

Week Ending Friday, January 21, 2000

**Letter to Congressional Leaders on
Action on Title III of the Cuban
Liberty and Democratic Solidarity
(LIBERTAD) Act of 1996**

January 14, 2000

Dear _____:

Pursuant to section 306(c)(2) of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (LIBERTAD) Act of 1996 (Public Law 104–114), (the “Act”), I hereby determine and report to the Congress that suspension for 6 months beyond February 1, 2000, of the right to bring an action under title III of the Act is necessary to the national interests of the United States and will expedite a transition to democracy in Cuba.

Sincerely,

William J. Clinton

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Jesse Helms, chairman, and Joseph R. Biden, Jr., ranking member, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; Ted Stevens, chairman, and Robert C. Byrd, ranking member, Senate Committee on Appropriations; Benjamin A. Gilman, chairman, and Sam Gejdenson, ranking member, House Committee on International Relations; and C.W. Bill Young, chairman, and David R. Obey, ranking member, House Committee on Appropriations. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 15.

The President’s Radio Address

January 15, 2000

Good morning. On Monday America will celebrate, through reflection and service, the birth of the 20th century’s great champion for justice and civil rights, Dr. Martin Luther King. Today I want to talk with you about new steps we’re taking to fulfill Dr. King’s dream and redeem America’s promise.

Of course, we’ve come a long way. I’m joined today by a woman named Charlotte Filmore. Mrs. Filmore is 100 years old.

Through the years, she’s seen her share of discrimination. A good while ago, she worked at the White House and back then, even here, she had to use a side door. Well, today Charlotte Filmore came to the White House through the front door, and all the way to the Oval Office. But there is still more to do. So, this morning I want to tell you about what we’re doing to open more doors of opportunity for all Americans.

In his last speech, Dr. King reminded us that the work of dignity and justice is as old as America itself. He said it’s about going back to those great wells of democracy dug deep by our Founding Fathers and the Constitution. To draw from that well, Dr. King challenged us to dig deep within our own hearts to face our flaws, renew our values, live up to our Nation’s creed.

We are doing better. We have the strongest economy in a generation, the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, and thankfully, the lowest African-American and Hispanic unemployment rates ever recorded, the lowest African-American poverty rate ever recorded, and the lowest Hispanic poverty rate in 25 years. We are coming together as a community. Our social fabric is on the mend.

But still there are people and places throughout America that have been left behind by this economic recovery. Minority unemployment and poverty still is about twice the national average. Still there are too many barriers on the road to opportunity, too many examples of Americans facing discrimination in daily life.

No American in the 21st century should have to face such discrimination when it comes to finding a home, getting a job, going to school, securing a loan. That’s why I’m very proud that my budget for the coming year will include the largest ever investment to enforce our civil rights laws, to help make sure that protections in law are protections in fact. I’m proposing a 20 percent increase for the Civil Rights Division of the Justice

Department. That would almost double the annual budget for the office since I became President 7 years ago.

Under the leadership of Acting Assistant Attorney General Bill Lann Lee, the Civil Rights Division has enforced our civil rights laws justly and fairly. And so, again, on behalf of all Americans, I ask the Senate to confirm Mr. Lee as our Nation's top civil rights enforcer.

Our budget also includes a 14 percent increase for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, so that it continue its work to enforce laws prohibiting employment discrimination. And we're beefing up our other civil rights enforcements effort throughout our National Government.

We must also do more to root out forces of hate and intolerance. We've seen far too many acts of violence targeted at others solely because of who they are, from the dragging death of James Byrd to the brutal killing of Matthew Shepard to the murder of the African-American basketball coach and the Korean-American student in the Midwest to the shooting at the Jewish school in Los Angeles and the murder of the Filipino postal worker. Such hate crimes leave deep scars, not just on the victims but on our larger community, for they take aim at others for who they are. And when they do, they take aim at America. So once again, I ask Congress to stop the delay and pass strong hate crimes legislation.

Taken together, these efforts will move us closer to building one America in the 21st century.

Dr. King taught us the most important civil right is to provide every citizen with the chance to live the American dream. This is the best chance we've had in my lifetime—maybe even in Mrs. Filmore's lifetime—to give every American a shot at that dream.

So as we celebrate Dr. King's life and legacy, let's keep following his footsteps to draw from that deep well of democracy and deepen the meaning of freedom for all Americans.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.

Exchange With Reporters at the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Washington

January 17, 2000

Israel-Syria Peace Talks

Q. Mr. President, are the peace talks still on track?

The President. We're working on it. That's what I've been doing this morning.

Q. Who are you talking to?

The President. Just our team, so far today.

Q. Mr. President, the Syrians say there is an issue that needs to be resolved before they can come; they may not come on Wednesday. Is that right?

The President. I'll probably put out something later today. I'm working on it, trying to make sure—we're trying to figure out what the most effective way to go forward is. The good news is I'm convinced they both still want to do it. They're not as far apart as they might be; they're not as far apart as they have been. So that's the good news.

The difference is right now about how or what the best way to go forward in the—so I'm working on it. We'll try to make a decision by the end of the day, the next couple of days, about what the best way to go forward is, and we'll let you know.

Q. Meaning a decision as to whether there will actually be talks on Wednesday?

The President. Yes. The decision about what the best way is, based on where they both are, to take the next steps.

Move to Chappaqua

Q. Are you going to start doing this in Chappaqua?

The President. If I need to. [*Laughter*] I've done a lot of other stuff. We've got a lot of work to do on that place. But it's a great house, and we're making progress. We did a lot of work the last few days when I was up there.

President's Race Initiative Report

Q. Mr. President, some are curious about how your book on race relations is coming on this Martin Luther King Day. Can you give us an update on that?