

But I sure think—it's Christmas week; they ought to open the Government again. That's the least we can do for the American people that have—you know, this is the only time of the year some people have to come here to Washington. And we've got a lot of Federal employees that don't need to lose a paycheck this week. They've got Christmas shopping to do; they've got things to do. I just think we ought to do it.

Q. Why do they keep saying you're not telling the truth?

The President. I don't know. You'll have to ask them that. I haven't—you know, I've tried to be very careful in this whole debate to deal with the specific facts and not to do characterizations like that. We have very different views, but if you read this—go back and read the resolution we agreed to. We agreed to strive to do our best to reach a 7-year balanced budget that the CBO would certify as balanced after consulting with OMB and with the private sector, that would protect the environment, would protect education, would protect agriculture and other things, and would invest in a way that really protected Medicare and Medicaid. And so we have certain standards to meet.

This is not easy to do; nobody ever pretended it would be easy to do. But I have been working to do it, and often I've felt that I was working only with myself. But over the weekend, we worked hard. We tried to involve more of the Democrats in the effort. We tried to—Mr. Pannetta went up to see that bipartisan group of Senators. And I am eager to meet and discuss this with Senator Dole and with the Speaker.

But we ought to open the Government. We owe that to the American people. It's Christmas week; we need to open the Government and then work this out. We can do it.

Q. Is the key their cutting their tax cut proposal and your coming up with additional savings on Medicare and Medicaid?

The President. Well, that may be the key from their point of view. The key from my point of view is that there's got to be—there has to be funds—funds have to go back into the Medicare and Medicaid programs and into education and the environment and research and technology.

You know, I don't want—you can burden—we would burden future generations with the debt if we don't balance the budget. But we also will burden future generations if we don't protect the environment and we don't invest in education, research, and technology. And we just—on pure human terms, we cannot have this level of health care cuts.

So we're going to have to work this out. But I think it can be done, but we don't—they should open the Government, and I will work with them to get this done.

Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich

Q. How do you feel about fellow Time magazine man of the year?

The President. I think he's had a big impact on events. That's the standard. That's it.

Q. Thank you.

The President. Thank you very much.

Q. Thank you. Merry Christmas. Where did you get that tie?

The President. Someone gave it to me. It's one of my Christmas ties. You know, I try to wear one every day for the last 12 days before Christmas.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:40 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Message to the House of Representatives Returning Without Approval the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1996 December 18, 1995

To the House of Representatives:

I am returning herewith without my approval H.R. 1977, the "Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1996."

This bill is unacceptable because it would unduly restrict our ability to protect America's natural resources and cultural heritage, promote the technology we need for long-term energy conservation and economic growth, and provide

adequate health, educational, and other services to Native Americans.

First, the bill makes wrong-headed choices with regard to the management and preservation of some of our most precious assets. In the Tongass National Forest in Alaska, it would allow harmful clear-cutting, require the sale of timber at unsustainable levels, and dictate the use of an outdated forest plan for the next 2 fiscal years.

In the Columbia River basin in the Pacific Northwest, the bill would impede implementation of our comprehensive plan for managing public lands—the Columbia River Basin Ecosystem Management Project. It would do this by prohibiting publication of a final Environmental Impact Statement or Record of Decision and requiring the exclusion of information on fisheries and watersheds. The result: a potential return to legal gridlock on timber harvesting, grazing, mining, and other economically important activities.

And in the California desert, the bill undermines our designation of the Mojave National Preserve by cutting funding for the Preserve and shifting responsibility for its management from the National Park Service to the Bureau of Land Management. The Mojave is our newest national park and part of the 1994 California Desert Protection Act—the largest addition to our park system in the lower 48 States. It deserves our support.

Moreover, the bill would impose a misguided moratorium on future listings and critical habitat designations under the Endangered Species Act. And in the case of one endangered species, the marbled murrelet, it would eliminate the normal flexibility for both the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture to use new scientific information in managing our forests.

Second, the bill slashes funding for the Department of Energy's energy conservation pro-

grams. This is short-sighted and unwise. Investment in the technology of energy conservation is important for our Nation's long-term economic strength and environmental health. We should be doing all we can to maintain and sharpen our competitive edge, not back off.

Third, this bill fails to honor our historic obligations toward Native Americans. It provides inadequate funding for the Indian Health Service and our Indian Education programs. And the cuts targeted at key programs in the Bureau of Indian Affairs are crippling—including programs that support child welfare; adult vocational training; law enforcement and detention services; community fire protection; and general assistance to low-income Indian individuals and families. Moreover, the bill would unfairly single out certain self-governance tribes in Washington State for punitive treatment. Specifically, it would penalize these tribes financially for using legal remedies in disputes with non-tribal owners of land within reservations.

Finally, the bill represents a dramatic departure from our commitment to support for the arts and the humanities. It cuts funding of the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities so deeply as to jeopardize their capacity to keep providing the cultural, educational, and artistic programs that enrich America's communities large and small.

For these reasons and others my Administration has conveyed to the Congress in earlier communications, I cannot accept this bill. It does not reflect my priorities or the values of the American people. I urge the Congress to send me a bill that truly serves the interests of our Nation and our citizens.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
December 18, 1995.