

Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report on the Trade Agreements Program

March 6, 1997

To the Congress of the United States:

As required by section 163 of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended (19 U.S.C. 2213), I transmit herewith the 1997 Trade Policy Agenda and

1996 Annual Report on the Trade Agreements Program.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
March 6, 1997.

The President's News Conference

March 7, 1997

The President. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Today we learned some very good news about the American economy. Our Nation has created almost 600,000 new jobs in the first 2 months of 1997, almost 12 million since January of 1992. At the same time, the deficit has been reduced by 63 percent; investment in our people has increased; inflation remains low. Our economy is on the right track. But to stay on that right track, we have to balance the budget while we go forward with the work that leads to continued growth and low inflation. That's what our balanced budget will do, eliminating the deficit in 5 years and strengthening critical investments for the future of all of our people.

Last week the Congressional Budget Office certified that even under its assumptions, because of the protections we built into the budget, it would be balanced by 2002. So I am hopeful, and I want to say again that the talks we have been continually having with congressional leaders in both parties will produce a balanced budget agreement this year and in the not too distant future.

I also want to talk a moment about our commitments to our Gulf war veterans. And I thank Secretary Brown and the other veterans leaders who are here, including Elaine Larson from the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Illnesses, the leadership of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and other veterans organizations, and the Persian Gulf veterans who join with us here today.

Two months ago, when I accepted the final report of the Presidential Advisory Committee

on Gulf War Illnesses, I pledged to the Committee and to all America's veterans that we would match their efforts with action. Today I am announcing three important steps to meet that pledge and our debt to our veterans.

First, I have approved Secretary Brown's recommendation for the new regulations to extend the eligibility period for compensation for Persian Gulf veterans with undiagnosed illnesses. We aim to raise significantly the window for Gulf veterans to claim the compensation they have earned. Under current regulations, veterans with undiagnosed illnesses must prove their disabilities emerged within 2 years of their return from the Gulf in order to be eligible for benefits. Experience has shown that many disabled veterans have had their claims denied because they fall outside that 2-year timeframe. The proposed new regulations would extend the timeframe through the year 2001. That is 10 years after the cessation of hostilities in the Gulf war. Gulf war veterans who became ill as a result of their service should receive the compensation they deserve even if science cannot yet pinpoint the cause of their illnesses.

Second, I have accepted from the Secretaries of Defense, Health and Human Services, and Veterans Affairs a comprehensive action plan to implement the recommendations of the Presidential Advisory Committee's final report. I asked for this plan within 60 days, and they delivered. The plan addresses outreach, medical and clinical issues, research, coordination, investigations, and chemical and biological weapons. It will help us to do an even better job of