

Nov. 1 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 2000

The White House,
November 1, 2000.

NOTE: S. 1707, approved November 1, was assigned Public Law No. 106-422.

Statement on Signing the National Transportation Safety Board Amendments Act of 2000

November 1, 2000

Today I am pleased to sign into law S. 2412, the “National Transportation Safety Board Amendments Act of 2000.” The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent agency charged with determining the probable cause of transportation accidents and promoting transportation safety. This Act will enhance transportation safety by authorizing appropriations for the NTSB to investigate accidents, conduct safety studies, evaluate the effectiveness of other transportation accident prevention programs, and coordinate Federal assistance for families of victims of catastrophic transportation accidents.

The Act will further advance transportation safety by prohibiting the disclosure of information from cockpit video recorders, or information from recorders installed on other modes of transportation. It also provides the NTSB with additional tools to carry out its mission, including strengthening the Board’s financial management and authorizing the NTSB to enter into agreements with foreign governments to provide technical assistance and accident investigative services. It is my understanding that, prior to entering into agreements with foreign governments, the NTSB will consult with me to avoid any interference with my sole constitutional authority to conduct diplomatic negotia-

tions; and that this provision in no way derogates from the Case-Zablocki Act (Title 1, Section 112b U.S.C.), which requires prior consultation with the Secretary of State.

The Act also includes a provision which authorizes the NTSB to establish an overtime pay schedule which is distinct from the rest of the Government. I am disappointed that the Congress has chosen not to address overtime reform in a comprehensive manner, as proposed by my Administration, to reform overtime pay for all employees who work long hours in response to emergency situations. We hope to continue to work with the Congress to provide a fair and equitable overtime pay structure for all such Federal employees. In the meantime, the NTSB should develop plans to implement the overtime pay provision in consultation with the Office of Personnel Management, and the NTSB should absorb the costs of implementing this provision within its appropriated levels.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
November 1, 2000.

NOTE: S. 2412, approved November 1, was assigned Public Law No. 106-424.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on Certification of Major Illicit Drug Producing and Transit Countries

November 1, 2000

Dear _____:

In accordance with the provisions of section 490(h) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended (the “Foreign Assistance Act”), I have determined that the following are major illicit drug producing or major drug-transit coun-

tries: Afghanistan, The Bahamas, Bolivia, Brazil, Burma, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Jamaica, Laos, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Thailand, Venezuela, and Vietnam. This year I have removed Hong Kong

and Taiwan from the list of major illicit drug producing or major drug-transit countries (the "Majors List").

The Majors List, as required by section 490(h) of the Foreign Assistance Act, applies to "countries." The term "countries" is interpreted broadly to include certain entities that exercise autonomy over actions or omissions that would lead to a decision to place them on the list and subsequently to determine eligibility or certification. Therefore, in the past, the Majors List has included certain entities that are not sovereign states.

I wish to make clear that a country's presence on the list of major drug-transit countries is not necessarily an adverse reflection on its counterdrug efforts or on the level of its cooperation with the United States. Among the reasons that major drug-transit countries are placed on the list is the combination of geographical, commercial, and economic factors that allow drugs to transit through a country, in many cases despite the most assiduous enforcement measures.

I also wish to note my concern over the rising imports of foreign-origin, illegal synthetic drugs into the United States, especially MDMA ("Ecstasy") from Europe. We are still collecting information on this problem, and it is a trend that bears watching closely in future years.

Changes to the List

Removal of Hong Kong. Hong Kong has been considered a major drug-transit country since 1987, when the first Majors List was prepared. Its proximity to the Golden Triangle opium cultivation countries of Thailand, Laos, and Burma, along with its highly developed air and sea transport infrastructure, made it a logical transit point for trafficking organizations moving Southeast Asian heroin to the United States and other countries in the Western Hemisphere.

Over the past few years, however, Hong Kong's role as a transit point for U.S.-bound drugs has declined markedly, due to several factors. Stringent enforcement measures and extradition agreements with various countries, including the United States, and the risk of having narcotics shipments seized, have become effective deterrents to shipping drugs through Hong Kong. At the same time, drug flows from China through Hong Kong have diminished significantly. As China continues to develop its coastal cargo-handling facilities and expands port oper-

ations in the south, there is less incentive for drug traffickers to re-export and transship cargo through Hong Kong.

Seizure rates in both the United States and Hong Kong suggest that trafficking organizations are no longer using Hong Kong as a transit point for U.S.-destined heroin. Since 1996, there have been no significant seizures in the United States of heroin linked with Hong Kong. Similarly, the Hong Kong authorities report that in the past two years they have made no large seizures locally of heroin destined for the United States. Consequently, I am removing Hong Kong from the Majors List and downgrading it to a country of concern. If in the future there is evidence of drug flows through Hong Kong that significantly affect the United States, Hong Kong will again be placed on the Majors List.

Removal of Taiwan. In the early 1990s, Taiwan became a transit point for Asian drug trafficking organizations moving heroin to the Western Hemisphere. The largest U.S. heroin seizure on record is the nearly half-ton of heroin that U.S. authorities discovered in Hayward, California in 1991. The drugs, which originated in China, had transited Taiwan en route to the United States. Given Taiwan's role in that transshipment and evidence of Taiwan-related drug flows to the United States at that time, I added Taiwan to the Majors List in 1995.

Taiwan's role as transit point for drugs destined for the United States, however, has changed radically in the past few years. More stringent law enforcement procedures, together with improved customs inspection and surveillance methods, have all but cut off serious flows of heroin from Taiwan to the United States. At the same time, the opening of major container ports in southern China has diminished Taiwan's importance for the drug trade.

Since Taiwan was designated a major drug-transit country, there have been no seizures in the United States of heroin that transited Taiwan, nor have Taiwan authorities identified any important drug shipments destined for the United States. Therefore, I am removing Taiwan from the Majors List and downgrading it to a country of concern. If in the future we detect any drug flows through Taiwan that significantly affect the United States, Taiwan will again be placed on the Majors List.

Countries/Entities and Regions of Concern

In addition to Hong Kong and Taiwan, the following are countries or regions of concern:

Belize. Belize was removed from the list of major drug-transit countries in 1999 because there was clear evidence that the drug trade was not currently using it as a transit point for drugs moving to the United States. If, at a future date, there is reliable information that U.S.-bound drugs are again moving through Belize in significant quantities, it will again be placed on the Majors List.

Central America. Central America's position as a land bridge between South America and Mexico, together with its thousands of miles of coastline, several container-handling ports, the Pan-American Highway, and limited law enforcement capability make the entire region a natural conduit and transshipment area for illicit drugs bound for Mexico and the United States. Currently, only Guatemala and Panama have been designated major drug-transit countries, since there is clear evidence that drug trafficking organizations use their territory to move significant quantities of illegal drugs to the United States. The same is not yet true of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, or Nicaragua.

Although there is no question that varying quantities of drugs do flow through these countries en route to the United States, the bulk of the traffic has shifted away from land routes. Stringent law enforcement and interdiction measures on land have forced trafficking organizations to move drugs along sea routes. In the event that there is evidence that drugs transiting these countries are having a significant effect on the United States, they will be added to the Majors List.

Iran. While Iran was once a traditional opium-producing country, the Government of Iran appears to have been successful in eradicating significant illicit opium poppy cultivation. The latest U.S. survey of the country revealed no detectable poppy cultivation in the traditional growing areas. Although one cannot rule out some cultivation in remote parts of the country, it is unlikely that it would be sufficient to meet the threshold definition of a major illicit drug producing country under section 481(e)(2) of the Foreign Assistance Act.

Important quantities of opiates reportedly continue to transit Iran en route to Europe, but I have no evidence that these drugs signifi-

cantly affect the United States, a requirement for designation as a major drug-transit country under section 481(e)(5) of the Foreign Assistance Act. Moreover, Iran has taken extensive measures to thwart the use of its territory by drug traffickers, seizing well above 200 metric tons of drugs annually in recent years.

Malaysia. Malaysia was removed from the Majors List two years ago because there was no evidence that drugs transiting the country were reaching the United States in significant quantities. That situation has not changed since that time.

Eastern Caribbean. The Leeward and Windward Islands, together with Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles, constitute a broad geographical area through which U.S.-bound drugs pass en route from Latin America. In the right circumstances, any country in the region could become a major drug-transit country. There is no evidence at this time, however, that any of these Eastern Caribbean nations is a major drug-transit country under the definition in section 481(e)(5) of the Foreign Assistance Act. The information available, however, indicates that drugs moving through the area are overwhelmingly destined for Europe. We are, therefore, keeping the region under observation. Relevant countries will be added to the Majors List, should conditions warrant.

Turkey and Other Balkan Route Countries. I am concerned by the large volume of Southwest Asian heroin that moves through Turkey and neighboring countries to Western Europe along the Balkan Route. There is no clear evidence, however, that this heroin significantly affects the United States, as required for a country to be designated a major drug-transit country. In the event that it is determined that heroin transiting Turkey, Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Yugoslavia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, or other European countries on the Balkan Route significantly affects the United States, the relevant countries will be added to the Majors List.

Syria and Lebanon. I removed Syria and Lebanon from the list of major illicit drug producers two years ago after we determined that there was no significant opium poppy cultivation in

Lebanon's Biqa Valley. Recent surveys have confirmed that there has been no detectable replanting of opium poppy, and we have no evidence that drugs transiting these countries significantly affect the United States. We continue, however, to keep the area under observation.

North Korea. We have been unable to confirm reports that significant quantities of opium poppy may be under cultivation in North Korea or that heroin originating in the country may be entering the international drug trade. We continue, however, to monitor the situation. If there is evidence that there is indeed poppy cultivation of 1,000 hectares or more in North Korea or that North Korea is a transit point for drugs significantly affecting the United States, it will be added to the Majors List.

Cuba. Cuba's geographical position, straddling one of the principal Caribbean trafficking routes to the United States, makes it a logical candidate for consideration for the Majors List. While there have been some reports that trafficking syndicates use Cuban land territory for moving drugs, we have yet to receive any confirmation that this traffic carries significant quantities of cocaine or heroin to the United States. Moreover, in 2000, much of the suspect air traffic that previously crossed Cuban airspace has now shifted away to Hispaniola (Haiti and the Dominican Republic).

I will continue to keep Cuba under careful observation for any changes in current transit patterns. If there is evidence of significant quantities

of drugs transiting Cuba to the United States, Cuba will be added to the Majors List.

Central Asia. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are traditional opium poppy growing areas of the former Soviet Union. However, we have not found evidence of significant opium poppy cultivation. If ongoing analysis reveals cultivation of 1,000 hectares or more of poppy, the relevant countries will be added to the Majors List.

Major Cannabis Producers. While Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, the Philippines, and South Africa are important cannabis producers, I have not included them on this list since in all cases the illicit cannabis is either consumed locally or exported to countries other than the United States. I have determined that such illicit cannabis production does not significantly affect the United States.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Jesse Helms, chairman, and Joseph R. Biden, Jr., ranking member, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; Ted Stevens, chairman, and Robert C. Byrd, ranking member, Senate Committee on Appropriations; Benjamin A. Gilman, chairman, and Sam Gejdenson, ranking member, House Committee on International Relations; and C.W. Bill Young, chairman, and David R. Obey, ranking member, House Committee on Appropriations.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Gay and Lesbian Leadership Council Dinner

November 1, 2000

Thank you very much. I will be quite brief because I want to just sit around and have a conversation. But I want to begin by thanking all of you, especially Andy for taking on this role with the Democratic Party. And thank you, Terry, for tonight and for so much else. And I want to thank all of you who have helped us along the way, particularly those of you who have been part of our administration in some way or another. I'm very grateful to you.

I thought it was quite interesting, you made that reference to George Washington's speech

to the Jewish community—I've read it several times—because it was actually quite a keen insight for a person to have in the 18th century, that tolerance implies that a superior group is abiding a group that's not equal. And I never thought much of that. I always tell people we ought to celebrate our diversity and affirm the primary importance of our common humanity, and that's the way I look at this.

I want to thank you, too, for the last 8 years. It's been an honor to serve. I'm thrilled that it worked out as well as it did. [Laughter] I