

commitment we made to the American people and to the children of this country just a year ago, that both Republicans and Democrats were bragging on in the election a year ago—we shouldn't just turn around and drop it. I think that's a big mistake, and I'll fight for that.

I think that we need to continue to push raising standards, testing kids, ending social promotion, but not blaming them for the failure of the system, which means you've got to have more after-school programs; you've got to have more summer school programs, and there ought to be a system which provides help to turn around failing schools, because we know that's working. In the States where that's going on, that's really working. Where these schools are being targeted and being told you're going to have to shut down if you don't turn around, it's working. But those aren't money problems. And then I have several environmental concerns that I hope we can work out, that I personally believe are quite important to our country's future.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:47 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. George W. Bush of Texas. H.R. 2684, approved October 20, was assigned Public Law No. 106-74. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

**Statement on Signing the
Departments of Veterans Affairs and
Housing and Urban Development,
and Independent Agencies
Appropriations Act, 2000**

October 20, 1999

Today I have signed into law H.R. 2684, the "Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act, 2000."

This Act will fund vital housing, community development, environmental, disaster assistance, veterans, space, and science programs. Specifically, it provides funding for the Departments of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Environmental Protection Agen-

cy (EPA), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and several other agencies.

The Act funds a number of my Administration's high priorities, including the Corporation for National and Community Service at this year's current funding level. National Service gives young people the opportunity to obtain funding for a college education while serving the country in areas of great need, such as the environment, public safety, and human services. National Service also allows young people to participate in service-learning programs that provide substantial academic and social benefits, including the opportunity to learn responsible citizenship.

I am pleased that the Act also provides full funding of HUD's highest priority: \$10.9 billion for the renewal of all Section 8 contracts, assuring continuation of HUD rental subsidies for low-income tenants in privately owned housing. I am also pleased that the Act provides 60,000 housing vouchers for low-income families. In addition, the Act adequately funds programs to help distressed communities, including my new initiative for America's Private Investment Companies (APIC), Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), assistance to the homeless, the Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund, Brownfields redevelopment, and rural and urban empowerment zones. The CDBG program promotes housing and economic activity in low- and moderate-income areas. It provides funding for housing rehabilitation, construction, and homebuyer assistance. The CDFI Fund helps to create a network of community development banks across the country, spurring the flow of capital to distressed neighborhoods and their currently underserved low-income residents.

The Act includes funding that could support part of my New Markets proposal, which will help ensure that all Americans share in our economic prosperity. APIC and the rural and urban empowerment zones will help revitalize communities so that they can take advantage of the strength of the economy and help those left behind in our economic boom. Additionally, \$1.02 billion is provided for

homeless assistance grants, enabling localities to continue to shape and implement comprehensive, flexible, coordinated “continuum of care” approaches to solving homelessness.

I am pleased that the Act adequately funds Fair Housing programs, which will enable HUD to expand significantly its activities aimed at reducing the level of housing discrimination nationwide.

The Act provides \$710 million, a significant increase, for elderly housing, recognizing the dramatic rise in our elderly population and the changing housing needs that accompany this unprecedented demographic shift. The Act replaces old models, which separated housing from services, with new models that bring services to elders where they live—allowing seniors to remain in their homes and communities longer.

I am also pleased that H.R. 2684 provides \$19.8 billion for the medical care of our Nation’s veterans. Since January, long waiting times in VA medical centers have disrupted the level and quality of medical care that veterans have received. This level of service is unacceptable, and the funding levels in the Act will allow us to address this issue. The Act will also allow for the provision of a range of home- and community-based care for those high-priority veterans who do not have access to such services, and it provides resources for the aggressive testing and treatment of Hepatitis C.

The Act provides \$7.6 billion for the EPA, which will enable the agency to adequately implement our environmental laws. I am pleased that H.R. 2684 adequately funds EPA’s portion of the Clean Water Action Plan and the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund. However, the Act should have provided full funding for the Climate Change Technology Initiative and the new Clean Air Partnership Fund at the requested levels. Furthermore, I continue to believe that the provision prohibiting implementation of the Kyoto Protocol is unnecessary, as my Administration has no intent of implementing the Protocol prior to ratification. This year’s language is identical to last year’s provision. Since this year’s House and Senate report language is contradictory, we will implement the Kyoto provision consistent with the lan-

guage in last year’s conference report. I also am disturbed that the conference report includes new language that is aimed at restricting efforts to reduce smog by delaying EPA action on several States’ clean air petitions. My Administration has a strong commitment to clean air and will continue to use the full range of authorities under the law to make our Nation’s air safe to breathe for all Americans.

The Act also adequately funds the Nation’s investment in space and science programs. It provides \$13.65 billion for NASA and \$3.9 billion for the NSF, including \$126 million for my Administration’s Information Technology in the 21st Century Initiative. If we want to maintain our current economic prosperity, it is essential that we sustain our investment in long-term research across all the scientific and engineering disciplines. This Act maintains the Nation’s investments in science, technology, and learning, which have fueled unprecedented economic growth for the past decade.

Finally, I am pleased that H.R. 2684 adequately funds FEMA to help cope with unforeseen disasters. The \$2.5 billion in contingent emergency funds, along with the \$821 million appropriated, ensures that the country is well prepared to deal with unforeseen natural disasters and that FEMA has adequate resources to respond to Hurricane Floyd and other disasters.

I am pleased that my Administration and the Congress were able to work together successfully on this bill—in a spirit of cooperation—to resolve our respective differences and produce a bill that is fully paid for and effectively addresses critical needs of the American people. I am especially pleased that we were able to achieve acceptable funding levels in a number of areas by providing offsets that were agreed on by both sides. I urge the Congress to work with my Administration in similar fashion in coming to mutually acceptable agreements on the remaining FY 2000 appropriations bills and to do so expeditiously. The American people deserve no less.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
October 20, 1999.

NOTE: H.R. 2684, approved October 20, was assigned Public Law No. 106-74.

Remarks on the Fifth Anniversary of AmeriCorps
October 20, 1999

The President. Well, Andre, thanks to you no one has to wonder about what AmeriCorps is all about. I thank you for your introduction. I thank you for your service to AmeriCorps and to your country. And I thank you for the power of your example. And I hope, maybe more than anyone else who speaks today, your voice and your story will be told out of this great anniversary meeting.

I want to thank all the other people here who helped to make this day possible. I want to thank Deb Jospin for her leadership; Senator Harris Wofford; Eli Segal, for what he did to help us get started; and all of them. Let's give them all a hand. [*Applause*]

I want to thank Hillary for always believing in this and for taking it on as a personal goal that we would do something about the fact that when we had 100,000 people in AmeriCorps and everybody who knew about it loved it but most people didn't know about it, she decided she would change that. And Eli and Alan Solomont and our friend Dan Dutko and others agreed to help. And I thank her for her passionate support during these years when we believed in AmeriCorps when it was just sort of an idea. And she has done a wonderful job. [*Applause*] Thank you.

I want to thank the Members of Congress who are here, who were here, Senator Spector, Congressman Quinn, and Congressman Payne, three who represent the bipartisan support that we have enjoyed. I thank James Lee Witt, Jack Lew, Janice Lachance, and others in the administration who have helped us. I want to thank our presenters, whom I will introduce in just a moment—General Colin Powell, Mrs. Coretta Scott King, Sargent Shriver, and the Governor of Utah, Mike Leavitt—for being here. And I want to thank the Howard University Choir. They're going to sing for us and with us in a few moments.

You know, it seems impossible to me that it was 5 years ago on the North Lawn of the White House that we led the first class of

AmeriCorps members in the AmeriCorps pledge. It wasn't very long before that that I had the privilege of signing the legislation creating AmeriCorps with the same pen that President Kennedy had used to sign the legislation creating the Peace Corps.

I always believed that you would elevate the cause of citizen service in America, that you would make America a better place. But on that day 5 years ago, AmeriCorps was still just an idea with a good plan, built on the remarkable pathbreaking efforts of Sargent Shriver with the Peace Corps and VISTA; built on the remarkable service corps I had seen in Boston and Los Angeles and San Antonio and other cities; championed by some of the most thoughtful and passionate citizens of both parties; energized by—even then—20,000 young people who were raring to give something to their country and wanted to be part of AmeriCorps.

But still, it was just an incandescent idea. Today we celebrate, thanks to you and your predecessors, a glowing success. AmeriCorps members are living up to the highest obligations of our citizenship. They are creating opportunity for others, taking responsibility for themselves, and fostering a community of all Americans. They are our best builders, building that bridge to the new century.

You can see it in the way their optimism inspires others to also lend a hand and volunteer in their communities. You can see it in the remarkable teamwork and camaraderie that I have personally witnessed and felt all over this country in so many different activities. You can see it in the way they work together across the lines that would normally divide AmeriCorps members, and eliminate the alienation that too many of our young people experience today.

You can see kids who went to Ivy League schools and kids who dropped out of high school working side by side, serving together, giving together, and treating each other as equals, proving that Dr. King's dream of a beloved community is alive and well in the hearts and lives of the AmeriCorps volunteers.

I could just give you one illustration among thousands. On his very first day as an AmeriCorps member in a small town in southern West Virginia, Scott Finn heard