

*June 29 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 2000*

will further strengthen our fiscal discipline by locking in \$400 billion of additional debt reduction and help keep our economy strong. The Conrad-Lautenberg amendment passed by the Senate today would truly protect Medicare and enhance our fiscal discipline. This amendment takes Medicare fully off budget, as the Vice President proposed, and as we have done with Social Security. I look forward to working with Congress on a Medicare off-budget lockbox bill that I can sign this summer.

Earlier this week, I made an offer for bipartisan cooperation on America's priorities. I called for establishing a foundation of fiscal discipline—the Conrad-Lautenberg amendment would accomplish that. I urge Congress to pass a plan that gives real, voluntary Medicare prescription drug coverage that is available and affordable for all seniors. Only if Congress does this, would I then be willing to sign broader marriage penalty relief legislation.

## Statement on House of Representatives Action on the Supplemental Appropriations Request

*June 29, 2000*

I am pleased that the House passed with overwhelming support my emergency funding request for a range of essential and time-sensitive needs. It has been 4 months since I first sent this request to Capitol Hill, and the needs are all the greater today.

With this funding, we will be able to support the courageous antidrug efforts of Colombia which can, in turn, help curb the flow of drugs in our Nation; we will help build homes for those still deprived of permanent housing by Hurricane Floyd; we will have funds available for low-income Americans to pay for home cool-

ing in the event of a dangerous summer heat wave; and we will provide support for our troops and efforts to build stability in Kosovo.

I am also pleased that Congress has, at our urging, dropped several deeply problematic anti-environmental riders along with the tobacco rider which would block Federal Government litigation against tobacco companies to recover costs to taxpayers of smoking related illnesses.

While it contains certain flaws, in total this bill will make our Nation safer and more secure by meeting essential and long-overdue needs at home and abroad.

## Message on the Observance of Independence Day, 2000

*June 29, 2000*

I am pleased and proud to join my fellow Americans across the nation and around the world in celebrating Independence Day.

When our Founders set their hands to the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and gave life to the United States of America, they took an enormous leap of faith. They placed a great trust not only in their fellow citizens, but also in all Americans who would follow in their footsteps. That trust has been passed from generation to generation, and it has been honored by millions of men and women whose hard work, sacrifice, generous spirit, and love of country

have seen us safely through more than two centuries of great challenge and change.

As we come together once again to celebrate the birth of our great nation, we reflect on the remarkable achievements that have placed us in a position of unparalleled world leadership. For the peace and prosperity we enjoy today, we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the great patriots who have come before us. As 21st century Americans, we are not only the beneficiaries of their courage and vision—we are also the stewards of their sacrifice.

It is up to us to preserve the freedom that so many brave Americans risked their lives to

secure. It is up to us to realize our country's highest ideals of justice, equality, and human dignity. It is up to us to reject the forces of hatred that would seek to divide us and instead embrace our common humanity and the values, history, and heritage we share as Americans. Our nation's journey to form a more perfect union is far from over; but, strengthened by

our Founders' vision and inspired by our children's dreams, we are sure to reach our destination.

On this Independence Day, as we celebrate the past, present, and future of America, Hillary joins me in sending best wishes to all for a wonderful Fourth of July.

BILL CLINTON

## Letter to Congressional Leaders on Bankruptcy Reform Legislation

*June 29, 2000*

*Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. Leader:)*

I write again because I am deeply concerned about recent developments concerning bankruptcy reform legislation pending before Congress. I understand the House and Senate Republican Leadership has reached a conclusion on a package they will soon move through the Congress. We have not seen the final language, but, if the reported description is accurate, I will veto the bill.

OMB Director Lew sent a letter to the informal conferees, on May 12, 2000, that laid out the principles against which I will judge any final bankruptcy bill that comes to my desk. I would like to sign a balanced consumer bankruptcy bill that would encourage responsibility and reduce abuses of the bankruptcy system on the part of debtors and creditors alike. The majority of debtors turn to the bankruptcy system, not to escape bills they can afford to repay, but because they face real hardship—uninsured medical expenses, unemployment, or divorce. We can target the abuses without placing unnecessary barriers before those in need of a fresh start who turn to bankruptcy as a last resort. I remain concerned about the balance in the bill that the informal conferees have produced.

In addition, in my letter of June 9, 2000, I highlighted five issues that could help to determine whether the final bill meets my standards of balance and fairness. On three of these issues, the Republican resolution is seriously flawed.

First, I cannot support a bankruptcy bill that fails to require accountability and responsibility from those who use violence, vandalism, intimidation, and harassment to deny others access to legal health services. Some have strategically abused the bankruptcy system to avoid the pen-

alties that Congress and the States have imposed for such illegal acts. The language that I understand the Republicans will include on this subject is inadequate. It would require a finding that there was a "willful and malicious threat of serious bodily injury" before certain debts would be made nondischargeable. Often, no such finding is made when holding parties liable for their actions in denying others access to legal health services under Federal or State law. The final legislation must include an effective approach to this problem, such as the one contained in the amendment by Senator Schumer, which passed the Senate by a vote of 80–17.

I am also concerned that the changes proposed to the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act would deny an effective remedy to victims of abusive check collection practices. We have yet to hear a compelling rationale for why check collectors should not be subject to the same requirements as those who collect other debts. Moreover, no committee in either body of Congress has considered this issue, raised for the first time in Conference. At a minimum, the proposal should be subject to full Congressional consideration, so that public scrutiny can be applied to the implications of the proposed changes.

The proposed limitation on State homestead exemptions will address, for the first time, those who move their residence shortly before bankruptcy to take advantage of large State exemptions to shield assets from their creditors. But the proposal does not address a more fundamental concern: unlimited homestead exemptions that allow wealthy debtors in some States to continue to live in lavish homes. In light of how other provisions designed to stem abuse