

National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1999, as a whole, is beneficial to the national defense and will help us achieve our objectives in this important area.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
October 17, 1998.

NOTE: H.R. 3616, approved October 17, was assigned Public Law No. 105-261.

**Statement on Signing the
Department of Defense
Appropriations Act, 1999**
October 17, 1998

Today I have signed into law H.R. 4103, the "Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 1999."

Our military readiness must remain our top national security priority. This Act fully funds many of the Department's critical readiness programs and supports our commitments to a better quality of life for our military personnel and their families. I anticipate that the Congress shortly will act to include the emergency funds necessary for our ongoing participation in peacekeeping operations in Bosnia in a supplemental funding bill. I strongly urge them to do so. In addition, as I have said before, I believe we should examine near-term and long-term options to secure additional funds to address critical readiness shortfalls.

While the Act funds a number of modernization priorities, I have expressed my strong concerns that this legislation contains excessive funding for projects that are not currently needed for our Nation's defense at the expense of higher priority programs.

I am concerned about section 8115 of the Act, which forbids the obligation or expenditure of appropriated funds under this Act for any additional deployment of U.S. Armed Forces to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), Albania, or Macedonia until after transmittal of a burdensome report to the Congress on the deployment. Consistent with the plain language of section 8115 and the intent of the Congress, I shall interpret it to apply only to the deployment of additional ground forces to one or

more of the three countries. Further, I shall interpret and implement section 8115 consistent with my constitutional authority to conduct the foreign relations of the United States and as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive, and not in a manner that would encumber my constitutional authority.

I will continue to work with the Congress on the appropriate level of long-term funding for defense in order to adequately address the Nation's security needs.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
October 17, 1998.

NOTE: H.R. 4103, approved October 17, was assigned Public Law No. 105-262.

**Remarks on Departure for the Wye
River Middle East Peace Talks and
an Exchange With Reporters**
October 19, 1998

Terrorist Attack in Beersheba, Israel

The President. I want to begin by saying how much I deplore the grenade attack earlier today on a bus station in Beersheba, Israel. No cause, no grievance justifies terror. This is another attempt to murder, plain and simple.

Now I am convinced that reaching a secure, just, and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians is the best way to ensure that terrorism has no future in the Middle East. I'm now returning to the Middle East peace talks to encourage the Israelis and the Palestinians to make the hard decisions necessary to move this peace process forward.

As I said when we launched the talks last week, the United States will do everything we can to help, but ultimately, only the parties themselves can bridge their differences and put their people on a more hopeful course. The issues are difficult. The distrust is deep. The going has been tough. But the parties must consider the consequences of failure, and also the benefits of progress.

Flash Floods in Texas

Finally, let me say just a few words about the flash flooding that has wreaked havoc in southeast Texas. Reportedly, 18 people have

lost their lives, 5,000 evacuated from their homes, 1,200 in refuge in emergency shelters. The storms themselves have not yet abated. We offer our thoughts, our prayers, our resolve to help to those who have lost family members, those who have been uprooted.

A short while ago, I spoke to our FEMA Director, James Lee Witt. He is already working with the Texas officials to assess the damage, and the budget I am about to sign contains nearly \$1 billion in additional resources to FEMA so that this vital agency will be even stronger as it works to address this and future disasters. For now, the Nation stands ready to assist the people of Texas in their time of need.

Wye River Talks

Q. Mr. President, will the Wye talks cancel your trip to California tomorrow in order to be available to continue the Middle East negotiations?

Q. Can they still succeed at Wye?

The President. I'm going back today to work on this. As you know, I got home at 3 o'clock last night. We're working hard through it. This incident in Israel is certainly a complicating factor. I have been briefed on the progress of events this morning, and we're going to work as hard as we can today and we'll have more to say about it as events unfold.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:28 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House.

Statement on Signing the Year 2000 Information and Readiness Disclosure Act

October 19, 1998

Today I am pleased to sign into law S. 2392, the "Year 2000 Information and Readiness Disclosure Act."

As our Nation prepares for the year 2000 (Y2K), we face an urgent need to address the Y2K problem, which may cause computers and embedded systems that run America's critical infrastructure to malfunction or even shut down. With little over a year until January 1, 2000, this is a serious global chal-

lenge that businesses and governments around the world must address.

Today, my Council on Year 2000 Conversion is launching "National Y2K Action Week," to urge small- and medium-sized businesses to take the necessary steps to ensure that the technologies they and their business partners depend upon are ready for the year 2000. Over the next 5 days, the Small Business Administration, the Department of Commerce, and several other Federal agencies will host Y2K educational events at their field offices across the Nation. As part of this week, we are also urging State, local, tribal governments, and community organizations to address this critical problem. More than 160 national organizations representing industries, professions, government, and the nonprofit sector have joined the Council in promoting Y2K action during this week.

This legislation will help provide businesses, governments, and other organizations with the necessary informational tools to overcome the Y2K computer problem. This Act, which builds upon a proposal my Administration submitted to the Congress in July, is an important bipartisan accomplishment. I particularly want to thank those in the Congress whose hard work and support of this legislation made its passage possible. Representatives Horn, Kucinich, Morella, Barcia, Leach, LaFalce, Hyde, Conyers, Dreier, and Eschoo and Senators Bennett, Dodd, Hatch, Leahy, and Kyl were integral to getting this work done and done quickly.

Many organizations have been reluctant to share valuable information about their experiences in dealing with the Y2K problem or the status of their Y2K efforts for fear of lawsuits. The Act's limited liability protections will promote and encourage greater information sharing about both experiences and solutions, which will significantly enhance public and private sector efforts to prepare the Nation's computer systems for the new millennium. However, the bill will not affect liability that may arise from Y2K failures of systems or devices.

While I understand that companies have a wide range of concerns related to the Y2K transition and potential litigation, we must