

Message to the House of Representatives Returning Without Approval Agriculture Appropriations Legislation October 7, 1998

To the House of Representatives:

I am returning herewith without my approval, H.R. 4101, the "Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1999." I am vetoing this bill because it fails to address adequately the crisis now gripping our Nation's farm community.

I firmly believe and have stated often that the Federal Government must play an important role in strengthening the farm safety net. This appropriations bill provides an opportunity each year for the Government to take steps to help hardworking farmers achieve a decent living, despite the misfortune of bad weather, crop disease, collapsing markets, or other forces that affect their livelihoods. It is especially necessary for the Government to act this year, with prices dropping precipitously, crops destroyed by flood, drought, and disease, and where many farmers will see their net income drop by as much as 40 percent below a 5-year average.

Two years ago, when I signed the "Freedom to Farm Bill," I made clear that it did not provide an adequate safety net for our Nation's farmers. There is no better proof of that bill's shortcomings than the hardship in America's farm country this year. Our farm families are facing their worst crisis in a decade.

My Administration has already taken steps to address this crisis. In July, we announced the purchase of \$250 million of wheat to export to hungry people around the world. In August, I signed legislation to speed up farm program payments. But in the face of a growing emergency for our Nation's farmers, we must do more to ensure that American farmers can continue to provide, for years to come, the safest and least expensive food in the world. Last month, I sent to the Congress a request for \$2.3 billion in emergency aid for our farmers, and I supported Senator Daschle's and Harkin's proposal to boost farm income by lifting the cap on marketing loan rates.

I am extremely disappointed that the Congress has reacted to this agriculture emergency situation by sending me a bill that fails to provide an adequate safety net for our farmers.

I have repeatedly stated that I would veto any emergency farm assistance bill if it did not adequately address our farmers' immediate needs, and this bill does not do enough.

The lack of sufficient emergency aid for farmers in this bill is particularly problematic in light of the bill's other provisions that affect farmers and their rural communities. Cutting edge agricultural research is absolutely essential to improve our farmers' productivity and to maintain their advantage over our competitors around the world. But this bill eliminates the \$120 million in competitive research grants for this year that I strongly supported and signed into law just last June. It also blocks the \$60 million from the Fund for Rural America provided through that same bill, preventing needed additional rural development funds that would help our Nation's rural communities to diversify their economies and improve their quality of life. The bill also cuts spending for our food safety initiative in half, denying funds for research, public education, and other food safety improvements.

Many of our most vulnerable farmers have also had to face an obstacle that no one in America ever should have to confront: racial discrimination. Over 1,000 minority farmers have filed claims of discrimination by USDA's farm loan programs in the 1980s and early 1990s that the statute of limitations bars from being addressed. While I am pleased that this legislation contains a provision waiving the statute of limitations, I am disappointed that it does not contain the language included in the Senate's version of this bill, which accelerates the resolution of the cases, provides claimants with a fair and full court review if they so choose, and covers claims stemming from USDA's housing loan programs.

Therefore, as I return this bill, I again call on the Congress to send me a comprehensive plan, before this session ends, that adequately responds to the very real needs of our farmers at this difficult time.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
October 7, 1998.

NOTE: This message was released by the Office
of the Press Secretary on October 8.

Remarks on the Decision of Certain Health Maintenance Organizations To Opt Out of Some Medicare Markets

October 8, 1998

Thank you. I would like to begin by thanking Senator Rockefeller and Congressman Dingell for their steadfast support of Medicare and their participation in our Medicare Commission. Let me say just in advance, I would think that the very issue we discuss today offers further evidence that it is time to take a look at the challenges and the responsibilities of the Medicare program, long-term, and I'm glad we have Jay Rockefeller and John Dingell on that commission.

I'd like to thank Senator Kennedy and Senator Lieberman and Congressman Stark and Congressman Cardin also for being here today. I'd like to thank Secretary Shalala for her marvelous service, and Nancy-Ann Min DeParle who is here with her. I'd like to thank all the members of the seniors groups who are representing their constituents, standing to my right here. I thank them for joining us today.

Kosovo

Since this is the only time I'll have to talk to the press for the next several hours, I hope you will indulge me for a moment while I make a few comments about the present situation in Kosovo.

As a result of the unconscionable actions of President Milosevic, we face the danger of violence spreading to neighboring countries, threatening a wider war in Europe. We face a humanitarian crisis that could be a catastrophe in the making, as tens of thousands of homeless refugees risk freezing or starving to death as winter comes on.

Our goal is simple: It is full compliance with United Nations Security Council resolutions by President Milosevic. My Special Envoy, Richard Holbrooke, has just completed 3 days of talks with Mr. Milosevic, making absolutely clear that he must meet the demands of this Security Council resolution, end the violence, withdraw his forces, let the refugees return to their

homes, give the humanitarian relief workers full and free access to the people who need them, and begin negotiations with the Kosovar Albanians on autonomy for their region, which is provided for under the law of their nation.

Yesterday I decided that the United States would vote to give NATO the authority to carry out military strikes against Serbia if President Milosevic continues to defy the international community. In the days ahead, my counterparts in Europe will be making similar decisions. We would prefer—we would far prefer—to secure President Milosevic's compliance with the will of the international community in a peaceful manner. But NATO must be prepared to act militarily to protect our interests, to prevent another humanitarian catastrophe in the Balkans.

HMO's and Medicare

Now, let me echo, first of all, the sentiments which have already been expressed here. Since John Dingell was in the chair when Medicare was passed, it has been more than a program; it has been a symbol of our intergenerational unity as a country, fulfilling our responsibilities to our grandparents and parents, protecting our families. Strengthening Medicare has been one of this administration's top priorities. Last year we took historic bipartisan action to improve benefits and extend the life of the Trust Fund for a decade. We expanded the number and types of health plans available to Medicare beneficiaries so that older Americans, like other Americans, would have more choices in their Medicare.

I think it ought to be said in defense of this decision and the enrollment of many seniors in managed care plans that one of the principal reasons that so many seniors wanted it is that there were managed care plans who thought, for the reimbursement then available, they could provide not only the required services under Medicare but also a prescription drug benefit,