

Statement on the Termination of Deportation Proceedings in Support of the Northern Ireland Peace Process

December 11, 2000

I strongly support the Attorney General's decision, at the request of the Secretary of State, to take action to terminate deportation proceedings against six individuals and to refrain from initiating proceedings against three others. All nine individuals had served sentences in the United Kingdom for activity connected with the IRA but are physically present in the United States. While in no way approving or condoning their past criminal acts, I believe that removing the threat of deportation for these individuals

will contribute to the peace process in Northern Ireland. The Attorney General's decision is consistent with steps taken by the British Government under the Good Friday accord to release prisoners in Northern Ireland and reintegrate them into normal society as part of a process of reconciliation. Her decision will also reinforce efforts by the Governments and the parties in Northern Ireland to implement in full all aspects of the Good Friday accord.

Statement on Signing the Water Resources Development Act of 2000

December 11, 2000

Today I have signed into law S. 2796, the "Water Resources Development Act of 2000," a multibillion dollar omnibus bill to authorize water projects and programs of the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

I am very pleased that this bill authorizes the Administration's plan to restore an unprecedented natural resource—America's Everglades. Thanks to an historic partnership among Federal, State, tribal, and local leaders, we can begin in earnest an over 30-year journey to complete the largest and most ambitious ecosystem restoration project in the world.

Since the beginning of our first term, the Vice President and I have made Everglades restoration a priority. We have provided the necessary resources to Federal agencies and made timely completion of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan an essential part of our environmental agenda. Through the leadership of the Army Corps of Engineers and the support of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of the Interior, and other Federal agencies, the State of Florida, and a diverse group of stakeholders, the authorized plan provides a scientifically sound blueprint to guide Everglades restoration. The legislation provides assurances that water developed under the Plan will be available for the restoration of the natural systems. We must all now make implemen-

tation of this Plan a priority if we are to save this threatened resource and leave an Everglades legacy that will make future generations proud of their Government. By acting now, we can reverse the damage of the past and rescue this unique and remarkable landscape.

I am pleased that S. 2796 also authorizes a major project to deepen channels into New York/New Jersey harbor, our Nation's third largest container port, that will benefit consumers and producers, create jobs, and make the United States more competitive in world markets. The Act also authorizes my proposal for projects to improve the Puget Sound ecosystem and authorizes efforts to restore the estuary of the lower Columbia River, boosting the recovery of threatened and endangered salmon species in the Pacific Northwest.

In addition, I am pleased that the Congress has adopted my proposals to strengthen the authority of the Army Corps of Engineers to evaluate comprehensively the water resources needs of watersheds throughout the Nation and to enhance its ability to work with Native American tribes and Alaska native communities to study proposed water resources projects. I also endorse the authorization for a National Academy of Sciences study on suggestions for an independent review of Army Corps of Engineers projects.

I am very concerned and disappointed, however, with many of the provisions in S. 2796. Earlier this year, I submitted water resource legislation to the Congress directed at certain fundamental issues. First, the bill included several high-priority Corps initiatives addressing important needs currently facing the Nation. Second, the bill proposed a number of much needed water project reforms. Finally, my Administration developed this bill with a Federal cost of about \$1 billion within a framework of overall fiscal discipline that helps ensure that only the most worthwhile projects are funded.

The version of this legislation as passed authorizes roughly \$5 billion in new Federal spending according to Corps of Engineers estimates, an amount that far exceeds a reasonable assessment of the available future Federal budgetary resources for this program. The vast majority of the new projects and modifications to existing projects in this bill have not completed the study phase or are under review and simply are not ready for authorization at this time. Until these proposals have completed the appropriate prior planning and review, including the review required for water resources project proposals under Executive Order 12322, neither the executive branch nor the Congress knows which of them will raise significant concerns regarding scope, feasibility, environmental acceptability, cost-sharing, or other issues. I strongly recommend that the Congress await completion of this process before reaching a decision on authorizing future projects and project modifications. Particularly in view of the Congress' directive to study benefits of an independent review of Corps of Engineers water projects, we need to find ways to strengthen the project planning and review process. I am pleased, however, that

the Congress decided to drop proposed authorizations totaling more than \$550 million for local infrastructure projects that should not become a responsibility of the Army Corps of Engineers.

Furthermore, my Administration proposed improvements to the procedures used for deauthorizing dormant projects, changes to close a loophole in the existing ability-to-pay law, an increase in the local cost-share for structural flood damage reduction projects, and a program to clean up brownfields. I am disappointed that the Congress did not authorize any of these important reforms.

Finally, section 601(b)(2)(D)(iii) provides that appropriations for certain water resources projects within the Everglades shall not be made unless technical reports on those projects have been approved by the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. This provision is a direction to the Congress regarding how the Congress will exercise its authority to appropriate funds. The provision does not limit the authority of agencies to spend funds that the Congress has appropriated.

Notwithstanding our concerns, the Water Resources Development Act of 2000 authorizes the Army to undertake much needed and important projects for improvements to the Nation's ports and harbors, and the restoration of our aquatic resources, including America's Everglades, and deserves enactment into law.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
December 11, 2000.

NOTE: S. 2796, approved December 11, was assigned Public Law No. 106-541.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland in Dublin

December 12, 2000

President's Visit to Ireland

Q. Mr. President, why do you keep coming back to Ireland?

The President. Well, I got invited. And you know, I've had a special interest, in my tenure

here, in the peace process. And the *Taoiseach* and Prime Minister Blair have worked hard, as the parties in Northern Ireland have, and there's still a little work to be done. So I thought maybe if I came back, I could help a little, and I hope I can.