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crime
curfew
drugs
teen pregnancy

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
(Chautauqua, New York)

For Immediate Release

October 4, 1996

RADIO ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE NATION

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. Today I want to talk about some good news about our nation's social fabric, just the latest good news we've had about the direction of our country.

For the past four years we've worked hard to expand opportunity, demand responsibility and build a stronger sense of community. Look what we've achieved together: 10.5 million new jobs; unemployment at its lowest level in 7.5 years; the deficit down 60 percent. And last week we learned that incomes have risen by \$1,600 after inflation since the passage of my economic plan. We've had the biggest one-year decline in poverty in 27 years. Clearly, America is on the right track.

This strategy has not only been good for our economy, it has also helped us begin to mend our social fabric. We've worked hard together to strengthen families and to give all Americans the tools to make the most of their own lives. That includes sending a strong message to young people that they must take responsibility for their own actions. That's why we've adopted a stand of zero tolerance for guns and drugs in our schools, and why we've supported school uniforms, strong truancy law enforcement and community curfews to reduce crime and promote discipline.

That's why I ordered tobacco companies to stop marketing cigarettes to our children -- the strongest action ever taken to protect our children against this deadly threat. And we're working to make sure young people get a clear message at school and at home: Drugs are wrong, drugs are illegal and drugs can kill you.

But we all know that so many of our other social problems have their roots in the breakdown of our families. For decades we have seen a stunning and simultaneous erosion of the institutions that give our lives structure and keep us strong -- work, family and neighborhood. There is no more troubling outgrowth of this social breakdown than the increase in teen pregnancy and out-of-wedlock births in recent decades.

We know that children who are born into homes where there is no marriage are more likely to drop out of school, get involved in crime and drugs and end up in poverty. That's why I've worked so hard to demand responsibility from young people and reduce teen pregnancies. Earlier this year I took executive action to require young mothers to stay in school or lose welfare payments.

We mounted an unprecedented crackdown on child support enforcement, and now child support collections are up nearly 50 percent compared to four years ago.

We are saying to young men and young women alike, it is wrong to get pregnant or father a child until you are married and ready to take on the responsibilities of parenthood. And all across America -- in our religious institutions, our schools, our neighborhoods, our work places -- our people are banding together, teaching young people right from wrong and helping steer them on the right path. We are supporting many school and community-based efforts, especially those that promote abstinence to reduce teen pregnancy.

Today I'm pleased to report that together we're making progress. I'm announcing the new release of a report by the Centers For Disease Control showing that last year the teen birth rate went down for the fourth year in a row. And, even more encouraging, the out-of-wedlock birth rate declined for the first time in 20 years. This is occurring across all racial and cultural lines. If we're going to save the American family it is absolutely critical that we keep moving in this direction. There are still far too many children being born outside of marriage, but we are now finally seeing that it is possible for us to move in the right direction.

For far too long too many Americans believed there was nothing we could do about our most vexing social problems. They always seemed to be there, and they always seemed to be growing worse. But, now, it's different. Crime is down four years in a row, one million fewer victims. Poverty is down, the largest drop in 27 years. Nearly 2 million people have moved from welfare to work, and now this good news on teen birth rates and out-of-wedlock pregnancies.

When the teen birth rate drops for four years in a row and out-of-wedlock births decline for the first time in a generation, that is news we can all be proud of. Americans are standing up for our values. The American family is getting stronger and we are making responsibility a way of life. Our economy and our society are on the right track. If we continue to pull together, to meet our challenges and protect our values, our best days are still ahead.

Thanks for listening.

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