

leadership of Vice President Gore, we've made great progress bringing Government into the digital age. Instead of waiting in line, citizens can go on-line to file their taxes, compare their Medicare options, and find good jobs. They can tap into the latest health research, change their address at the post office, and follow along with NASA's missions in outer space. And they can do it 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

But with 27 million web pages of Government information now on-line and more added every day, finding the information or service you need can be frustrating. That's why I'm pleased to announce that today we're launching a new, one-stop website for Federal on-line information: [firstgov.gov](http://firstgov.gov). It allows you, for the first time, to link to the Federal Information Service, or service you are looking for, without having to know the name of the agency or the program that offers it.

So, go to [www.firstgov.gov](http://www.firstgov.gov), and you're just a few mouse clicks away from websites where you can apply for student loans or reserve a campground in a national park.

Now, when I first announced in June we would be creating [firstgov.gov](http://firstgov.gov), I promised we would do so in 90 days. That was exactly 90 days ago. I am very proud of the Federal em-

ployees who made this happen in Internet time. And I'm thankful to Dr. Eric Brewer of Inktomi. He's the entrepreneur who, with the help of Federal grants, created one of the private sector's most successful search engine technologies. Out of gratitude and patriotism, he developed and donated the search engine for [firstgov.gov](http://firstgov.gov).

Now this website belongs to the American people. We've included a place for you to suggest improvements, and we're going to keep working on this site and on all of our Government websites. Firstgov symbolizes, I think, the kind of Government we need in the 21st century, one that empowers citizens to make the most of their own lives.

At the dawn of our Republic, Thomas Jefferson said, "America's institutions must move forward hand in hand with the progress of the human mind." Well, today, as the progress of the human mind races ahead, it's vital that we make sure our democratic institutions keep pace. And if we do, we can create a more perfect, more responsive democracy for the information age.

Thanks for logging on.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:10 p.m. from the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

## Statement on Signing the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000

*September 22, 2000*

Today I am pleased to sign into law S. 2869, the "Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000," which will provide important protections for religious exercise in America. This Act will, in certain cases, forbid State and local governments from imposing a substantial burden on the exercise of religion unless they could demonstrate that imposition of such a burden is the least restrictive means of furthering a compelling governmental interest. The Act would protect the exercise of religion in two situations: (1) where State and local governments seek to impose or implement a zoning or landmark law in a manner that imposes a substantial burden on religious exercise and (2) where State and local governments seek to impose a substantial burden on the religious exer-

cise of persons residing or confined to certain institutions.

I applaud the Congress, particularly Senators Kennedy, Hatch, Reid, and Schumer, and Representatives Canady and Nadler for their hard work in passing this legislation. The Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act will provide protection for one of our country's greatest liberties—the exercise of religion—while carefully preserving the civil rights of all Americans. Just as I fully supported the Religious Freedom Restoration Act in 1993, I support Senator Kennedy's and Hatch's bill. Religious liberty is a constitutional value of the highest order, and the Framers of the Constitution

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included protection for the free exercise of religion in the very first Amendment. This Act recognizes the importance the free exercise of religion plays in our democratic society.

I also want to thank the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion and the civil rights community for the central role they played in crafting this legislation. Their work in passing this legislation once again demonstrates that

people of all political bents and faiths can work together for a common purpose that benefits all Americans.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,  
September 22, 2000.

NOTE: S. 2869, approved September 22, was assigned Public Law No. 106-274.

## Statement on the President's Commission on Improving Economic Opportunity in Communities Dependent on Tobacco Production While Protecting Public Health

*September 22, 2000*

Today I am pleased to sign an Executive order establishing a new Commission to improve opportunities for tobacco farmers and their communities while continuing to protect public health. This action builds on the longstanding commitment Vice President Gore and I share to protect our children from the dangers of tobacco use and protect individual tobacco farmers. Tobacco growers, like many other farmers, have confronted difficult economic circumstances these last few years as tobacco companies increasingly turn to foreign tobacco. We have supported several efforts over the years to protect tobacco farmers and to develop new opportunities for these growers and their communities. The Commission, which will make recommendations on ways to continue this work while protecting public health, is an important next step.

This new panel, the President's Commission on Improving Economic Opportunity in Communities Dependent on Tobacco Production

While Protecting Public Health, will be co-chaired by William Martin "Rod" Kuegel, Jr., the president of the Burley Tobacco Growers Cooperative Association, and Matthew Myers, the president of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. Both are leaders in their communities with proven records on bringing grower and health groups together on issues important to both. In 1998 they worked with a coalition of grower, public health, and religious groups to issue a statement of principles outlining their shared commitment to reducing disease caused by tobacco products and ensuring the future prosperity and stability of American tobacco farmers and farming communities. The work of this important new Commission will serve to further demonstrate that the goals of reducing youth smoking and protecting American farmers can be pursued together.

NOTE: The Executive order is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.