

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:25 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Catherine Wilkinson, an employee of West Virginia Northern Community College

who introduced the President, and John Sweeney, president, AFL-CIO. H.R. 3448, approved August 20, was assigned Public Law No. 104-188.

Statement on Signing the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996 *August 20, 1996*

Today I have signed into law H.R. 3448, the "Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996."

This is important and long overdue legislation that provides a badly needed pay raise for millions of Americans and their families who struggle to make ends meet while working at the minimum wage. The Act boosts the minimum wage in two steps—a 50 cent increase from \$4.25 to \$4.75 an hour that takes effect October 1, followed by an additional 40 cent rise to \$5.15 an hour on September 1, 1997. This increase will help some 10 million of our hardest pressed working families build a better future. It is true to the basic American bargain that if you work hard you ought to have food on your table and a living wage in your pocket. It is the right thing to do.

I should note that I disagree with certain provisions added to the minimum wage title of the Act, such as the provision creating a new sub-minimum wage for young people and the one denying increased cash wages to most employees who rely on tips for part of their income. Still, those defects do not obscure the central accomplishment of this Act—securing the first minimum wage increase since 1991.

Beyond raising the minimum wage, this Act represents real progress on a number of other fronts.

First, I am particularly gratified by the important provisions in this Act concerning adoption. The Act provides a nonrefundable tax credit of up to \$5,000 per child for adoption expenses; \$6,000 for children with special needs. It will help thousands of children waiting for a family who wants them. It will help thousands of middle class parents realize their dream of adopting a child. It will build stronger families and stronger communities.

Moreover, the Act bars placement agencies that receive Federal funds from denying or delaying adoptions based on race, color, or national

origin. As I have consistently said, it is time to end the historical bias against interracial adoptions. That bias has too often meant interminable delay for children waiting to be matched with parents of the same race. It is time to put the creation of strong and loving families first.

Second, the Act creates a simplified, 401(k) retirement plan for small businesses, making it far easier for such companies to offer pensions to their employees. This new plan includes many of the pension reforms my Administration proposed more than a year ago. For example, it increases the portability of pensions, allowing more new workers to start saving for retirement from their first day on the job. It cuts the vesting period for workers in multiemployer plans from 10 years to 5, immediately vesting over 1 million workers in their benefits. It repeals the so-called "family aggregation rule," which limited the retirement benefits of family members working together in the same business. It allows nonprofit organizations and Indian tribes to maintain 401(k) plans for their workers; assures veterans they will have continued pension coverage if they return to a civilian job after military service; and makes pension benefits safer and more secure for millions of employees of State and local governments. The pension provisions in the Act are not perfect—they provide a smaller share of benefits to lower and middle wage workers than I proposed. But they are a significant step in the right direction.

Third, the Act gives a boost to small business by increasing the amount of capital that small businesses can write off as an expense. I proposed a \$15,000 increase in 1993 in order to encourage the kind of investment that creates new growth and jobs. The Congress passed half of what we advocated then and this legislation gives us the other half. Although the measure in this Act is phased in more slowly than I

proposed, it will still give small businesses a good incentive for capital investment.

Fourth, the Act extends the research tax credit, an important measure for a high-tech economy that will retain its competitive edge in the 21st century only if we remain committed to innovation and the research that underlies it. I wanted the Congress to go further by reinstating the research credit retroactively to July 1, 1995, when it last expired, and making it permanent. But this extension, through May of next year, is an important step forward.

Fifth, the Act extends a tax incentive for businesses that train and educate their employees. That incentive excludes from an employee's taxable income as much as \$5,250 of educational assistance provided by an employer. Such assistance is another key element in maintaining U.S. competitiveness because a better trained, better educated work force is vital to achieving higher productivity. I regret that the Congress failed to make this incentive permanent and that it has eliminated the incentive for post-graduate education. But in extending the incentive for undergraduate education through May 1997, the Act takes a useful step.

Sixth, by replacing the expiring Targeted Jobs Tax Credit (TJTC) with a new Work Opportunity Tax Credit, the Act provides a significant incentive for employers to hire people from certain targeted groups most in need of jobs, such as high-risk youth. I am pleased to see improvements that address many of the concerns raised about implementation of the TJTC. For example, the minimum employment period required before an employer becomes eligible for the credit will promote longer, more meaningful work experiences for those hired.

As strong a piece of legislation as this is overall, however, I am concerned about three provisions, two of which I objected to when they were included in legislation I vetoed last year.

The first provision repeals the tax credit related to corporate investments in Puerto Rico and other insular areas. I urged the Congress to reform the credit and use the resulting revenue for Puerto Rico's social and job training needs. My proposal would have, over time, prevented companies from obtaining tax benefits

by merely attributing income to the islands, but it would have continued to give companies a tax credit for wages and local taxes paid and capital investments made there, as well as for earnings reinvested in Puerto Rico and qualified Caribbean Basin Initiative countries. This legislation ignores the real needs of our citizens in Puerto Rico, ending the incentive for new investment now and phasing out the incentive for existing investments. I remain committed to my proposal for an effective incentive based on real economy activity that preserves and creates jobs in underdeveloped islands, and I hope that the Congress will act to ensure that the incentive for economic activity remains in effect.

A second provision repeals a 1993 initiative of this Administration that reduces tax incentives for U.S. companies to move jobs and operations abroad. Repeal of this provision will allow businesses to avoid taxes by accumulating foreign earnings without limit.

Finally, I have reservations about a provision in the Act which makes civil damages based on nonphysical injury or illness taxable. Such damages are paid to compensate for injury, whether physical or not, and are designed to make victims whole, not to enrich them. These damages should not be considered a source of taxable income.

Notwithstanding these objections, this is important, forward-looking legislation. It gives millions of hard-pressed workers a well-deserved raise, will make adoption a reality for thousands of grateful families and children, takes a good first step toward providing adequate retirement benefits and security for employees of small businesses, and creates useful tax incentives for the benefit of small businesses and their employees. Where there are improvements yet to be made, we will continue to work with the Congress to make them.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
August 20, 1996.

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