

of U.S.-made items in connection with emergency repair or replacement for commercial aircraft, and I will exercise the certification authority consistent with that view.

I am disappointed that the Congress, in a well-meaning effort to further protect nuclear weapons information, has included an overly broad provision that impedes my Administration's work to declassify historically valuable records. I am committed to submitting the plan required under this Act within 90 days. In the meantime, I will interpret this provision in a manner that will assure the maximum continuity of agency efforts, as directed by my Executive Order 12958, to declassify historically valuable records.

I am also concerned that several provisions of the Act could be interpreted to intrude unconstitutionally on the President's authority to conduct foreign affairs and to direct the military as Commander in Chief. These provisions could be read to regulate negotiations with foreign governments, direct how military operations are to be carried out, or require the disclosure of national security information. I will interpret these provisions in light of my constitutional responsibilities.

Finally, I strongly object to a provision that will impede the ability of the Department of Defense to assist small and disadvantaged businesses in obtaining contracts. My Administration

recently announced new procurement policies to increase contracting opportunities for such businesses. This action was taken in order to help remedy discrimination and comply with constitutional requirements. It is unfortunate that this Act will undermine the effectiveness of our efforts and create difficulties in implementing these important policies in future years. My Administration will seek remedial legislation.

There are costs associated with this Act in FY 2002 that are not fully offset under Administration budget scoring. Under the Budget Enforcement Act, a sequester of mandatory programs will be required in the future if savings to offset the costs of this Act are not enacted. My Administration will work with the Congress to offset these costs to avoid a potential sequester.

Notwithstanding the concerns noted above, I believe that the Strom Thurmond National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1999, as a whole, is beneficial to the national defense and will help us achieve our objectives in this important area.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
October 17, 1998.

NOTE: H.R. 3616, approved October 17, was assigned Public Law No. 105-261.

Statement on Signing the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 1999 *October 17, 1998*

Today I have signed into law H.R. 4103, the "Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 1999."

Our military readiness must remain our top national security priority. This Act fully funds many of the Department's critical readiness programs and supports our commitments to a better quality of life for our military personnel and their families. I anticipate that the Congress shortly will act to include the emergency funds necessary for our ongoing participation in peacekeeping operations in Bosnia in a supplemental funding bill. I strongly urge them to do so. In addition, as I have said before, I believe we should examine near-term and long-term op-

tions to secure additional funds to address critical readiness shortfalls.

While the Act funds a number of modernization priorities, I have expressed my strong concerns that this legislation contains excessive funding for projects that are not currently needed for our Nation's defense at the expense of higher priority programs.

I am concerned about section 8115 of the Act, which forbids the obligation or expenditure of appropriated funds under this Act for any additional deployment of U.S. Armed Forces to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), Albania, or Macedonia until after

Oct. 17 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1998

transmittal of a burdensome report to the Congress on the deployment. Consistent with the plain language of section 8115 and the intent of the Congress, I shall interpret it to apply only to the deployment of additional ground forces to one or more of the three countries. Further, I shall interpret and implement section 8115 consistent with my constitutional authority to conduct the foreign relations of the United States and as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive, and not in a manner that would encumber my constitutional authority.

I will continue to work with the Congress on the appropriate level of long-term funding for defense in order to adequately address the Nation's security needs.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
October 17, 1998.

NOTE: H.R. 4103, approved October 17, was assigned Public Law No. 105-262.

Remarks on Departure for the Wye River Middle East Peace Talks and an Exchange With Reporters October 19, 1998

Terrorist Attack in Beersheba, Israel

The President. I want to begin by saying how much I deplore the grenade attack earlier today on a bus station in Beersheba, Israel. No cause, no grievance justifies terror. This is another attempt to murder, plain and simple.

Now, I am convinced that reaching a secure, just, and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians is the best way to ensure that terrorism has no future in the Middle East. I'm now returning to the Middle East peace talks to encourage the Israelis and the Palestinians to make the hard decisions necessary to move this peace process forward.

As I said when we launched the talks last week, the United States will do everything we can to help; but ultimately, only the parties themselves can bridge their differences and put their people on a more hopeful course. The issues are difficult. The distrust is deep. The going has been tough. But the parties must consider the consequences of failure and also the benefits of progress.

Flash Floods in Texas

Finally, let me say just a few words about the flash flooding that has wreaked havoc in southeast Texas. Reportedly, 18 people have lost their lives, 5,000 evacuated from their homes, 1,200 in refuge in emergency shelters. The storms themselves have not yet abated. We offer our thoughts, our prayers, our resolve to help

to those who have lost family members, those who have been uprooted.

A short while ago, I spoke to our FEMA Director, James Lee Witt. He is already working with the Texas officials to assess the damage, and the budget I am about to sign contains nearly \$1 billion in additional resources to FEMA so that this vital agency will be even stronger as it works to address this and future disasters. For now, the Nation stands ready to assist the people of Texas in their time of need.

Wye River Middle East Peace Talks

Q. Mr. President, will the Wye talks cancel your trip to California tomorrow in order to be available to continue the Middle East negotiations?

Q. Can they still succeed at Wye?

The President. I'm going back today to work on this. As you know, I got home at 3 o'clock last night. We're working hard through it. This incident in Israel is certainly a complicating factor. I have been briefed on the progress of events this morning, and we're going to work as hard as we can today and we'll have more to say about it as events unfold.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:28 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House.