

And so, ladies and gentlemen, let me say again, I thank all of you who are responsible for this legislation. I thank all the hard-working Americans, the business leaders, the labor leaders, the working people of this country. I thank our economic team and others who have worked to construct an economic direction for America that will permit us to grow together. This is a good day for our country.

If we keep our economy strong, if we educate our young people, if we protect our environment, and if we fulfill our responsibilities to one another, then we will build that bridge to the 21st century I've been talking about, and our best days are still ahead. No one who heard what was said today and saw these families and looked at these Members of Congress standing together and working together for America's benefit could be anything but optimistic about that future.

It is now my honor to sign this legislation. And I'd like to ask the Members and the families who are here to join us up here on the platform so we can sign the bill.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:25 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. H.R. 3666, approved September 26, was assigned Public Law No. 104-204.

Statement on Signing the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act, 1997

September 26, 1996

Today I have signed into law H.R. 3666, the "Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act, FY 1997."

The Act provides funding for the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the National Science Foundation, and several other agencies. This Act will fund vital environmental, veterans, housing, community development, science, and space programs.

I am pleased that the Congress has responded to my call to include three bipartisan provisions aimed at eliminating a range of health care crises that thousands of Americans face every year. These include: a mental health parity provision that prohibits health plans from establishing separate lifetime and annual limits for mental health; the Newborns' and Mothers' Health Protection Act of 1996 that requires health insurers to let all new mothers and their babies stay in the hospital for at least 48 hours following normal deliveries; and my proposal to assist the children of Vietnam veterans who are born with the birth defect, spina bifida.

The Act provides funding for a number of my high-priority investment proposals, including the Corporation for National and Community Service and the Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) fund. The National Service initiative gives young people an opportunity to obtain funding for a college education while serving the country in areas of great need, such as education, environment, public safety, and human services. If Congress had provided my request, an additional 6,000 young Americans would have had the opportunity to help their community through AmeriCorps. Funding for CDFI will increase the flow of capital to distressed neighborhoods and their currently underserved, low-income residents, and provide financing for neighborhood re-development and revitalization efforts.

The Act provides \$6.7 billion for the EPA, or 4.5 percent less than my request and will enable the EPA to adequately enforce our environmental laws and provide for the continued cleanup of hazardous waste sites.

I am, however, concerned about the levels provided for EPA's important implementation of the recently enacted safe drinking water and food quality legislation, continued progress on the U.S. global climate change Action Plan, Montreal Protocol efforts to prevent ozone layer depletion, and Boston Harbor clean-up. I will continue to press the Congress to provide more adequate funding levels for these and other important priorities as my Administration negotiates with the Congress over an omnibus appropriations bill to resolve remaining fiscal 1997 funding issues.

The Act extends several expiring provisions of last year's bill that are critical to HUD's ability to continue its activities, including demolishing and replacing the worst public housing, supporting movement from dependency to work, and streamlining low-income housing assistance and FHA mortgage insurance programs. The bill also provides the tools necessary to reduce the costs of section 8 renewals for FHA-insured properties, and fully funds my request for the Housing Opportunities for Persons With Aids program.

I am pleased that the bill continues to support States and cities through HUD's key economic development programs—Community Development Block Grants, and the Home Investment Partnerships program. Funding provided for the Youthbuild program will help at-risk youth learn valuable skills, that will enable them to gain employment and break the cycle of poverty. The bill also provides needed capital and operating funds to support the sound operation of over one million public housing apartments.

The Act fully funds my request for the medical care of this Nation's veterans and includes incremental funding for a VA hospital at Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield, California. I am, however, disappointed that the bill does not provide necessary funding for an additional hospital in Brevard County, Florida.

The bill fully funds the Space Station program, and includes needed buyout authority for NASA as it moves to restructure itself for the future.

I am concerned, however, that the bill does not provide funding for NASA's or EPA's contribution to the innovative GLOBE program. This unwarranted change of direction will adversely impact thousands of teachers and students in 2,000 U.S. schools and in 35 other countries who have invested their resources, time, and energy in this valuable program. I plan to press the Congress to include funding for GLOBE in the omnibus 1997 funding bill that my Administration is negotiating with the Congress.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
September 26, 1996

NOTE: H.R. 3666, approved September 26, was assigned Public Law No. 104-204.

Remarks on Departure for Capitol Hill and an Exchange With Reporters *September 26, 1996*

Situation in the Middle East

The President. Good afternoon. I'd like to say a few words about the situation in the Middle East. I deeply regret the injuries and the loss of life we've seen in the West Bank and Gaza in the last few days. It points to the urgency for both sides not only to end the violence but to take positive steps to resolve the issues that divide them.

Over the past 24 hours we have been in constant touch with the Israelis and the Palestinians. Our message to them is this: It is in everyone's interest to resolve their differences peacefully, to work together on security, and to avoid any actions that could make progress on the peace between Israelis and Palestinians more difficult.

The events of the past 2 days stand out precisely because we have made so much progress toward peace in these past few years. Violence was becoming the exception, not the rule. The overwhelming majority of Israelis and Palestinians want peace, and they have been doing the hard work to build it.

So again, let me say: I ask both sides to end this violence, to get back to the business of peace, to implement the agreements they've reached, to resolve their differences through negotiations.

Q. Mr. President, are the Israelis wrong to open this tunnel? It seems like to some people it may have been really a provocation.

The President. Let me say, I have said repeatedly, and I would like to just repeat what I have said consistently: I think that all the parties should avoid any actions which are likely to undermine the progress of the peace. And now, the important thing is to end the violence and to get back to implementing those peace agreements.

Wolf? [Wolf Blitzer, Cable News Network]

Q. Do you think, Mr. President, the Israelis should seal up that tunnel since that seems to have started this chain of events?