

While I am troubled by a provision requiring the Department of Defense to seek specific authorization for the payment of fines or penalties for environmental violations, I will direct the Department to seek such authorization on any fine or penalty it receives, ensuring full accountability for all such violations.

Furthermore, while the provision in section 8174 of the bill prohibits the Department from contributing funds to the American Heritage Rivers initiative, I will direct the Department, within existing laws and authorities, to continue to support and undertake community-oriented service or environmental projects on rivers I have recognized as part of the initiative.

Finally, the bill provides only about one-quarter of the funding level requested for construction of Forward Operating Locations that would

reestablish regional drug interdiction capabilities in Latin America. This amount will not adequately support our vital drug interdiction efforts in the Western Hemisphere.

I have signed this bill because, on balance, it demonstrates our commitment to the military, meets our obligations to the troops, maintains readiness, and funds modernization efforts that will ensure our technological edge into the 21st century.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
November 4, 1999.

NOTE: H.R. 2561, approved November 4, was assigned Public Law No. 106-79.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on Minimum Wage Legislation *November 4, 1999*

Dear _____:

I am writing this letter to encourage you to pass a straightforward minimum wage bill that gives working Americans the pay raise they deserve. If we value work and family, we should raise the value of the minimum wage.

In 1996, the Congress and I worked together to raise the minimum wage by 90 cents over 2 years. Since then, the American economy has created nearly 9 million new jobs—with more than 1 million of them in the retail sector where many minimum-wage workers are employed. The unemployment rate has fallen from the already low rate of 5.2 percent to 4.2 percent—the lowest in 29 years. We have enjoyed larger real wage increases for more consecutive years than at any time in more than two decades, while inflation is the lowest it has been in more than three decades. The minimum wage increase has contributed to the 39 percent decline in the welfare caseload since the last minimum wage increase—bringing the welfare rolls down to their lowest level in three decades. And the minimum wage increase has been a crucial factor in reversing the wage stagnation and declines of the previous decade, contributing to rising wages for even the lowest income groups. Our recent experience clearly demonstrates that what

is good for America's working families is good for America's economy.

But as our economy continues to break records, we must do more to ensure that all Americans continue to benefit from it. It is time to build on the steps we have taken to honor the dignity of work. The expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit in 1993 and the increase in the minimum wage have ensured that no full-time working parent with two children has to raise his or her family in poverty. It is important that we take steps to achieve this goal in the future. That is why I have proposed to raise the minimum wage by \$1 an hour over the next two years—from \$5.15 to \$6.15. This modest increase would simply restore the real value of the minimum wage to what it was in 1982. More than 11 million workers would benefit under this proposal. A full-time, year-round worker at the minimum wage would get a \$2,000 raise—enough for a typical family of four to buy groceries for 7 months or pay rent for 5 months.

All Americans should share in our historic prosperity. This is why Congress should not let politics get in the way of raising the minimum wage. If you send me a clean bill that increases

the minimum wage by \$1 over the next two years, I will sign it.

Unfortunately, some in Congress have proposed a more gradual increase in the minimum wage that would cost a full-time, year-round worker roughly \$1,500 over three years compared with my proposal. They have added provisions that would repeal important overtime protections for American workers. And they have been playing politics with the minimum wage bill, using it as a vehicle for costly and unnecessary tax cuts that would threaten our fiscal discipline. As I have stated repeatedly, before we consider using projected surpluses to provide for a tax cut, we must put forth things first and address the solvency of Social Security and Medicare. If Congress sends me a bill that threatens our fiscal discipline, I will veto it.

If paid-for tax cuts are attached to the minimum wage bill, they should reflect our priorities and address urgent national needs like deteriorating schools and the communities that have

been left behind during this time of prosperity. In contrast, the bulk of the provisions attached to the minimum wage bill in the House are directed away from working families. Some of these provisions could even *reduce* the retirement benefits enjoyed by millions of working Americans.

America's workers show up to work every day and get the job done. Congress should do the same this year. I urge Congress to pass a minimum wage bill that does not at the same time add poison pills that bypass the priorities of working families.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: Letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives; Richard A. Gephardt, House minority leader; Trent Lott, Senate majority leader; and Thomas A. Daschle, Senate minority leader. An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.

Letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives on Proposed Managed Care Improvement Legislation

November 4, 1999

Dear Mr. Speaker:

I am writing to underscore my deep disappointment with the unusual procedure employed in naming participants to the joint House-Senate conference on H.R. 2723, the Bipartisan Consensus Managed Care Improvement Act of 1999. The decision to appoint members that fail to reflect the overwhelming vote of 275 to 151 on the Norwood-Dingell bill sends the wrong message to the American people, and the wrong messengers to the conference committee.

The Norwood-Dingell Patients' Bill of Rights legislation is the only patient protections bill in this Congress that has received strong bipartisan support. Yet, out of the 13 Republican members appointed as conferees, only one voted for this legislation, and only one voted in favor of yesterday's successful motion in the House that instructed conferees to insist on including the provisions of the Norwood-Dingell bill.

It is clear that the public longs for us to reach across party lines to address issues of national concern. There are few matters that are more important than enacting a strong Patients Bill of Rights. In this regard, I am asking you to use your authority under the House rules to expand the conference committee to include members who accurately reflect the will of the House.

We need to make certain that the results of this conference will be in the public interest; as currently constituted, this committee is weighted heavily in favor of the special interests that oppose this bill. Over the years, we have worked together on drafting and passing bipartisan health care legislation, including the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996. I hope we can build on that record so that this Congress can respond to the public's need for patients' protections as our nation's health care delivery system undergoes change.