

funds to invest in technology to serve the communications industry more effectively.

In conference action, a rider was added that would amend the recently-enacted Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act to expand the prohibition of discrimination against individuals who refuse to “prescribe” contraceptives to individuals who “otherwise provide for” contraceptives (all nonphysician providers) in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program. As an example, this language could allow pharmacists to refuse to dispense contraceptive prescriptions. This action violated jurisdictional concerns and is also unacceptable policy.

The bill underfunds a number of high-priority programs within the Department of Commerce. My Administration sought an additional \$9 million to help public broadcasters meet the Federal deadline to establish digital broadcasting capability by May 1, 2003. The bill would provide less than half of last year’s funding level for the Critical Infrastructure Assurance Office. The bill also fails to fund the Department’s other

programs to protect critical information and communications infrastructures. The Congress must restore these funds if the Department is to continue performing its important and emerging role in coordinating activities that support our economic and national security.

The bill does not include any funds to reimburse Guam and other territories for the costs of detaining and repatriating smuggled Chinese aliens. These entities deserve our support for assisting in this interdiction effort.

I look forward to working with the Congress to craft an appropriations bill that I can support, and to passage of one that will facilitate our shared objectives.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
October 25, 1999.

NOTE: This message was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 26.

Statement on Senate Action on Proposed Legislation To Provide Assistance to African Nations

October 26, 1999

I applaud the strong, bipartisan vote in the Senate to move forward with consideration of the African growth and opportunity act. This historic legislation will help build a partnership that will strengthen economic and political ties, increase trade, and boost economic growth and

opportunity in both the United States and Africa. It will strengthen the relationship between our Nation and a continent entering a new era of democracy and economic progress. I urge Congress to pass this legislation this year.

Statement on Signing the Wireless Communications and Public Safety Act of 1999

October 26, 1999

Today I am pleased to sign into law the Wireless Communications and Public Safety Act of 1999. By making it easier to use wireless phones to report emergencies, this bill could save thousands of lives every year.

Nearly 100,000 times each day, someone uses a wireless phone to make an emergency call. People with wireless phones can speed the deliv-

ery of public safety services by providing rapid reports of car crashes, incidents of aggressive or drunk driving, serious crimes, and natural disasters. Getting rapid care to someone who is suffering from a heart attack or is involved in a car crash can mean the difference between life and death.

Oct. 26 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999

The legislation I am signing today will improve emergency wireless communications in several ways. First, it will make 9-1-1 the universal emergency telephone number for wireless and “wireline” telephones across the United States. Currently, there are 20 different emergency wireless numbers in different States. Second, it will encourage statewide coordination of the efforts of public safety and law enforcement officials to protect our citizens and save lives. Finally, it will increase private sector investment

in emergency wireless services by providing wireless companies with the same level of liability protection that “wireline” telecommunications companies have.

I want to thank Members of Congress, the wireless industry, public safety officials, and medical professionals who worked together to pass this important legislation.

NOTE: S. 800, approved October 26, was assigned Public Law No. 106-81.

Message to the Congress Transmitting Proposed Legislation To Strengthen Social Security and Medicare

October 26, 1999

To the Congress of the United States:

I transmit herewith for your immediate consideration a legislative proposal entitled the “Strengthen Social Security and Medicare Act of 1999.”

The Social Security system is one of the cornerstones of American national policy and together with the additional protections afforded by the Medicare system, has helped provide retirement security for millions of Americans over the last 60 years. However, the long-term solvency of the Social Security and Medicare trust funds is not guaranteed. The Social Security trust fund is currently expected to become insolvent starting in 2034 as the number of retired workers doubles. The Medicare system also faces significant financial shortfalls, with the Hospital Insurance Trust Fund projected to become exhausted in 2015. We need to take additional steps to strengthen Social Security and Medicare for future generations of Americans.

In addition to preserving Social Security and Medicare, the Congress and the President have a responsibility to future generations to reduce the debt held by the public. Paying down the debt will produce substantial interest savings, and this legislation proposes to devote these entirely to Social Security after 2010. At the same time, by contributing to the growth of the overall economy debt reduction will improve the Government’s ability to fulfill its responsibilities and to face future challenges, including preserving and strengthening Social Security and Medicare.

The enclosed bill would help achieve these goals by devoting the entire Social Security surpluses to debt reduction, extending the solvency of Social Security to 2050, protecting Social Security and Medicare funds in the budget process, reserving one-third of the non-Social Security surplus to strengthen and modernize Medicare, and paying down the debt by 2015. It is clear and straightforward legislation that would strengthen and preserve Social Security and Medicare for our children and grandchildren. The bill would:

- Extend the life of Social Security from 2034 to 2050 by reinvesting the interest savings from the debt reduction resulting from Social Security surpluses.
- Establish a Medicare surplus reserve equal to one-third of any on-budget surplus for the total of the period of fiscal years 2000 through 2009 to strengthen and modernize Medicare.
- Add a further protection for Social Security and Medicare by extending the budget enforcement rules that have provided the foundation for our fiscal discipline, including the discretionary caps and pay-as-you-go budget rules.

I urge the prompt and favorable consideration of this proposal.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
October 26, 1999.