

America, what we hope happens in America.

I particularly want to thank Lorey Wilson and Pamela Hedrick. Each of them have incredible success stories, and Pam has agreed to share her story with us. I want to thank her family for being here as well. Both women show us the dignity that comes with work and the great hopes that have been realized through the welfare reform.

The welfare law of 1996 has enabled millions of Americans to build better lives—better lives for themselves and better lives for their families and, hence, better lives for our country. The time has come to strengthen that law, and that's what I want to talk about today.

Leading the charge will be Department of Health and Human Services leader Tommy Thompson. And I appreciate Tommy. Tommy, when he was the Governor of Wisconsin, was on the leading edge of welfare change. He was an innovative Governor. He's an innovative Cabinet officer as well.

And I appreciate Elaine Chao for being here as well. She's Secretary of the Department of Labor. When we're interested in jobs, we think about the Department of Labor. So, thank you for coming, Elaine. *[Laughter]* I appreciate your work.

I appreciate Bob Woodson for being here—Woody. Thanks for coming. He's the director of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise. He's one of these innovative thinkers about how to best help people help themselves in America, make sure that hope extends to all neighborhoods, not just some neighborhoods but every neighborhood in our country.

I appreciate Rodney Carroll, who is the president and CEO of the Welfare-To-Work Partnership. His job has been to gather up people who are willing to help people go from welfare to work. And he's done a magnificent job. I remember well our meeting in Chicago with the "Big Brown," UPS, which is one of the leading

companies in America to—helping people find the dignity of work. And we sat there on the stage and heard the stories of those who have gone from welfare to work. It must have made you feel good, Rodney, because you had a lot to do with helping these individuals. So thanks for coming.

John Gregory is the president of TEACH, The Enrichment Association of Community Healing. I appreciate John being here and all the rest of you for coming. Welcome. Glad you're here.

The reforms of the 1990s recognized that people on welfare are not charges of the state; they're citizens of this country, with abilities and aspirations. Both parties in Congress realize that welfare system as we knew it sapped the soul and drained the spirit from our citizens. They came together, the people of both parties, to put an end to the culture of dependency that welfare had created.

The obligation of Government did not end with just mailing of a check, and that's important for our citizens to realize. Men and women deserved a chance to learn new skills. That was an obligation of Government, to help people learn, to use their talent so that they could realize dreams, to gain the fulfillment of sense of purpose that comes with striving and working and providing for their own families.

In the 7 years since welfare was reformed, millions of Americans have shared in this experience. Their lives and our country are better off. Today, more than 2 million fewer families are on welfare—2 million fewer than in 1996. It's a reduction of 54 percent. That's a number, but behind each number is a life. And that's important to recognize. In Washington, we spend a lot of time talking about numbers. And that's okay. It's kind of a measuring tool. But we've also got to remember, with each number is somebody's aspiration and hope.

During the period from 1996 to 2001, the percentage of welfare recipients who