

## Statement on Congressional Action on Immigration Legislation *November 14, 1997*

During my trip to Central America in May, I pledged to address the circumstances of Central Americans who were treated unfairly by last year's immigration bill. The bill's strict new rules threatened to uproot hundreds of thousands of people who came to our shores fleeing violence and persecution. In July, I transmitted to the Congress a legislative proposal that offered relief to these people. I am very pleased that the Congress has now passed provisions that do just that.

In the 1980's, a large number of Central Americans sought refuge in the United States because of the civil war and human rights abuses that then plagued that region. As I noted during my trip, the United States has a particular obligation to help these people because they and their families have now established deep roots in our communities and because sending them home in large numbers at this time would very likely disrupt the important progress these countries have made towards peace, democracy, and economic reform. As a result of these new provisions, these people may now be considered for permanent status under more generous rules than were imposed by the recent immigration bill.

Nevertheless, I am concerned about several aspects of this legislation. First, I am troubled

by the fact that it treats similarly situated people differently. The Central Americans covered by this bill fled similar violence and persecution; they have established similarly strong connections to the United States; and their home countries are all fledgling democracies in need of our assistance. The relief made available to these people should be consistent as well. I believe, however, that these differences can be minimized in the implementation process.

I am also concerned about the plight of certain Haitians who are not covered by this legislation. Before we helped restore democracy to Haiti, many Haitians were also forced to flee their country because of persecution and civil strife. They deserve the same treatment that this legislation makes possible for other groups. We will seek passage of legislation providing relief to these Haitians early in the next session of Congress and take appropriate administrative action while we pursue this solution.

Finally, I believe that Congress should not have continued to permit the application of new, harsher immigration rules to other persons with pending cases. Changing the rules in the middle of the game is unfair, unnecessary, and contrary to our values. We intend to revisit this issue at the earliest opportunity.

## Statement on Signing the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1998 *November 14, 1997*

I have signed into law today H.R. 2107, the "Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1998."

This Act provides funding for the Department of the Interior, various programs of the Department of Energy, the Forest Service (Department of Agriculture), the Indian Health Service (Department of Health and Human Services), the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities, and several other agencies. It funds several of my Administration's priorities, which were highlighted in the Bipartisan Budget

Agreement (BBA): priority Federal land acquisitions, National Park Service (NPS) operations, NPS base land acquisition, Everglades restoration, and Tribal Priority Allocations in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

The National Endowment for the Arts will continue to provide active and visible support to important American arts communities and is funded at \$98 million, \$1.5 million below the FY 1997 level. The Act also provides \$111 million for the National Endowment for the Humanities. I remain concerned, however, about

the low level of funding for these agencies that provide important cultural, education, and artistic programs for communities across America.

The \$699 million provided in H.R. 2107 for priority Federal land acquisitions and exchanges is an extraordinary accomplishment agreed to in the BBA. These funds, in addition to the amounts provided for regular land acquisition, will allow the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to protect nationally important treasures—including Yellowstone National Park and the largest privately held stand of ancient redwoods in northern California—from unacceptable environmental threats. It is important that the decision of the Congress to allow a portion of this appropriation to be used for critical maintenance projects and other purposes not be seen as a precedent for the allocation of moneys for such purposes from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in the future. These problems, while meriting attention, are not appropriate uses of the funds. Finally, the bill includes an unjustified transfer of millions of dollars of mineral rights to the State of Montana—I intend to use my line-item veto authority to cancel the dollar drain on the Treasury that would result from this unwarranted action.

The Act provides \$1.2 billion for operation of our national park system. This funding, an increase of more than 6 percent over the amount provided for FY 1997, will enable the NPS to improve on the high-quality service at existing national parks, including five new parks established in 1996. Funding is provided at my requested level for Everglades restoration. This will support our efforts to restore this rare and delicate ecosystem to environmental health. The Act also provides \$1.3 billion for operation of our national forest system (6 percent over FY 1997), and full funding for other land management agencies that provide recreation, conservation, and development opportunities to all Americans.

My Administration has moved away from past policies that primarily emphasized timber cutting at the expense of the environment and blatantly violated environmental laws. This Administration stands for protecting the environment as well as jobs. For example, my Pacific Northwest Forest Plan, in place for over 3 years, encompasses this new approach of managing our national forests based on sound science. This plan helps to ensure that these forests can continue to provide multiple benefits to the public for the long-

term, including timber harvest, wildlife, fisheries, recreation, and clean water. Another approach we are proud of is employing Habitat Conservation Plans, such as that in the Headwaters Forest agreement, which are based on sound science and that fully comply with the Endangered Species Act. We can and do protect economic and environmental interests.

Unfortunately, the Act includes several provisions that attempt to interfere with the responsible management of our national forests. These Forest Service riders in the bill reflect increasing efforts by the majority in the Congress to micromanage forest management decisions and to prevent the use of scientifically based information to guide land stewardship. These provisions clearly are an attempt to return to forest management by politics rather than science and full public participation. This is a grave disservice to the people of the United States.

For example, the bill includes a provision to restrict the ability of the Forest Service to start new revisions of national forest land management plans to bring them up to date with new science, until the agency publishes new planning regulations. The Congress clearly seeks to force the Administration to release forest planning regulations that have not yet been finalized because of our concerns over the regulations' impact on the Forest Service's ability to improve its environmental performance. Instead, USDA has established an independent Committee of Scientists to review the regulations and provide recommendations for their improvement. I have directed the agency to proceed expeditiously with this scientific review and to use its findings to guide its effort in rewriting forest planning direction. Until the new regulations are published, the agency will proceed with protecting the environment by conducting the necessary environmental analysis and updating forest plans to continue the Administration's science-based management policy to the maximum extent allowed under the rider.

The Congress also continues to interfere with the Administration's efforts to promote ecosystem management and a greater understanding of the natural resource management issues affecting areas like the interior Columbia River Basin—an area characterized by forest health, watershed, and endangered species problems. Cumbersome requirements to delay a science-based plan for the Basin could potentially shut

down every forest in that region, hurting communities and families dependent on these forests for their livelihood. This action may benefit a few special interests, but it injures both the environment and the economy.

In addition, the Conference Report for this Act directs the Forest Service to continue the use of so-called “purchaser road credits” for commercial timber roads on national forests. I have proposed to eliminate these credits, which amount to an unneeded subsidy for companies buying public timber. Contrary to the views expressed in the Conference Report, many in the Congress have acknowledged the adverse environmental impact that decades of timber road building have caused to our land and water. Therefore, I will again propose elimination of purchaser road credits next year while holding counties and small businesses harmless and have asked the Secretary of Agriculture to take the necessary administrative steps to be prepared to implement the Administration’s proposal in FY 1999. Further, the Forest Service is developing a scientifically based policy for managing roadless areas in our national forests. These last remaining wild areas are precious to millions of Americans and key to protecting clean water and abundant wildlife habitat, and providing recreation opportunities. These unspoiled places must be managed through science, not politics.

The Act contains funding of \$612 million for energy conservation activities. While I am pleased that this includes modest increases for mitigating global climate change and for the Partnership for a New Generation of Vehicles, it is still a \$96 million reduction from our request that will slow our planned progress in both of those areas.

The Act provides \$757 million for reservation-level BIA Tribal Priority Allocation programs as

agreed to in the BBA. This will enable Tribes to allocate funding for essential programs, such as social services, law enforcement, housing improvement, scholarships, and road repair.

While I am pleased that the Congress has funded the Tribal Priority Allocation programs at the level I requested, I am concerned that provisions in the Act will limit the ability of sovereign Alaskan tribes to exercise their self-determination as to how health services are provided. These provisions contradict my Administration’s longstanding support of self-determination for tribal governments set forth under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Act. It is my understanding that the Secretary of Health and Human Services can review any proposal submitted to the Indian Health Service for contracting primary care services against the statutory declination provisions in section 102 of the Indian Self-Determination Act.

Section 129 of the Act prohibits the Secretary of the Interior from approving new class III tribal-State gaming compacts without prior approval of a State. This section properly construed, clarifies that State approval is governed by State law. I am advised that this section does not prohibit the Secretary from conducting a rulemaking to establish a process to govern situations in which a tribe and a State cannot agree on a tribal-State compact. This section is acceptable because it is not inconsistent with the established national policy set forth in the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,  
November 14, 1997.

NOTE: H.R. 2107, approved November 14, was assigned Public Law No. 105–83.

## Remarks to the Women’s Leadership Forum in Las Vegas, Nevada *November 14, 1997*

Thank you very much. Thank you all for being here, for being in such a good humor. [*Laughter*] You know why they’re sitting down now? Because they think I’m going to talk a lot longer than previous speakers. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank Senator Reid and Senator Bryan and Governor Miller for being here, for their service, and for their remarkable friendship to me. I’d like to thank the national chair of the Women’s Leadership Forum, Cynthia Friedman, who is also up here on the stage with