

revenue source gives the Department of Veterans Affairs the incentive to improve its collections while ensuring more control over its future viability as a health-care provider.

Unfortunately, the Act also eliminates funding for the U.S. Office of Consumer Affairs, which has served Presidents of both parties over three decades. I will work to ensure that a consumer voice is maintained from existing agency resources.

**William J. Clinton**

The White House,  
October 27, 1997.

NOTE: H.R. 2158, approved October 27, was assigned Public Law No. 105-65.

**Statement on Signing the  
Department of Transportation and  
Related Agencies Appropriations  
Act, 1998**

*October 27, 1997*

I am pleased to sign into law today H.R. 2169, the "Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1998."

This legislation provides funds to improve safety on our highways, airways, and waterways. It would also permit the highest level of Federal infrastructure investment in history—investment to improve our Nation's highways, transit systems, Amtrak, and airports and, as a result, improve personal mobility and make America a better global competitor.

Unfortunately the Congress has done only half the job in passing this legislation. Authorization of the Federal grant programs for highways, transit, and highway safety expired on September 30, 1997. Until the Congress reauthorizes those programs within the constraints of the Balanced Budget Act, we have only the promise of record-high investment levels, not the reality.

I submitted my proposal to reauthorize those programs, called "The National Economic Crossroads Transportation Efficiency Act" (NEXTEA), last March. The Congress has held hearings and begun work on this legislation. But, as we near the end of the first month of fiscal 1998, the Congress has

not presented me with legislation that would reauthorize these programs.

I call on the Congress to act—before it adjourns for the year—on a multi-year reauthorization bill that will give transportation planners and decision-makers the assurance of multi-year funding levels that they can use to continue to improve America's vital transportation network. My Administration stands ready to assist the Congress to resolve the issues and agree on a multi-year bill.

**William J. Clinton**

The White House,  
October 27, 1997.

NOTE: H.R. 2169, approved October 27, was assigned Public Law No. 105-66.

**Remarks at a Birthday Party for the  
First Lady in Chicago, Illinois**

*October 27, 1997*

**The President.** Thank you very much. You can hear I'm a little hoarse tonight, but I'll do my best to be heard over the din. Let me say to all of you, first of all, thank you, Mr. Mayor, thank you Mrs. Daley; thank you, Lois Weisberg. I thank all the committee, everybody who had anything to do with this day today. You have made Hillary and, I might say, her mother and her brothers who came with her today—you've made their whole family very happy. This has been an unforgettable day in her life, and I am profoundly grateful to all of you, and I thank you very much.

You know, before I met Hillary, you could put what I knew about Chicago in a thimble and have space left over. [Laughter] About a week after I met Hillary, I thought there was no other city on the face of the Earth. [Laughter] I'll never forget the first time I came here to visit Hillary. I remember only two things: her father would not come outside to say hello to me—[laughter]—which I thought showed good judgment on his part—[laughter]—and she took me to Chicago and showed me the city. And I fell in love with it then—that was a long time ago now—and I have been ever since.

This is a magnificent place. You have done unbelievable things. You're in the process of

doing other unbelievable things. They may well make a larger chapter in the history of this city, but you will never have a kinder, better, warmer gesture than the one you've given Hillary today, and I will never forget it as long as I live. Thank you very, very much.

**Audience member.** Four more years!

**The President.** It's not constitutional. [Laughter]

I want to ask Hillary to come up now. You have to remember—this birthday—she wore it lightly for a long time, but her staff started celebrating 50 days before the event. They wanted her to recognize precisely how old she was by giving her one present a day for 50 days up to the blessed event—[laughter]—which occurred yesterday. Now she's still celebrating it as if she's going to hold on for dear life. [Laughter] Whatever she wants to do, I'm for.

Ladies and gentlemen, our First Lady.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:25 p.m. in Gar Hall at the Chicago Cultural Center. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Richard M. Daley of Chicago and his wife, Margaret, and Chicago Commissioner of Culture Affairs Lois Weisberg. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

### Remarks at the Oscar Mayer Elementary School in Chicago

October 28, 1997

Thank you very much. Thank you, Evaline, and thank you, Mary. Thank you, Maggie Sullivan. Mr. Blitstein, thank you for welcoming me here.

I have been officially welcomed. [Laughter] I have my Oscar Mayer wiener here. When Hillary was teaching me about Chicago so long ago, we learned to sing the Oscar Mayer song. [Laughter]

Congressman, Mayor, Mr. Chico, Mr. Wallace, Ms. Buckney, Alderman Bernardina, Alderman O'Connor, Recorder White. I don't know if my friend John Stroger is here or not, but if he is, hello. I am delighted to be here today.

As all of you know, I'm sure, my wife had a wonderful day in Chicago yesterday, and her whole family was here. And I was regaled

with it last night, everything that happened. Chicago is a really special place, and the people who are tied to it have this almost psychic energy, I think, about what's going on.

For example, on the way in to Chicago, my brother-in-law told me, he said, "I got good feelings about this." He said, "I even think the Bears are going to win." [Laughter] I swear he did. So there is something quite mystical about all this but also something very wonderful. I thank you for letting me come here.

I wanted to be here today because this school is the embodiment of the effort that I have asked Americans to make to prepare our country for the 21st century, to make sure we have an America where every person who is responsible enough to work for it can live the American dream, where we're still strong enough to lead the world for peace and freedom and prosperity, and where we look across all of our diversity and come together as one America.

I know today a lot of Americans are focused on the stock market. It may be disappointing, but I think it is neither prudent nor appropriate for any President to comment on the hour-by-hour or the day-by-day movements of the market. I'd like to ask all of us to remember that our economy is as strong and vibrant today as it has been in a generation. We saw yesterday that our deficit has come down to \$22 billion from \$290 billion. That's the lowest since 1970.

With unemployment and inflation at their lowest levels in two decades, businesses and banks healthy and sound, new jobs being created every day, our economy is continuing to grow steady and strong. That's why we have to feel confident and continue our economic strategy. We've got to balance the budget, expand trade, and invest in the education of all our people.

Now, on that last score—in spite of all the economic progress we're making, in spite of the fact that crime is down 5 years in a row, that we have the lowest percentage of people on welfare we've had since 1970—millions of people have left the rolls—on education, we know we've got a lot more to do to make sure all children receive the world-class education they deserve to thrive in the information economy of the 21st century. That's why