

and deprive our citizens of needed environmental information.

The Act provides \$24 billion in funding for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), including full funding for my request to renew expiring Section 8 contracts, thus assuring continuation of HUD rental subsidies for low-income tenants in privately owned housing. Funding is also provided for programs such as the HOME Investment Partnership program, Community Development Block Grants, and HOPE VI for severely distressed public housing. I am pleased that the bill continues to support States and cities through these vital economic development programs. The Act also funds my request for Brownfields redevelopment, an initiative to redevelop abandoned sites and return them to productive uses and thereby help communities revitalize these areas. The Act also fully funds my requests for Homeless Assistance Grants and Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS, and provides funding, although not my full request, for antidiscrimination efforts, including the Fair Housing Initiatives program.

The Act contains a major initiative to reduce the costs of Section 8 contract renewals for FHA-insured properties. The Act recognizes the gravity of the situation and provides HUD with many new tools. At the same time, I am con-

cerned that provisions within the Act could limit FHA's ability to design efficient partnerships, increasing costs to the FHA insurance fund, and could restrict opportunities for assisted tenants to use portable vouchers to seek out the housing that best meets their particular needs. I am also concerned that there is no direct and explicit solution for the tax consequences that threaten the restructuring process.

The Act fully funds my request of \$17.6 billion for the medical care of this Nation's veterans and contains my requested user fee proposal, funded at \$0.6 billion. This new revenue source gives the Department of Veterans Affairs the incentive to improve its collections while ensuring more control over its future viability as a health-care provider.

Unfortunately, the Act also eliminates funding for the U.S. Office of Consumer Affairs, which has served Presidents of both parties over three decades. I will work to ensure that a consumer voice is maintained from existing agency resources.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
October 27, 1997.

NOTE: H.R. 2158, approved October 27, was assigned Public Law No. 105-65.

Statement on Signing the Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1998

October 27, 1997

I am pleased to sign into law today H.R. 2169, the "Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1998."

This legislation provides funds to improve safety on our highways, airways, and waterways. It would also permit the highest level of Federal infrastructure investment in history—investment to improve our Nation's highways, transit systems, Amtrak, and airports and, as a result, improve personal mobility and make America a better global competitor.

Unfortunately the Congress has done only half the job in passing this legislation. Authorization of the Federal grant programs for highways, transit, and highway safety expired on Sep-

tember 30, 1997. Until the Congress reauthorizes those programs within the constraints of the Balanced Budget Act, we have only the promise of record-high investment levels, not the reality.

I submitted my proposal to reauthorize those programs, called "The National Economic Crossroads Transportation Efficiency Act" (NEXTEA), last March. The Congress has held hearings and begun work on this legislation. But, as we near the end of the first month of fiscal 1998, the Congress has not presented me with legislation that would reauthorize these programs.

I call on the Congress to act—before it adjourns for the year—on a multi-year reauthorization bill that will give transportation planners and decision-makers the assurance of multi-year funding levels that they can use to continue to improve America's vital transportation network. My Administration stands ready to assist

the Congress to resolve the issues and agree on a multi-year bill.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
October 27, 1997.

NOTE: H.R. 2169, approved October 27, was assigned Public Law No. 105–66.

Remarks at a Birthday Party for the First Lady in Chicago, Illinois October 27, 1997

The President. Thank you very much. You can hear I'm a little hoarse tonight, but I'll do my best to be heard over the din. Let me say to all of you, first of all, thank you, Mr. Mayor; thank you, Mrs. Daley; thank you, Lois Weisberg. I thank all the committee, everybody who had anything to do with this day today. You have made Hillary and, I might say, her mother and her brothers who came with her today—you've made their whole family very happy. This has been an unforgettable day in her life, and I am profoundly grateful to all of you, and I thank you very much.

You know, before I met Hillary, you could put what I knew about Chicago in a thimble and have space left over. [*Laughter*] About a week after I met Hillary, I thought there was no other city on the face of the Earth. [*Laughter*] I'll never forget the first time I came here to visit Hillary. I remember only two things: her father would not come outside to say hello to me—[*laughter*]—which I thought showed good judgment on his part—[*laughter*]—and she took me to Chicago and showed me the city. And I fell in love with it then—that was a long time ago now—and I have been ever since.

This is a magnificent place. You have done unbelievable things. You're in the process of

doing other unbelievable things. They may well make a larger chapter in the history of this city, but you will never have a kinder, better, warmer gesture than the one you've given Hillary today, and I will never forget it as long as I live. Thank you very, very much.

Audience member. Four more years!

The President. It's not constitutional. [*Laughter*]

I want to ask Hillary to come up now. You have to remember—this birthday—she wore it lightly for a long time, but her staff started celebrating it 50 days before the event. They wanted her to recognize precisely how old she was by giving her one present a day for 50 days up to the blessed event—[*laughter*]—which occurred yesterday. Now she's still celebrating it as if she's going to hold on for dear life. [*Laughter*] Whatever she wants to do, I'm for.

Ladies and gentlemen, our First Lady.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:25 p.m. in Gar Hall at the Chicago Cultural Center. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Richard M. Daley of Chicago and his wife, Margaret; Chicago Commissioner of Culture Affairs Lois Weisberg; and the First Lady's mother, Dorothy Rodham, and brothers Tony Rodham and Hugh Rodham, Jr.

Remarks at Oscar Mayer Elementary School in Chicago October 28, 1997

Thank you very much. Thank you, Evaline, and thank you, Mary. Thank you, Maggie Sul-

livan. Mr. Blitstein, thank you for welcoming me here.