

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:45 a.m. in the Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery. In his remarks, he referred to Manuel Tanguma, Jr., commander, Catholic War Veterans of the U.S.A.; Maj. Gen. Robert R. Ivany, USA, commander, U.S. Army Military District of Washington; John C. Metzler, Jr., Superintendent, Arlington Na-

tional Cemetery; Hugh Maddy, Chief of Chaplains, Department of Veterans Affairs; Lee Thornton, master of ceremonies; and President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete. H.R. 4110, the Veterans Programs Enhancement Act of 1998, approved November 11, was assigned Public Law No. 105-368.

## Statement on Funding for Military Readiness

*November 11, 1998*

Today, as part of the Omnibus Consolidated and Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act, 1999, I am releasing \$1.1 billion in military readiness funding that will enhance our Armed Forces' ability to maintain high standards of readiness throughout the coming year.

I consider military readiness—ensuring that our forces are always prepared to carry out their assigned mission in peace and in war—to be among America's highest priorities.

On September 15 I met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Unified Commanders in Chief, and they advised that, while our current state of readiness is sound, there are real concerns about the future. While our forces are now capable of meeting the security needs of the Nation, the chiefs raised several concerns about military readiness, especially regarding the future readiness of follow-on troops who would be deployed in a sustained conflict.

In response, I made a commitment to add resources to the current year's budget that will address emerging readiness concerns by reducing the backlog of equipment awaiting maintenance, buying additional spare parts for Air Force and Navy aircraft, and improving our recruiting efforts. In addition, I have ordered a thorough and complete readiness review, involv-

ing the Department of Defense, the National Security Council, and the Office of Management and Budget, as part of my administration's budget review process for fiscal year 2000.

The review process for fiscal year 2000 is already underway, and I anticipate a series of budget and policy proposals that will continue our effort to ensure that U.S. forces remain ready to meet the security needs of the Nation. Our challenge is to strike a balance between providing sufficient resources for military readiness while maintaining fiscal discipline and appropriate funding levels for other investments necessary to sustain our economy.

I look forward to working with the next Congress to ensure a viable defense budget that continues to guarantee that our forces are prepared, while investing wisely in modernization and supporting the overall policy goals of my administration. And I am pleased that this action today will address the most immediate readiness needs of the U.S. military.

NOTE: H.R. 4328, the Omnibus Consolidated and Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act, 1999, approved October 21, was assigned Public Law No. 105-277.

## Statement on Signing the Veterans Programs Enhancement Act of 1998

*November 11, 1998*

Today I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 4110, the "Veterans Programs Enhancement Act

of 1998." It is particularly appropriate on this Veterans Day to express the Nation's continued

gratitude to our veterans by improving a wide range of veterans' benefits and programs. I am particularly pleased that H.R. 4110 includes so many Administration proposals.

Most important, the bill provides a 1.3 percent increase in compensation payments to veterans with service-connected disabilities and in dependency and indemnity compensation to the survivors of those whose deaths were service-related. This increase, effective December 1, 1998, reflects the same percentage increase in benefits that Social Security beneficiaries and veterans' pension recipients will receive. Approximately 2.3 million veterans and over 300,000 surviving spouses and children will benefit from this increase, which will ensure that the value of their well-deserved benefits is maintained.

The bill also furthers the Nation's commitment to veterans who served in the Persian Gulf War. In particular, it extends existing authority for providing priority health care to Gulf War veterans through December 31, 2001. In addition, the bill bolsters efforts by the Departments of Veterans Affairs (VA), Defense, and Health and Human Services, with the help of independent scientific organizations, to study and treat these veterans' illnesses in a scientifically sound and effective manner. Furthermore, this legislation enhances outreach efforts to Gulf War veterans and broadens the public's access to the findings of federally sponsored research on the health consequences of service in the Persian Gulf.

The bill contains a number of provisions to help veterans reach their educational and employment goals. For instance, the legislation expands veterans' options for entering on-the-job training programs and meeting requirements for Montgomery G.I. Bill benefits. In addition, the bill reinforces and expands an individual's right

to return to a job after military service, as provided by the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act.

Other provisions revise veterans' pension and insurance programs. For example, the legislation increases the special pension paid to recipients of the Medal of Honor, the Nation's highest military award. Additionally, the bill provides increased assistance to certain veterans with terminal illnesses by allowing them to receive a portion of their life insurance benefits as "living benefits," helping them to meet medical and living expenses during their time of special need.

The bill includes many other provisions to improve the quality and effectiveness of VA services to veterans. One provision permanently restructures and streamlines VA housing loan operations. Another provision contributes to high-quality VA health care by authorizing the Department to establish new educational benefits for certain categories of health care professionals to help attract and retain the best qualified employees.

This Nation owes no greater debt of gratitude than to our veterans, particularly those who have suffered disability or who made the supreme sacrifice while defending our freedoms. Each Veterans Day, the Nation makes a special effort to give thanks for and to honor the sacrifices of veterans and their families. This comprehensive legislation further expresses our gratitude to these brave men and women, not just on Veterans Day, but every day. For that reason, I am privileged to sign H.R. 4110 into law.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,  
November 11, 1998.

NOTE: H.R. 4110, approved November 11, was assigned Public Law No. 105-368.