

the key elements of the compensation initiatives I proposed and that were enacted in the FY 2000 Defense Authorization Act, including military retirement reform, pay table reform, and a significant pay increase. It also fully funds my request for training, spare parts, equipment maintenance, and base operations—all items essential to military readiness. I am pleased that the bill restores partial funding for the F-22 fighter aircraft, which is essential to guaranteeing early air dominance in any future conflict.

Regrettably, the bill goes beyond what is necessary, providing funding for a host of unrequested programs at the expense of other core government activities. It provides \$267.4 billion in discretionary budget authority, a funding level that is \$4.5 billion above my request. As testified to by our military chiefs, my budget request correctly addressed our most important FY 2000 military needs. Unfortunately, H.R. 2561 resorts to a number of funding techniques and gimmicks to meet the Appropriations Subcommittee allocation. These include: designating \$7.2 billion of standard operation and maintenance funding as a contingent emergency; deferring payments to contractors until FY 2001; and incrementally funding a Navy ship (LHD-8).

Furthermore, the bill contains several objectionable language provisions. I am concerned about section 8074, which contains certain reporting requirements that could materially interfere with or impede this country's ability to provide necessary support to another nation or international organization in connection with peacekeeping or humanitarian assistance activities otherwise authorized by law. I will interpret this provision consistent with my constitutional authority to conduct the foreign relations of the United States and my responsibilities as Commander in Chief.

While I am troubled by a provision requiring the Department of Defense to seek specific authorization for the payment of fines or penalties for environmental violations, I will direct the Department to seek such authorization on any fine or penalty it receives, ensuring full accountability for all such violations.

Furthermore, while the provision in section 8174 of the bill prohibits the Department from contributing funds to the American Heritage Rivers initiative, I will direct the Department, within existing laws and authorities, to continue to support and undertake community-oriented service or environmental projects on rivers I have recognized as part of the initiative.

Finally, the bill provides only about one-quarter of the funding level requested for construction of Forward Operating Locations that would reestablish regional drug interdiction capabilities in Latin America. This amount will not adequately support our vital drug interdiction efforts in the Western Hemisphere.

I have signed this bill because, on balance, it demonstrates our commitment to the military, meets our obligations to the troops, maintains readiness, and funds modernization efforts that will ensure our technological edge into the 21st century.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
November 4, 1999.

NOTE: H.R. 2561, approved November 4, was assigned Public Law No. 106-79.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on Minimum Wage Legislation

November 4, 1999

Dear _____:

I am writing this letter to encourage you to pass a straightforward minimum wage bill that gives working Americans the pay raise they deserve. If we value work and family, we should raise the value of the minimum wage.

In 1996, the Congress and I worked together to raise the minimum wage by 90 cents over 2 years. Since then, the American economy has created nearly 9 million new jobs—with more than 1 million of them in the retail sector where many minimum-wage workers are employed. The unemployment rate has fallen from the already low rate of 5.2 percent to 4.2 percent—the lowest in 29 years. We have enjoyed larger real wage increases for more consecutive years than at

any time in more than two decades, while inflation is the lowest it has been in more than three decades. The minimum wage increase has contributed to the 39 percent decline in the welfare caseload since the last minimum wage increase—bringing the welfare rolls down to their lowest level in three decades. And the minimum wage increase has been a crucial factor in reversing the wage stagnation and declines of the previous decade, contributing to rising wages for even the lowest income groups. Our recent experience clearly demonstrates that what is good for America's working families is good for America's economy.

But as our economy continues to break records, we must do more to ensure that all Americans continue to benefit from it. It is time to build on the steps we have taken to honor the dignity of work. The expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit in 1993 and the increase in the minimum wage have ensured that no full-time working parent with two children has to raise his or her family in poverty. It is important that we take steps to achieve this goal in the future. That is why I have proposed to raise the minimum wage by \$1 an hour over the next two years—from \$5.15 to \$6.15. This modest increase would simply restore the real value of the minimum wage to what it was in 1982. More than 11 million workers would benefit under this proposal. A full-time, year-round worker at the minimum wage would get a \$2,000 raise—enough for a typical family of four to buy groceries for 7 months or pay rent for 5 months.

All Americans should share in our historic prosperity. This is why Congress should not let politics get in the way of raising the minimum wage. If you send me a clean bill that increases the minimum wage by \$1 over the next two years, I will sign it.

Unfortunately, some in Congress have proposed a more gradual increase in the minimum wage that would cost a full-time, year-round worker roughly \$1,500 over three years compared with my proposal. They have added provisions that would repeal important overtime protections for American workers. And they have been playing politics with the minimum wage bill, using it as a vehicle for costly and unnecessary tax cuts that would

threaten our fiscal discipline. As I have stated repeatedly, before we consider using projected surpluses to provide for a tax cut, we must put forth things first and address the solvency of Social Security and Medicare. If Congress sends me a bill that threatens our fiscal discipline, I will veto it.

If paid-for tax cuts are attached to the minimum wage bill, they should reflect our priorities and address urgent national needs like deteriorating schools and the communities that have been left behind during this time of prosperity. In contrast, the bulk of the provisions attached to the minimum wage bill in the House are directed away from working families. Some of these provisions could even *reduce* the retirement benefits enjoyed by millions of working Americans.

America's workers show up to work every day and get the job done. Congress should do the same this year. I urge Congress to pass a minimum wage bill that does not at the same time add poison pills that bypass the priorities of working families.

Sincerely,

William J. Clinton

NOTE: Letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives; Richard A. Gephardt, House minority leader; Trent Lott, Senate majority leader; and Thomas A. Daschle, Senate minority leader. An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.

Letter to the Speaker on the Selection Procedure for Participants in the Joint House-Senate Conference on the "Bipartisan Consensus Managed Care Improvement Act of 1999"

November 4, 1999

Dear Mr. Speaker:

I am writing to underscore my deep disappointment with the unusual procedure employed in naming participants to the joint House-Senate conference on H.R. 2723, the Bipartisan Consensus Managed Care Improvement Act of 1999. The decision to appoint members that fail to reflect the overwhelming vote of 275 to 151 on the