

only America can lead the world's fight against it. We can't let the gun lobby turn America into a safe house for terrorists. Congress should get back on track and send me tough legislation that cracks down on terrorism. It should listen to the cries of the victims and the hopes of our children, not the back-alley whispers of the gun lobby.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 5:08 p.m. on March 15 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 16.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on Product Liability Legislation

March 16, 1996

Dear Mr. Leader:

I will veto H.R. 956, the Common Sense Product Liability Legal Reform Act of 1996, if it is presented to me in its current form.

This bill represents an unwarranted intrusion on state authority, in the interest of protecting manufacturers and sellers of defective products. Tort law is traditionally the prerogative of the states, rather than of Congress. In this bill, Congress has intruded on state power—and done so in a way that peculiarly disadvantages consumers. As a rule, this bill displaces state law only when that law is more beneficial to consumers; it allows state law to remain in effect when that law is more favorable to manufacturers and sellers. In the absence of compelling reasons to do so, I cannot accept such a one-way street of federalism, in which Congress defers to state law when doing so helps manufacturers and sellers, but not when doing so aids consumers.

I also have particular objections to certain provisions of the bill, which would encourage wrongful conduct and prevent injured persons from recovering the full measure of their damages. Specifically, the bill's elimination of joint-and-several liability for non-economic damages, such as pain and suffering, will mean that victims of terrible harm sometimes will not be fully compensated for it. Where under current law a joint wrongdoer will make the victim whole, under this bill an innocent victim would suffer when one wrongdoer goes bankrupt and cannot pay his portion of the judgment. It is impor-

tant to note that companies sued for manufacturing and selling defective products stand a much higher than usual chance of going bankrupt; consider, for example, manufacturers of asbestos or breast implants or intra-uterine devices.

In addition, for those irresponsible companies willing to put profits above all else, the bill's capping of punitive damages increases the incentive to engage in the egregious misconduct of knowingly manufacturing and selling defective products. The provision of the bill allowing judges to exceed the cap in certain circumstances does not cure this problem, given Congress's clear intent, expressed in the Statement of Managers, that judges should do so only in the rarest of circumstances.

The attached Statement of Administration Policy more fully explains my position on this issue—an issue of great importance to American consumers, and to evenly applied principles of federalism.

Sincerely,

Bill Clinton

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Bob Dole, Senate majority leader, Thomas Daschle, Senate minority leader, Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Richard Gephardt, House minority leader. A statement of administration policy on H.R. 956 was attached to the letter. The letter was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary but was not issued as a White House press release.

Remarks to the United Jewish Appeal Young Leadership Conference

March 17, 1996

You know, I've been trying to convince everyone else in Washington to delay the onset of this year's campaign, and you aren't helping very much. *[Laughter]* But you have my permission to vary from the official line. *[Laughter]*

I thank you so much. I want to thank my friend David Hermelin for his wonderful remarks and his remarkable service. I don't know that I've ever known anybody that had such a remarkable combination of energy and commitment to the common good. He is indefatigable, and all of his energies seem