

Remarks on Vetoing the Departments of Commerce, Justice, and State, the Judiciary, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1996, and an Exchange With Reporters

December 19, 1995

The President. Good afternoon. I'm delighted to be joined by these police officers and by the Attorney General and Secretary Brown and the mayors of Chicago and Philadelphia and representatives of law enforcement who are here today.

For yet another day, the Republican Congress continues to keep our Government closed. Shortly, I will meet with Senator Dole and Speaker Gingrich. I hope we can resolve the situation and give the American people their Government back by Christmas.

We also should give them a balanced budget that reflects our values of opportunity for all, respecting our duty to our parents and our children, building strong communities and a strong America.

There is no value more basic than keeping our children safe. Unfortunately, the bill that the Congress passed to fund the Justice, Commerce, and State Departments failed to fulfill that essential obligation.

Last year, with the support of Members of both parties in Congress, I signed a crime bill into law. The key to that crime bill was our effort to put 100,000 new police officers on the street because we had clear, hard evidence that more police officers in community policing would actually lower the crime rate not only by catching more criminals but by preventing crime. Today we are awarding 5,500 police officers to communities all across America. That brings the grand total in less than 15 months to 31,000 new police officers for America's streets, almost a third of the 5-year total.

Everywhere I go, mayors and police chiefs and sheriffs tell me that community policing is helping them to fight crime and lower the crime rate. And the tide is turning. Yesterday, the FBI reported that the murder rate has dropped 12 percent in the last year. That's the largest decline in the murder rate since the FBI started keeping statistics 35 years ago. Violent crime is down 5 percent overall from last year's rate. We are turning the tide. We are beginning to win the fight against crime. This is no time to turn back the clock.

The crime bill is working because it provides funds for police officers directly to police departments. Unfortunately, this bill replaces this initiative which is guaranteed to put 100,000 police on the street with a block grant that has no guarantees at all. The bill that is before me does not guarantee that even one more police officer will be put on our streets, not one.

I gave my word in 1992 that I would work for 100,000 more police officers on the street. In 1994, when I signed that bill into law, it represented a solemn commitment by the United States Government that we would put 100,000 more police officers on the street. I intend to keep my word.

That is not the only reason I am vetoing this bill. Looking out for our families and our children is essential, and to do that, we have to look out for our future. The dawn of the information age is no time to turn out the lights on our research laboratories and our technology centers. But the Republican budget could cut nondefense research and development by as much as one-third over the next 7 years.

America thrives because we create opportunities for our children to create a better future. In this era of rapid technological change, we will only pass opportunity on to our children if we take advantage of American ingenuity and innovation. No business in the world today facing the pressures of the 21st century would gut its investment in research and technology, and no country should either.

The Japanese are in the midst of a serious recession. Yet their government just announced plans to double the Japanese research budget over the next 5 years. We have the lowest combined rates of unemployment and inflation in 27 years, and I do not intend to preside over a decision by Congress to cut our investment in research and technology by a third.

Look at the people who are winning the Nobel Prizes and see how many of them got Government-funded research. Look at the research that has been funded by our Government agencies over the last several years in new technologies, in new developments, and see the con-

tribution that is made here. America has the strongest economy in the world in large measure because we are leading the race to the technology age. And I don't believe we should drop out of the race on the edge of a new century.

Of course, we have to balance the budget, but we don't need to do it by cutting back on police officers and risking our safety. We don't need to do it by slashing our research in science and technology and risking our future. Remember, balancing the budget is more important to our children than anything else. It's lifting the burden of future debt off our children. We don't want to impose on our children a restricted future by making them less safe today and less secure in terms of economic opportunity tomorrow.

There is one last thing I'd like to say. Eight months ago today, terror visited our children in Oklahoma City. The memory of that awful tragedy will be with us forever. Just yesterday, law enforcement officers found a bomb outside a Federal office building in Reno, Nevada. In the weeks after Oklahoma City, I sent to the Congress a bill to give law enforcement the tools they need to crack down on terrorism and to protect our families—terrorism arising from within the United States, terrorism coming from beyond our borders.

The Senate passed the bill last June with sweeping bipartisan support. But a few people with extreme views have prevented the House of Representatives from even considering the bill. They have held it up long enough. Here in this time of peace for our country, I ask all Americans to remember the victims of Oklahoma City, and I ask the Congress to give law enforcement the tools they need to be truly peace officers.

When they send me a bill that protects our families by keeping our promise to put 100,000 police officers on the street, they should also protect our families by keeping their promise to send us a strong antiterrorism bill.

Thank you.

[At this point, the President signed the veto message.]

Q. Mr. President, are your numbers on Medicare and Medicaid savings negotiable?

The President. You know what I said yesterday; I said—I carry this little statement around with me. This is the agreement I made with the Congress when we reopened the Govern-

ment. The agreement says that we will enact legislation to balance the budget in 7 years, protecting Medicare, Medicaid, education, the environment, and other things, and that the agreement we finally make must be scored by the Congressional Budget Office as bringing the budget into balance. What is not negotiable with me is that we must protect these things. I have proposed savings in Medicare and Medicaid that are considerable but that will protect both the integrity of the programs and the interest of the people who depend upon Medicare and Medicaid.

So what I said to the Speaker and to Senator Dole yesterday was if they wanted me to put down a 7-year budget on the front end, I expected them to respond to the second part of this resolution. This is not a resolution about just any old 7-year budget. This 7-year budget has all these things that we all agreed to to protect, and Medicare and Medicaid are at the top of that list.

Q. Can you protect Medicare and Medicaid with—

Q. —seven years protecting all these things, including the things the Republicans added to it?

The President. Well, it depends on a lot of other variables. That's why—we were negotiating in good faith at the time they called the negotiations off last week, apparently because of the group in the House that has been controlling a lot of the decisions here for the last several months. We have put forward more than twice as many policy changes as they had in a good-faith effort to reach agreement.

The answer to your question is, yes, we could pass a 7-year budget that protects Medicare and Medicaid, education and the environment, and that does not—and our research and technology budget—and does not raise taxes on working families and that has great credibility in the financial markets. We can do that. If that is what the Congress wants to do, we can do it.

If instead the balanced budget is a cover for making war on the ability of the National Government to protect our common interest and to move us ahead, then I can't go along with that. But of course we can do it. And I hope that after this meeting I'm going to have in a few minutes, we'll be closer to doing it.

Q. Do you expect to get an agreement to reopen the Government at this meeting?

The President. I don't know. That's up to the Congress. Only the Congress can shut the Government down, and only the Congress can reopen it. But they can certainly reopen it, and I hope they will, particularly this week. It's just wrong for the Federal employees, and even more for the American people, to have the Government close the week before Christmas. It is a decision they made, and they can undo it and I hope they will.

Q. Do you share the concerns, Mr. President, of the financial markets that lack of a budget agreement may keep interest rates locked in place or even turn them around and head them back upward?

The President. Well, let me say this. I think the action of the Federal Reserve today—although I don't want to comment on the merits of it one way or the other, but there's a general understanding that we have a—first of all, back in '93, we made some very tough decisions without any bipartisan support to bring the deficit down and to increase investment in technology and research and education and the environment, things that would grow the economy. Interest rates came down; billions of dollars were invested; there was a homebuilding boom; we got the economy going again.

The fundamentals of this economy were sound. There is good growth. There is low infla-

tion—I will say again, the lowest combined rates of inflation and unemployment in 27 years. And we have to continue on that track. I think the message ought to be to people who are concerned about that is that this deficit is going to keep coming down, regardless. There is too much determination for that. That is not what this debate is all about. The deficit will keep coming down, regardless. The leadership of both parties favors that.

But we must have a 7-year balanced budget plan that reflects our other values. We are doing well in the world economy because the deficit is coming down and because the other things that are being done in the private sector are good and because the other things the Government is doing are good things. So we have to keep doing all the right things if we want to succeed. That's what the debate over the budget plan is about.

If the markets are worried about whether the deficit is going to keep coming down, they should forget about that. The deficit is going to keep coming down, regardless.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:34 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Message to the House of Representatives Returning Without Approval the Departments of Commerce, Justice, and State, the Judiciary, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1996

December 19, 1995

To the House of Representatives:

I am returning herewith without my approval H.R. 2076, the "Departments of Commerce, Justice, and State, the Judiciary, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1996."

This bill does not meet the priorities and needs of our Nation and people. It would undermine our ability to fight the war on crime; decimate technology programs that are critical to building a strong U.S. economy; and weaken our leadership in the world by drastically cutting funding for international organizations, peacekeeping, and other international affairs activities.

First, the bill represents an unacceptable retreat in our fight against crime and drugs. It eliminates my COPS initiative (Community Oriented Policing Services) to put 100,000 more police officers on the street. Already, this initiative has put thousands of police on the street, working hand-in-hand with their communities to fight crime. The block grant that H.R. 2076 would offer instead would not guarantee a single new police officer. That's not what the American people want, and I won't accept it. As I have said, I will not sign any version of this bill that does not fund the COPS initiative as a free-