

Clinton signs welfare reform bill

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Body

Admitting its faults, extolling its potential and openly wishing it removes a dangerous election-year obstacle, President **Clinton** Thursday **signed** a controversial and far-reaching welfare reform **bill** that places a five-year limit on all welfare benefits. The **bill**, **signed** by **Clinton** after he vetoed two previous versions, also requires able-bodied adults to secure employment within two years, allows states to impose even tighter limits, and ends a 61-year-old New Deal federal guarantee of cash aid for poor children. "The new **bill** restores America's basic bargain of providing opportunity and demanding in return responsibility," **Clinton** declared at a Rose Garden **signing** ceremony. Faced with either accepting election-year charges that he abandoned a 1992 campaign pledge to reform welfare, or accepting legislation that could alienate his own Democratic Party base, **Clinton** decided to **sign** the **bill** and then immediately undertake an effort to reverse key elements. His decision to **sign** the **bill** nevertheless was strongly condemned by leaders of his own party, as well as protesters gathered outside the White House and those planning demonstrations next week at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. National Organization for Women President Patricia Ireland and other opponents this month staged a 10-day fast outside the White House, then repeated their protests Thursday wearing black **signs** labeled "Shame," while Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., described **Clinton** as being in "welfare denial." "All the congressional rhetoric in the world can't erase the fact that unskilled jobs are declining and the pool of unskilled workers -- even before this **bill** -- is growing," Simon said in a statement Thursday.

Republicans, while generally praising **Clinton**'s decision to **sign** the **bill**, have tried to retain the political credit by accusing him of acting only under heavy public pressure. **Clinton** primarily faulted the **bill** for cutting too deeply into nutritional programs and benefits for legal immigrants, and he insisted such provisions were not essential to the underlying job of reforming welfare. "I want to ask all of you, without regard to party," **Clinton** said Thursday in remarks aimed at members of Congress, "to think through the implications of these other non-welfare issues on the American people, and let's work together in good spirits and good faith to remedy what is wrong." "We can balance the budget without these cuts," he said. The **bill**, approved overwhelmingly by Congress, is expected to save \$55 billion over six years by placing tough new rules on the most of the 12.8 million people on welfare and almost all of the 25.6 million people who receive food stamps. The **bill** also bans most forms of public assistance and social services for **illegal immigrants** and legal immigrants who have not become citizens, although some legal immigrants will qualify after five years of U.S. residency. In addition to the new overall two-year and five-year limits on benefits, the **bill** gives states wide new authority to run their own welfare and work programs in returning for smaller but less restricted sums of federal money. States that meet the **bill**'s minimum work requirements must contribute 75 percent of their fiscal 1994 spending as matching funds for the block grants, while states that do not must contribute 80 percent. The five states that are "most successful in reducing illegitimacy" will be eligible for cash rewards. The food stamp restrictions require able-bodied adults to find at least part-time employment within three months. The **bill** also contains measures strengthening the abilities of federal and local law enforcement agencies to crack down on deadbeat parents, as well as incentives for inter-ethnic adoption. Altogether, it affects benefits for more than one-fifth of all U.S. families with children. **Clinton**, while using the Rose Garden rather than

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the more extravagant South Lawn setting he chose for minimum wage and health care **bill** signings the two previous days, accentuated the positive in the welfare **bill**. "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," **Clinton** said. "This **bill** had broad bipartisan support and is much, much better on both counts." **Clinton** also expressed his hope that his signature on the third version means welfare "will no longer be a political issue," and insisted at length that he and his political enemies now have a joint stake in making it work. "The two parties cannot attack each other over it," **Clinton** said. "The politicians cannot attack poor people over it. There are no encrusted habits, systems and failures that can be laid at the foot of someone else. We have to begin again. "This is not the end of welfare reform; this is the beginning," he said. "The governors asked for this responsibility, now they've got to live up to it," **Clinton** said. "There are mayors that have responsibilities, county officials that have responsibilities. "Every employer in this country that ever made a disparaging remark about the welfare system needs to think about whether he or she should now hire somebody from welfare and go to work, go to the state and say, 'OK, you give me the check, I'll use it as an income supplement, I'll train these people, I'll help them to start their lives, and we'll go forward from here.' "Every single person...in America tonight who sees a report of this, who's ever said a disparaging word about the welfare system, should now say, 'OK, that's gone. What is my responsibility to make it better?'" **Clinton** said. As **Clinton signed** the welfare reform measure, Rep. Clay Shaw, R-Fla., accused the administration of undermining the **bill** by rushing through approval of several welfare waivers over the last three weeks. Shaw wrote in a letter to **Clinton** that he has come to the conclusion that the administration "has actively worked in the last three weeks to undermine several key provisions of the (welfare) **bill**." Shaw cited an Aug. 16 waiver by the Department of Health and Human Services that gave Washington, D.C., a 10-year waiver from the **bill's** five-year time limit, and waivers to Hawaii and Minnesota that exempted them from certain work requirements and time limits. GOP presidential candidate Bob Dole also cited the waivers, saying in a statement that **Clinton** "is already undermining this welfare reform **bill** by offering weak exemptions." Dole urged the American people to "demand that President **Clinton** allow the law to be fully implemented." Asked about Shaw's letter, White House press secretary Mike McCurry denied that the waivers approved by HHS Secretary Donna Shalala conflicted with the new law. "It is all part of the process that the president said begins today as we can, you know, launch a major national effort to reform welfare as we know it," he said. "So these steps, these waivers are consistent with the intent of this law, consistent with the thrust of what the president has been doing now for three-and-a-half years."

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Person: **BILL CLINTON** (79%)

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