

Statement on Signing the Volunteer Protection Act of 1997

June 19, 1997

I have signed into law S. 543, the "Volunteer Protection Act of 1997," which will provide volunteers working for nonprofit and governmental entities certain protections from civil liability. Through citizen service, Americans recognize that we are responsible for one another and that we are members of a true community. All levels of government should encourage citizens to volunteer for service. This bill is a small part of what the Federal Government is doing to help our citizens serve as volunteers.

This legislation is a limited and targeted bill that deals with the specific concerns of individuals serving our communities without compensation. It preserves for the States, the traditional source of tort law, not only the ability to opt out of the bill's provisions in most cases, but also the right to require proper licensing and evidence of financial responsibility. It is important to note that none of the bill's limitations on liability will apply to misconduct that constitutes a crime of violence, an act of international terrorism, or a hate crime, or to misconduct that involves intoxication, drug use, a sexual offense, or the violation of any State or Federal civil rights laws. The bill does not apply to actions on behalf of any organization that

engages in hate crimes. Also, S. 543 does not interfere with State law regarding the liability of volunteer organizations.

I remain concerned, however, that S. 543 contains both an absolute prohibition on joint and several liability of volunteers for noneconomic damages and elements of one-way preemption of State law. These are both modifications of tort law that make it harder for innocent injured parties to recover. I emphasize that my signing this specialized and limited bill, which is designed to promote individual citizen service, in no way mitigates the concern about these issues that I raised in my veto message on the product liability bill presented to me last year (H.R. 956, 104th Congress).

On balance, however, S. 543 will encourage volunteer citizen service without unduly affecting the rights of citizens who benefit from such service. I am pleased to have signed the bill.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
June 19, 1997.

NOTE: S. 543, approved June 18, was assigned Public Law No. 105-19.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With President Boris Yeltsin of Russia in Denver

June 20, 1997

President Yeltsin. Thank you for your hospitality, for the wonderful hotel and accommodations.

Russian Support for U.N. Resolution on Iraq

Q. President Yeltsin, if we may, we understand the United States and Britain are looking for help on a resolution on Iraq with the United Nations that's being discussed. Is Russia at least willing to promise not to veto the resolution?

President Yeltsin. I'm prepared to block my answer to your question. [Laughter]

Russian Role in Group of Eight

Q. Mr. President, will the United States support expansion of the G-7 to a G-8 to include Russia?

President Clinton. Well, Russia is fully included. This is the first time we've ever had a meeting where the Russians were here from the beginning to the end. And we also have another happy development today: When we were in Helsinki I pledged to President Yeltsin that I would do my best to see Russia be admitted into the Paris Club within the year, and Russia and the Paris Club have just completed

their negotiations, which means that now Russia will be a partner with the other members in trying to help promote the global economic growth by relieving the burden of the debt on developing countries that—[inaudible]—so what you see here is a sweeping—[inaudible]—Russia—[inaudible]—networks in the world in a way that is very positive for the rest of us.

And I must say, in the last 5 years, as Russian participation has steadily increased here, we have seen the agenda of this group broaden dramatically, and because Russia is a partner, we can talk about, for example, what we can do together to prevent the inappropriate spread of nuclear materials, and we can work together on a whole range of other options.

So I'm very positive about this and very pleased with this summit and pleased with the emergence of Russia as a leader in all these world institutions. It's a great tribute I think to President Yeltsin's leadership and to the commitment of the Russian people to democracy and reform.

Proposed Tobacco Agreement

Q. Mr. President, is there a tobacco settlement? Are you happy with it?

President Clinton. I don't believe it's been announced yet. I don't know that a settlement has been reached.

Q. But you've been briefed, sir?

President Clinton. Well, I've been generally briefed that they're approaching a settlement. But if a settlement, in fact, is announced today, then I'll make a statement about it. Until there is I don't want to make a statement.

Q. Would you intervene if there's a problem over regulation? What is your feelings—

President Clinton. Let's wait and see if they reach an agreement. If there is an agreement, I'll make a statement. I don't know that there is one.

[At this point, one group of reporters left the room, and another group entered. When the sec-

ond group of reporters had gathered, a question was asked and answered in Russian, and a translation was not provided.]

Russian Role in Group of Eight

President Clinton. Let me say that until you asked that question, no one had ever suggested to me that there would ever be a time when Russia would not be a full partner in this Group of Eight.

Let me just remind you that over the last few years, as the participation of Russia in this group has grown to this moment, when for the first time we are here together from beginning to end and participating in only one press conference together and speaking with one voice—and as I'm sure you probably know, Russia has reached an agreement to join the Paris Club—it has enabled this body to go from a purely economic focus to deal with the common challenges that we have in the world we're about to enter and the one we face today.

For example, the work we're doing in nuclear cooperation would be impossible if Russia were not our partner here. And there are many other things that we're going to do together. So I think that this is a cause for celebration not only in Russia but in the other countries here.

Let me just say one final thing. I consider this day and all these things that are happening that are positive a tribute, first of all, to the support of the Russian people for democracy and reform and, second, to the unusual combination of vision and persistence that President Yeltsin has displayed over so many years. It's quite a hopeful moment for the world, I think, and I give him a lot of credit.

Thank you.

NOTE: The exchange spoke at 1:03 p.m. at the Brown Palace Hotel. President Yeltsin spoke in Russian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks Prior to Discussions With President Jacques Chirac of France and an Exchange With Reporters in Denver June 20, 1997

Proposed Tobacco Agreement

President Clinton. Let me say, first of all, I'm delighted to see President Chirac again, and I want to compliment him again on his leadership in Paris recently when we signed the NATO-Russia Founding Act. I have asked for his indulgence so that I can make a brief statement about the settlement which was announced in the tobacco case.

You all remember that it was, I think, a little less than a year ago that the Food and Drug Administration announced its proposed rule to restrain the marketing, access, and sales of tobacco to children in the United States. The jurisdiction of the FDA subsequently was upheld in court, and I believe that it was those developments which gave rise to the willingness of tobacco companies to engage in talks with the States and the other parties.

They have now reached a proposed settlement. And the first thing I'd like to do is to compliment the attorneys general and the others who were involved in the suit for their work to advance the cause of protecting the public health and protecting our children. Now what we have to do is to subject this proposed agreement to strict scrutiny.

I have asked my Domestic Policy Adviser, Bruce Reed, and Secretary Shalala to head up an administration team to review this agreement very, very carefully. And they will do that in a matter of weeks, not months. But I want them to take an adequate amount of time.

And I want to assure you that my standard will be what it always has been: We must judge this agreement based on whether it advances the public health and will reduce the number of children who are smoking cigarettes. And we will look at it from that point of view. But I do want to congratulate the parties for reaching this agreement, and I'm looking forward to looking into it.

Q. What's your first take on it, Mr. President? Does it look pretty good, or are there certain areas that you have reservations—[*inaudible*]?

President Clinton. Well, what—the money—of course, it's an enormous amount of money. And apparently, quite a bit was added just in

the last few days. I don't know much more about it than that. I would say this—what I want to look at is two things, principally, from the—[*inaudible*]—point of view: What is the scope of the FDA's jurisdiction? What is the capacity of the FDA, for example, to deal with nicotine levels in cigarettes, things of that kind? And then the second issue is, how is this money going to be paid in and spent over this period of time? What is the spending? Will it really advance the public health?

And of course, then there's some other non-financial issues: What are the nature of the warnings that they've agreed to? I've heard a little about that. But I have had no opportunity to really even see a summary of this agreement. So the number one thing for us would be the scope and nature of the FDA jurisdiction and then how will the money be spent? Will it really advance the public health?

Thank you.

Romania and NATO Expansion

Q. President Chirac, what is your position, and will you be talking to President Clinton about Romania's membership in NATO? Would you prefer Romania to be allowed into NATO right now?

President Chirac. I think it's in the interest of the world and in the interest of Romania to be part of the first set of countries admitted into expanded NATO, and I will certainly be presenting this viewpoint, which I think is fair and normal.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, you evidently got a bad report from President Mubarak on Mideast peacemaking. Are you bringing some urgent message to the President that the U.S. should redouble its efforts? Are you unhappy with the slow state of play?

President Chirac. This is a subject that I will be discussing with President Clinton. I am, in fact, worried about the situation in the Middle East.

[*At this point, one group of reporters left the room, and another group entered.*]