

real problem, and how will it play out irrespective of Janet Reno's decision?

The President. Well, after the decision is over, when she makes a decision, whatever the decision is, I would expect that things will return to normal because we'll go back to work. I just want everybody to go back to work here. We've got serious law enforcement challenges both beyond our borders and within our country. And the most important thing is that everybody does the people's work up there, that we get back to the business of protecting the American people and dealing with those challenges.

And I think that that's what we're expected to do, that's what we got hired to do, and we shouldn't let anything interfere with that. And I don't intend to let anything interfere with my efforts there. But I thought it was appropriate to limit any personal contacts I had during this period of time because I didn't even want the appearance to be out there that there would be any attempt to influence a decision. I don't think that's right. This is a legal decision; it ought to be made on the facts.

And a lot of the political rhetoric that's been in the press in the last several months I think is entirely inappropriate because there is a legal—there's a statute here, and we cannot get in the position in this country of basically bringing politics to bear on every legal decision that has to be made. That's not the right way to do this.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:50 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Kayce Steger, Jessica James, and Nicole Hadley, high school students killed when a classmate opened fire following a prayer meeting in West Paducah, KY.

Statement on Signing the Amtrak Reform and Accountability Act of 1997

December 2, 1997

Today I am pleased to sign into law S. 738, the "Amtrak Reform and Accountability Act of 1997." This Act represents the first Amtrak reauthorization since 1992 and the most comprehensive restructuring of Amtrak since

the early 1980s. Amtrak is a significant component of our national transportation services in densely populated corridors, such as the northeast; on medium- and short-haul routes; and on transcontinental routes linking cities across the Nation. In many areas of rural America it is the only alternative to the automobile. With the enactment of this legislation, we have the opportunity to set Amtrak on a course to continue these services into the 21st Century.

Amtrak has entered a critical stage in its existence. Over the past several years, Amtrak has restructured its operations and streamlined its approach to inter-city rail passenger service. It has improved its organization and created separate strategic business units that are better able to respond to customer needs. It has also significantly reduced its need for Federal operating subsidies. Today, Amtrak recovers a higher percentage of its operating costs from fares—85.1 percent—than any other passenger or commuter railroad in America, and higher than the rail systems in France and Germany. This Act will allow Amtrak to build upon this progress.

With this Act, Amtrak will now be able to access the \$2.3 billion capital account created in the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997. With these funds, Amtrak will be able to make many needed capital improvements, including replacing its aging car fleet, upgrading its tracks, and rehabilitating stations and maintenance facilities nationwide. With these improvements in place, Amtrak will be able to attract new customers and better serve existing customers. The implementation of new high-speed operations in the northeast corridor between Boston and Washington is a key part of this greatly improved service.

This Act will also free Amtrak to operate in a more businesslike manner by repealing a number of outdated requirements that hampered its ability to operate more like a private entrepreneurial corporation. In particular, S. 738 frees Amtrak to adjust its route structure to meet demand and to respond to competition rather than to congressional directive.

The Act also addresses certain labor relations issues by directing that these issues be negotiated by Amtrak and its unions through

collective bargaining, rather than by statute. In this respect, it carries forward the spirit of the reform-oriented labor agreement recently agreed to by Amtrak and one of its unions.

This Act calls for the creation of an Amtrak Reform Council that will bring together individuals with expertise in the fields of corporate management, finance, rail and other transportation operations, labor, economics, and law to assist Amtrak in identifying how to operate more efficiently and effectively.

As a result of these changes, we can all look forward to better rail service. I recognize that this Act represents a compromise of a number of competing concerns and competing visions for Amtrak and its future. I want to compliment the Senators and Representatives who devoted many hours to developing this needed legislation. I also want to commend the many individuals in the Department of Transportation and other Federal agencies who contributed to the development of this Act.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
December 2, 1997.

NOTE: S. 738, approved December 2, was assigned Public Law No. 105-134.

Statement on the Attorney General's Decision Not To Call for an Independent Counsel

December 2, 1997

The Attorney General made her decision based on a careful review of the law and the facts, and that's as it should be.

Memorandum on Burma

December 2, 1997

Presidential Determination No. 98-6

Memorandum for the Secretary of State

Subject: Report to Congress Regarding Conditions in Burma and U.S. Policy Toward Burma

Pursuant to the requirements set forth under the heading "Policy Toward Burma"

in section 570(d) of the FY 1997 Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, as contained in the Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act (Public Law 104-208), a report is required every 6 months following enactment concerning:

- 1) progress toward democratization in Burma;
- 2) progress on improving the quality of life of the Burmese people, including progress on market reforms, living standards, labor standards, use of forced labor in the tourism industry, and environmental quality; and
- 3) progress made in developing a comprehensive, multilateral strategy to bring democracy to and improve human rights practices and the quality of life in Burma, including the development of a dialogue between the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and democratic opposition groups in Burma.

You are hereby authorized and directed to transmit the attached report fulfilling this requirement to the appropriate committees of the Congress and to arrange for publication of this memorandum in the *Federal Register*.

William J. Clinton

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting the Line Item Veto of the Departments of Commerce, Justice, and State, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1998

December 2, 1997

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

In accordance with the Line Item Veto Act, I hereby cancel the dollar amount of discretionary budget authority, as specified in the attached report, contained in the "Departments of Commerce, Justice, and State, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1998" (H.R. 2267). I have determined that the cancellation of this amount will reduce the Federal budget deficit, will not impair any essential Government functions, and will not harm the national interest. This letter, together with its attachment, constitutes a special message under section 1022 of the