

the construction of productive water resources projects.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
October 12, 1996.

NOTE: S. 640, approved October 12, was assigned Public Law No. 104-303. This statement was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 14.

Remarks on Signing the Wildfire Suppression Aircraft Transfer Act of 1996 and an Exchange With Reporters in Albuquerque *October 14, 1996*

The President. Thank you, Senator Bingaman and Congressman Richardson. I want to thank the representatives of New Mexico's firefighting community here from the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the volunteer firefighters, the New Mexico State forestry office. And of course, we've got some folks from the Albuquerque Fire Department over there, as well.

I'm delighted to be staying here for the next few days. As you look around New Mexico you can't help being awestruck by the awesome, the breathtaking natural beauty of this State and of the entire West, the deserts, the mountains, the play of light and color. We have to do everything we can to protect the treasures of New Mexico. The beauty we see here and, indeed, throughout the West is very deep, but it's also fragile. We know that wildfires can ravage the landscape, threaten people, devastate homes and farms and businesses.

This has been the worst year for wildfires in nearly four decades. I think I need to emphasize that because that is the importance of the legislation we signed today and the efforts that these firefighters and those whom they represent have made—the worst year in almost 40 years. The brave men and women who are with us today and the thousands of their colleagues put their lives on the line to protect their fellow citizens, our natural environment, as they battle these blazes. We owe them our thanks, and we should be deeply grateful that during this past year, despite the huge rash of wildfires, not a single firefighter lost his or her life in a wildfire. That's because their training, their dedication, and because of the equipment that they have been provided.

We have to make sure that they have the very best possible equipment at their disposal. We can't tolerate a situation where any firefighter is unable to protect the public or themselves because of a lack of equipment, especially the air tankers that can muster such force and power to fight fires.

The legislation I have just signed will help these and other firefighters to do a better job with more safety, especially when they're faced with wildfires. Today, the Forest Service and other agencies rely on an aging and shrinking fleet of 39 air tankers to fight fires throughout our Nation. With this measure, we allow the Department of Defense to sell excess military aircraft to private contractors for conversion into air tankers that then can be leased to our Government to drench the fires from the sky.

This is a public-private partnership in the best sense, providing a vital service to the American public and its safety, using the skills and resources of the private sector to maintain a full fleet of modern air tankers for use by the Forest Service. It's especially fitting that this becomes law at the end of National Fire Prevention Week, a time we honor fallen firefighters and redouble our own efforts to be prudent and prevent fires from happening in the first place.

Again, I want to thank those brave men and women who are here with me today. I thank Senator Bingaman for his leadership. I thank Congressman Richardson, whose district has been especially affected. I'd also like to thank Senators Kempthorne and Craig for what they did and Senator Lott for making it possible for us to bring up this bill late in the congressional session and get it passed eventually in both Houses on a voice vote. This was a good thing for America, and I was glad to sign the bill.

Thank you very much.

1996 Election

Q. Mr. President, Newt Gingrich yesterday—

Q. Mr. President, Dole says he may make a renewed effort in California. Do you believe the race in California has tightened within 10 points?

The President. Well, I can't answer that question. I don't know. But I will say this: If California is to become a battleground in the last 3 weeks of the election, that is something that I would welcome, because I believe the people there are fundamentally fair-minded and forward-looking. And when I became President, California had the weakest economy in the country. Since I've been President, they've had to endure earthquakes and fires and floods. And in spite of all of that, they have shown a remarkable turnaround in so many areas, and I'm very proud of the partnership we have had.

No administration in history has worked as hard on so many fronts to make so much progress as we have. So if that's going to be the issue for the last 3 weeks, I would be happy to engage in that discussion, and I believe I know how it will come out.

Q. What are you going to do if Bob Dole goes negative?

The President. I can't—I'm going to do what I always do. I'm preparing to do my debate, to answer whatever questions may be asked. As I understand it, the people who are coming are picked from undecided voters, a fairly small

percentage of people who still have questions on their minds. Whatever they ask I'll do my best to answer. But Senator Dole will decide his strategy, and I will decide mine, and we'll see what the people have to say afterwards. There's nothing else to say.

I look forward to it, just as I looked forward to the last one, and the most important thing, I hope, is that it will be something that people will feel better about when it's over. Many people said to me after the last debate that they thought that it had been fundamentally positive and that people had really learned from the debate what the differences between us are and what practical impact that would have in the next 4 years. That's all any of us could hope for, and that's what I hope will come out of this debate.

Thank you.

Q. What's your reaction to Newt Gingrich, sir?

Q. Mr. President, you said FBI numbers show lowest crime rate, but here in Albuquerque we've had a record number of homicides.

Q. Any comment on Newt Gingrich?

The President. It's election time.

Q. It's a waste of time, did you say?

The President. It's election time, I said.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:03 a.m. outside the Holiday Inn Pyramid Hotel, S. 2078, approved October 14, was assigned Public Law No. 104-307. A portion of the exchange could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting an Executive Order To Revise Procedures for Processing Export License Applications

October 12, 1996

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

In order to take additional steps with respect to the national emergency described and declared in Executive Order 12924 of August 19, 1994, and continued on August 15, 1995, and August 14, 1996, necessitated by the expiration of the Export Administration Act on August 20, 1994, I hereby report to the Congress that pursuant to section 204(b) of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, 50 U.S.C.

1703(b) ("the Act"), I have today exercised the authority granted by the Act to issue an Executive order (a copy of which is attached) to revise the existing procedures for processing export license applications submitted to the Department of Commerce.

The new Executive order relates to my decision to transfer certain commercial communications satellites and jet engine hot-section technology from the United States Munitions List