

prevent substance abuse and violence, are important investments in the well-being of our Nation. For these reasons, I am pleased to sign H.R. 4365.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,  
October 17, 2000.

NOTE: H.R. 4365, approved October 17, was assigned Public Law No. 106–310.

### Statement on Signing the Microenterprise for Self-Reliance and International Anti-Corruption Act of 2000 *October 17, 2000*

Today I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 1143, the “Microenterprise for Self-Reliance and International Anti-Corruption Act of 2000.” The primary purpose of this legislation is to authorize continued and expanded efforts to provide assistance to the world’s poorest entrepreneurs. The Act is the result of a long process of collaboration and negotiation among Members of Congress, my Administration, and the nonprofit microenterprise community represented by the Microenterprise Coalition. I congratulate all who worked on this bipartisan, public-private effort.

I am proud that my Administration has put microenterprise development and democratizing access to capital on the national and international agenda. When I was Governor of Arkansas, the First Lady and I encouraged and supported some of the first microenterprise programs in the United States. Thanks to the work of pioneering microenterprise development organizations around the world, all of us have come to appreciate the potential of microenterprise as means to empower poor people, especially women, to help themselves and their families.

Microenterprise programs help self-employed entrepreneurs obtain loans for small business enterprises to begin the process of growing out of poverty. Without microenterprise programs administered by the Agency for International Development and many nongovernmental organizations, these poor entrepreneurs abroad would not be able to borrow the small amount of money needed to get their repair shops, sewing shops, or similar businesses, off the ground. This is not a gift to these entrepreneurs, it is a loan. And experience has shown that these small loans are repaid and, in the process, these small-scale enterprises generate income and jobs for poor families.

This Act also represents a breakthrough in recognizing the value of business development services to the very poorest entrepreneurs. To many poor entrepreneurs, basic training and technical assistance in running a business can be as important as a loan.

In addition, H.R. 1143 authorizes a range of programs to promote good governance and democratization overseas. The United States has long encouraged and funded programs that foster an independent media, establish audit offices for executive agencies, and promote judicial reform. This legislation contains authority to provide assistance in furtherance of these programs to countries that would otherwise be prohibited from receiving U.S. assistance. While no direct assistance to the governments of such countries can be provided under this authority, the legislation and its history make clear that assistance to such governments through nongovernmental organizations would be permissible.

The Act also contains the “Support for Overseas Cooperative Development Act,” which expresses support for the development and expansion of U.S. economic assistance programs abroad that fully utilize cooperatives and credit unions. My Administration and the Congress value and support the direct involvement of U.S. cooperative organizations in transferring their knowledge to local cooperatives in countries overseas.

Lastly, I note that H.R. 1143 includes the “International Academic Opportunity Act of 2000,” which authorizes the Department of State to establish a grant program, to be called the “Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarships.” These scholarships will enable American undergraduate students of limited financial

means to study abroad, and better prepare them to compete in an increasingly global economy.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,

October 17, 2000.

NOTE: H.R. 1143, approved October 17, was assigned Public Law No. 106–309.

## Statement on Signing the American Competitiveness in the Twenty-First Century Act and Non-Immigrant Worker Fee Legislation

*October 17, 2000*

I am pleased today to sign into law S. 2045, the “American Competitiveness in the Twenty-First Century Act,” and H.R. 5362, an Act to increase the fees charged to employers who petition to employ H-1B non-immigrant workers. Together, these laws increase the number of H-1B visas available to bring in highly skilled foreign temporary workers and double the fee charged to employers using the program to provide critical funding for training U.S. workers and students. The Acts recognize the importance of allowing additional skilled workers into the United States to work in the short-run, while supporting longer-term efforts to prepare American workers for the jobs of the new economy.

At the core of my economic strategy has been the belief that fiscal discipline and freeing up capital for private sector investment must be accompanied by a commitment to invest in human capital. The growing demand for workers with high-tech skills is a dramatic illustration of the need to “put people first” and increase our investments in education and training. Today, many companies are reporting that their number one constraint on growth is the inability to hire workers with the necessary skills. In today’s knowledge-based economy, what you earn depends on what you learn. Jobs in the information technology sector, for example, pay 85 percent more than the private sector average.

My Administration has made clear that any increase in H-1B visas should be temporary and limited in number, that the fee charged to employers using the program should be increased significantly, and that the majority of the funds generated by the fee must go to the Department of Labor to fund training for U.S. workers seeking the necessary skills for these jobs. This legislation does those things. But the need to edu-

cate and train workers for these high-skilled jobs goes beyond what has been addressed here.

I want to challenge the high-tech companies to redouble their efforts to find long-term solutions to the rapidly growing demand for workers with technical skills. This will require doing more to improve K–12 science and math education, upgrading the skills of our existing workforce, and recruiting from underrepresented groups such as older workers, minorities, women, persons with disabilities, and residents of rural areas. Many companies have important initiatives in these areas, but we clearly need to be doing more.

This legislation contains a number of provisions that merit concern. For example, one provision allows an H-1B visa holder to work for an employer who has not yet been approved for participation in the H-1B program. In addition, there are provisions that could have the unintended consequence of allowing an H-1B visa holder who is applying for a permanent visa to remain in H-1B status well beyond the current 6-year limit. I am concerned that these provisions could weaken existing protections that ensure that the H-1B program does not undercut the wages and working conditions of U.S. workers, and could also increase the vulnerability of H-1B workers to any unscrupulous employers using the program. For example, one of the key requirements of the H-1B program is that the foreign worker is paid the same wage as U.S. workers doing the same job. This legislation, however, by allowing H-1B workers to change employers before a new employer’s application has been approved, could result in an employer—knowingly or unknowingly—not paying the prevailing wage. For these reasons, I am directing the Immigration and Naturalization Service, in consultation with the Department of