireland, the Middle East, all of these things, these destructive impulses people have, how can we prove in America that we can all get along, not without giving up our basic beliefs but in finding a ground of mutual respect? It seems to me that that may be the single most significant decision facing the United States. We have a lot of other things we have to deal with in the next 4 years, the whole question of the entitlements burden when the baby boomers retire and education initiatives that I intend to push and finishing the work of balancing the budget and all that. That's fine, but if we can all find a way to hold up to the world not only the example of our freedom but the example of our freedom in the 21st century global interdependent world in which anybody from anywhere can live here, and if you show up for work or you show up for school and you do what you're supposed to do and you're a good citizen, you can be part of our