

Oct. 26 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 2000

are realizing the dream of owning their own home. Higher homeownership rates help build stronger families, create more stable communities, and raise living standards for all Americans.

Vice President Gore and I came to office committed to a strategy to make it easier for American families to buy their own homes. By providing record levels of homeownership loan assistance, increasing the availability of afford-

able housing, providing incentives to save for a home purchase, and maintaining our commitment to fiscal discipline that has kept interest rates low, we have worked to ensure that every family has the opportunity to own their own home. I would like to particularly thank Vice President Gore and Secretary Cuomo for their excellent leadership in working with families, especially in low-income and empowerment communities, to help make homeownership a reality.

Statement on Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act *October 26, 2000*

Older Americans all across the country have reason to cheer today. After more than 5 years of congressional inaction, the Senate voted to approve legislation to reauthorize the Older Americans Act. I look forward to signing this measure of vital importance to our Nation's older Americans.

The Older Americans Act ensures that seniors in every State have access to meals, nursing home ombudsmen, legal assistance, elder abuse prevention, employment and transportation services that are essential to their dignity and independence. Enactment of the Older Americans Act Amendments of 2000 will strengthen and improve these services.

I am especially pleased that the final legislation includes the National Family Caregiver Support Program—a key administration priority designed to provide respite care and other supportive services to help hundreds of thousands of families who are struggling to care for their older loved ones who are ill or disabled.

I applaud the bipartisan leadership in the U.S. Senate for its outstanding efforts to approve the Older Americans Act Amendments of 2000. Finally, and most important, I want to pay special tribute to the aging community for its tireless commitment to the needs of older Americans.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting a Report on Counterdrug Assistance to Colombia and Neighboring Countries *October 26, 2000*

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I hereby report, in accordance with section 3202 of the Military Construction Appropriations Act, 2001, on current U.S. policy and strategy for counterdrug assistance to Colombia and neighboring countries. The enclosed report sets forth the rationale for expanded support to Colombia and neighboring countries and highlights the comprehensive initiatives now underway in the Andean region in support of the National Drug Control Strategy.

Colombia's success in combating the threat of drugs is profoundly in the interest of the

United States. A peaceful, democratic, and economically prosperous Colombia will result in a significant reduction of the supply of illicit drugs and help promote democracy and stability throughout the hemisphere. I am proud of the bipartisan effort that has made our Colombian initiative possible.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: Letters were sent to Jesse Helms, chairman, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations;

Ted Stevens, chairman, Senate Committee on Appropriations; Benjamin A. Gilman, chairman, House Committee on International Relations; and

C.W. Bill Young, chairman, House Committee on Appropriations. An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on Bipartisan Tax Cut Legislation

October 26, 2000

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

Thank you for your letter yesterday responding to my proposed consensus tax package. As I said yesterday, I believe we all have a responsibility to make every possible effort to come together on a bipartisan agreement on tax relief and Medicare/Medicaid that will maintain fiscal discipline and serve the interests of all the American people. That is why I put forward a good faith offer yesterday that sought to reflect our differing priorities in a balanced manner. I was disappointed, however, that, without any consultation with me or Congressional Democrats, you chose to put forward a partisan legislative package that ignores our key concerns on school construction, health care, and pensions policy. If this current tax and Medicare/Medicaid package is presented to me, I will have no choice but to veto it.

While we have already reached substantial agreement in important areas, such as replacement of the Foreign Sales Corporations regime, your legislation has substantial flaws in several key areas.

As I stated yesterday, I believe it is absolutely essential that we do as much as possible to meet America's need for safe and modern schools. It is estimated that there may be as much as a \$125 billion dollar financing gap in meeting the school construction and modernization needs of our children. The bipartisan Rangel-Johnson proposal to finance \$25 billion in bonds to construct and modernize 6,000 schools is, quite frankly, the very least we should do, given the magnitude of this problem and its importance to America's future. Unfortunately, your proposal falls far short of the mark. We should not sacrifice thousands of modernized schools to pay for inefficient tax incentives that help only a few. For example, the arbitrage provision encourages delay in urgently needed school construction and would disproportionately help wealthy school districts.

On health care, my offer sought to lay a path to common ground by coupling both of our priorities on health and long-term care. Unfortunately, your health care proposal completely ignores our proposal to cover millions of uninsured, working Americans. Instead you put forward a series of tax cuts that, particularly when standing alone, would be inequitable, inefficient, and even potentially counterproductive health care policy. For example, while our FamilyCare proposal would expand coverage to 4 million uninsured parents at a cost of slightly over \$3,000 per person, your proposal would provide additional coverage to one-seventh the people at six times the cost per person. Moreover, your proposal would give the least assistance to moderate-income families that need help the most, while even raising concerns that those with employer-based coverage today could lose their insurance.

Similarly, on long-term care, I offered to embrace your proposed deduction for long-term care insurance in exchange for inclusion of my proposal to give families, who are burdened today by long-term care needs, a \$3,000 tax credit. Unfortunately, your legislation ignores the bipartisan package I suggested and instead would provide half the benefits of my proposal for financially pressed families trying to provide long-term care for elderly and sick family members. Surely we can agree on this bipartisan compromise that has already been endorsed by a broad array of members of Congress, advocates for seniors and people with disabilities, and insurers. Similarly, I am perplexed that we cannot agree to include the bipartisan credit for vaccine research and purchases that is essential to save lives and advance public health.

I also am disappointed that you have made virtually no attempt to address the concerns my Administration has expressed to you about the pension provisions of your bill. By dropping the progressive savings incentives from the Senate