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Message on the Observance of Polish American Heritage Month

October 8, 1996

Warm greetings to everyone observing Polish American Heritage Month.

Many Americans proudly trace their roots to Poland, a land whose rich and colorful past is rivaled only by the bright promise of its future. This month, as we celebrate the many contributions that Americans of Polish heritage have made to our nation's history and culture, we also reaffirm the strong and friendly ties between the United States and Poland.

Before America became a nation, Poles came to these shores in search of liberty and opportunity, and their descendants have remained at the forefront of efforts to keep America free, strong, and prosperous. This year we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the birth of the great Polish hero Tadeusz Kosciuszko, who helped secure the independence of our fledgling republic during the Revolutionary War. Since that time, millions of other men and women of Polish descent have invested their hopes in America's bold experiment in self-government and, inspired by faith in God and a devotion to democratic ideals, have worked hard to ensure its success.

The deep cultural and familial ties between the peoples of the United States and Poland have been strengthened by our shared values and aspirations. For generations, Poles have demonstrated the same reverence for individual rights and dignity that infuses our own system of government. The United States supports Poland's democratic transition and her people's efforts to establish a pluralistic society and a free market economy. Poland and the United States are building a new security for the twenty-first century, working together to prepare for NATO's enlargement in an undivided Europe.

As we observe Polish American Heritage Month, I join all Americans in thanking our fellow citizens of Polish descent for their countless contributions to the strength and quality of our national life. Best wishes to all for a memorable celebration.

Bill Clinton

Remarks on Signing the Federal Aviation Reauthorization Act of 1996

October 9, 1996

Thank you, Doug Smith, for your very moving remarks, for your recognition of the contributions of others, and for your own constant, brave efforts to help this day come to pass. And I thank all the family members who are here for your efforts to go beyond your own personal suffering to make something positive happen for our country in the future. Thank you, Madam Attorney General, for your strong support and your leadership in this regard; to OMB Director Raines; Congressman Duncan, thank you, sir, for your leadership, for the fine work you did; to the FAA Administrator, David Hinson, who is here. I'd like to say a special word of thanks to Admiral Edward Kristensen and Coast Guard Commander Ken Burgess, who supervised the recovery efforts for TWA 800. And I hope they will thank the Navy divers and the men and women of the Coast Guard who have worked so long and hard off Long Island. To Deputy Secretary Mort Downey of Transportation; Vice Chairman of the NTSB, Bob Francis. To all of you, thank you for being here.

Today I am pleased to sign the Federal Aviation Administration's authorization bill that will address the concerns Doug Smith expressed so movingly. It will improve the security of air travel. It will carry forward our fight against terrorism.

Last summer I met with the families of the victims of TWA Flight 800, the cause of which we are still investigating. They told me, as Mr. Smith and others have said, that there should be a single place in the Federal Government, a specific office that has the responsibility and the capability to assist them in the wake of a tragedy. This bill gives the National Transportation Safety Board that task. The NTSB will be the sole authoritative agency so that families will know exactly where to go and who will speak for the Government when they have lost a loved one. The measure builds upon Secretary Peña's efforts to improve passenger manifests on international flights, a priority for families of victims.

I thank the families for the tremendous work they have done to make these changes happen. And I thank Secretary Peña, who could not be here today because of another assignment he has undertaken for our administration. The bill I sign today will increase the safety of our Nation and our families by giving us more of the tools we need to fight terrorism.

We have pursued a concerted strategy against terrorism on three fronts: First, working more closely than ever with our allies to build a coalition with zero tolerance for terrorism; second, by giving our own law enforcement officials the most powerful counterterrorism tools available; and third, by increasing security in our airports and on our airplanes. This bill is an outstanding example of how we can advance that strategy when we work together, Government and private citizens, the executive branch and Congress, Republicans and Democrats.

After the TWA 800 disaster, I asked Vice President Gore and a commission of experts to examine all our aviation security practices and recommend improvements that would protect against terrorists or criminal attacks. On September the 9th, 45 days after they began their work, the Vice President and his commission delivered their action plan. Today, exactly one month later, almost all of its recommendations will become the law of the land.

I want to say a special word of thanks to the Vice President, who very much wanted to be here today and could not for obvious reasons, for the extraordinary work he has done on this and so many other issues.

Because of this legislation and the budget bill I signed last week, we will install hundreds of state-of-the-art bomb detection scanners in our major airports to examine both checked and carry-on luggage. It will pay for a dramatic increase in FBI agents assigned to the Bureau's counterterrorism efforts. Now background and FBI fingerprint checks will become routine for airport and airline employees with access to security areas. And the Federal Aviation Administration will continue the bag match program for domestic flights at selected airports that were begun by my Executive order last month.

We will increase inspection of mail and other international air cargo and expand the use of bomb-sniffing dogs. Because of these improvements, Americans will not only feel safer, they will be safer. America has the will and we are finding the ways to increase security against the terrorist threat on all fronts. We cannot make the world risk-free, but we can reduce the risks we face.

Beyond our efforts to improve aviation security, our new counterterrorism measures will also strengthen America's intelligence capabilities worldwide so that we can stop terrorists before they strike. We're improving security at both military and diplomatic facilities so that those who serve our Nation abroad are better protected. We are strengthening security at public sites here at home. And we are continually stepping up our law enforcement efforts with more agents and more prosecutors, after sending the message to terrorists that they will pay the full price for their deeds.

With these steps we are helping to make Americans safer. This legislation is proof that if we work together and put the interests of real people first, we can meet the challenges of this era.

I'd like to say, on a personal note, that I am especially grateful for the time and effort and stories that the family members of air tragedies have shared with me. And when I went to New York with Hillary to meet with the family members of the victims of TWA 800, a grandmother spoke to me movingly about how she had lost both her child—her daughter—and her grandson in that crash. And she gave me a picture of her 10-year-old grandson because of his particular attachment to the President and his desire to grow up to be in public life some day. I have carried that picture with me every single day until this day and the signing of this bill. And I hope that this legislation will mean more children will have the chance to live out their dreams.

I'd like to ask Congressman Duncan, the Attorney General, and the family members to come up now as we sign the legislation.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:20 a.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Doug Smith, president, National Air Disaster Alliance. H.R. 3539, ap-

proved October 9, was assigned Public Law No. 104–264.

Statement on Signing the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Amendments Act of 1996

October 9, 1996

Today, I have signed into law H.R. 2594, the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Amendments Act of 1996, proving once again that when management and labor work together they make their businesses, their communities, and our working families stronger.

This bill, which was supported by both labor and management, brings unemployment benefits for railroad workers in line with benefits for other workers. It also reduces the waiting periods for receiving unemployment and sickness benefits and increases the maximum daily rate for these same benefits.

In short, this bill is good for the American economy and the American worker. I applaud rail labor and management and those at the Railroad Retirement Board, the Department of Labor, the Department of Transportation, the National Mediation Board, and all others who had a hand in helping to create the climate that has led to good relations and progress in the industry.

NOTE: H.R. 2594, approved October 9, was assigned Public Law No. 104–251.

Statement on Signing Veterans Legislation

October 9, 1996

I have signed into law today three veterans-related bills that will ensure that veterans benefits keep pace with inflation, improve the veterans health care system, and expand other veterans programs and benefits.

The first bill—H.R. 3458, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 1996—authorizes a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) on December 1, 1996, for recipients of veterans' disability compensation, Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), and clothing allowances. The COLA, identical to the one that Social Security recipients will receive on January 1, 1997, will go to about 2.3 million veterans with disabilities who receive disability compensation benefits, over 300,000 individuals who receive DIC as the surviving spouses and children of service members who died in service and veterans whose deaths were service-connected, and veterans who receive clothing allowances because they wear or use prosthetic or orthopedic appliances.

The second bill—H.R. 3118, the Veterans' Health Care Eligibility Reform Act of 1996—includes many elements of the proposal that the National Performance Review, led by Vice President Gore, recommended to establish a modern, integrated health care system that will improve access to, and care for, the Nation's veterans. The bill, for instance, authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs to furnish comprehensive medical services to all veterans, expanding the array of services that it now provides. Eligibility reform has been a high priority of veterans for many years, and I am pleased that we finally could enact it.

Finally, the third bill—S. 1711, the Veterans' Benefits Improvements Act of 1996—expands and extends numerous veterans education, housing, life insurance, and employment and training benefits.

NOTE: H.R. 3458, approved October 9, was assigned Public Law No. 104–263; H.R. 3118, approved October 9, was assigned Public Law No. 104–262; S. 1711, approved October 9, was assigned Public Law No. 104–275.

Statement on Signing the Helium Privatization Act of 1996

October 9, 1996

I have signed into law today H.R. 4168, the Helium Privatization Act of 1996, which privatizes the Department of Interior's Federal Helium Refining Program—as the Vice President's National Performance Review had recommended.

Once, our defense and aviation industries had a strong need for helium and the Nation lacked a market to supply it. A Government program was appropriate. But today, over 90 percent of U.S. helium needs are met by private producers and suppliers. A Govern-