

**Remarks on Signing the National
Defense Authorization Act for
Fiscal Year 2000**

October 5, 1999

Thank you very much, Secretary Cohen, for your remarks, your leadership, and for the depth of your concern for our men and women in the military.

Secretary Richardson, Secretary West, Deputy Secretary Hamre, General Shelton, General Ralston, Senior Master Sergeant Hall—he told me today this is the fourth time we've met, and the first time in Washington, DC. I've tried to get around to see people like the senior master sergeant in uniform in the Middle East and Asia and elsewhere.

I want to thank all those who serve them: the senior service chiefs, the service secretaries, the senior enlisted advisers. I'd also like to say a special word of thanks to all the Members of Congress here, too numerous to recognize them all. But I do want to acknowledge the presence of Senator Warner, Senator Levin, Senator Thurmond, Senator Robb, Senator Allard, Representative Spence and Representative Skelton, and the many other Members of the House of Representatives here today.

This, for me, more than anything else, is a day to say thank you; thank you for recognizing the urgent needs and the great opportunities of our military on the edge of a new century.

Today should be a proud day for men and women in uniform, not only here in this audience but all around the world. Time and again, they have all delivered for our country. Today America delivers for them.

In a few moments, I will have the privilege of signing the National Defense Authorization Act. As you have already heard, it provides for a strong national defense and a better quality of life for our military personnel and their families. It builds on the bipartisan consensus that we must keep our military ready, take care of our men and women in uniform, and modernize our forces.

Today, we have about 1.4 million men and women serving our country on active duty, doing what needs to be done from Korea to Kosovo, to Bosnia, to Iraq, to helping our neighbors in the hemisphere and in Turkey

dig out from natural disasters, to simply giving us confidence that America is forever strong and secure.

We ask our men and women in uniform to endure danger and hardship, and you do; to suffer separation from your families, and you endure that. We ask you to be the best in the world, and you are. In return, you ask very little. But we owe you the tools you need to do the job and the quality of life you and your families deserve.

This bill makes good on our pledge to keep our Armed Forces the best equipped and maintained fighting force on Earth. It carries forward modernization programs, funding the F-22 stealth fighter, the V-22 Osprey, the Comanche helicopter, advanced destroyers, submarines, amphibious ships, command and control systems, and a new generation of precision munitions. The bill also recognizes that no matter how dazzling our technological dominance, wars still will be won today and tomorrow as they have been throughout history, by people with the requisite training, skill, and spirit to prevail.

The excellence of our military is the direct product of the excellence of our men and women in uniform. This bill invests in that excellence. It authorizes, as you have already heard, a comprehensive program of pay and retirement improvements that add up to the biggest increase in military compensation in a generation. It increases bonuses for enlistment and reenlistment, and provides incentives needed to recruit and retrain our military personnel.

I would like to say a special word of appreciation to all the members of our military, including a lot of enlisted personnel, who have discussed these issues with me over the last 2 or 3 years, in particular. And I would like to thank the Members of Congress not only for the work they did on the pay issue but also on the retirement issue. And I'd like to say a special word of appreciation on that to Congressman Murtha, who first talked to me about it, and I know labored very hard on it.

Now, an awful lot of people worked to make this bill a reality. And I'm glad that there are so many members of both parties of the House and the Senate Armed Services Committee here today. I also want to thank

Secretary Cohen, General Shelton, and all the people at the Pentagon for their leadership and determination.

This bill is an expression of America at its best. It's about patriotism, not partisanship. It's about putting the people of our Armed Forces first. No matter how well we equip these forces to deal with any threat, I would also argue that we owe them every effort we possibly can to diminish that threat—the threat to the members of our Armed Forces and to the American people whom they must defend.

One of the greatest threats our people face today, and our Armed Forces face, is the threat of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. We have worked in a bipartisan way to diminish those threats, passing the Chemical Weapons Convention, getting an indefinite extension of the nonproliferation treaty. We are now working to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention.

At this time, the Senate has a unique opportunity to diminish that threat by ratifying the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. It will end nuclear weapons testing forever, while allowing us to maintain our military strength in nuclear weapons and helping to keep other countries out of the nuclear weapons business.

We stopped testing nuclear weapons in 1992 in the United States. Instead, we spend some \$4.5 billion a year on programs that allow us to maintain an unassailable nuclear threat. This treaty will strengthen our security by helping to prevent other countries from developing nuclear arsenals and preventing testing in countries that have nuclear weapons already but have nowhere near the sophisticated program we do for maintaining the readiness of our arsenal in the absence of testing.

It will strengthen our ability to verify by supplementing our intelligence capabilities with a global network of sensors and onsite inspections, something we will not have if the treaty does not enter into force. It will make it easier for us to determine whether other nations are engaged in nuclear activity and to take appropriate action if they are.

Obviously, no treaty—not this one or any other—can provide an absolute guarantee of security or singlehandedly stop the spread of

deadly weapons. Like all treaties, this one would have to be vigorously enforced and backed by a strong national defense. But I would argue if the Senate rejects the treaty we run a far greater risk that nuclear arsenals will grow and weapons will spread to volatile regions, to dangerous rulers, even to terrorists.

I want to emphasize again, the United States has been out of the testing business for 7 years now. We are not engaged in nuclear testing. If we reject this treaty, the message will be, "We're not testing, but you can test if you want to," with all the attendant consequences that might have in India, Pakistan, China, Russia, Iran, and many other places around the world. I want to avoid a world where more and more countries race toward nuclear capability. That's the choice we face, not a perfect world, but one where we can restrain nuclear testing, but train the growth of nuclear arsenals.

Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy first advocated a comprehensive test ban treaty. Four former Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, together with Chairman Shelton and our Nation's leading nuclear scientists, including those who head our national weapons labs, advocate this treaty. I believe the treaty is good for America's security. I believe walking away and defeating it would send a message that America is no longer the leading advocate of nonproliferation in the world.

So, all I ask today is not a vote; the discussion just began. What I ask is that we meet this challenge in the same bipartisan fashion in which we approached the defense authorization bill. The stakes are exactly the same. When a young man or woman joins the United States military, they don't ask you if you're a Republican or a Democrat. And you all make it clear you're prepared to give your life for your country. We should do everything we can to ensure your safety, to give you a bright future, even as we give you the tools and the support to do the work you have sworn to do.

Let me say in closing, after nearly 7 years in this office, there has been no greater honor, privilege, or joy than the opportunity I have had to see our men and women in uniform do their jobs, all kinds of jobs all

over the world. I have also been very moved by how honestly and frankly and straightforwardly they have answered every question I have ever put to any of them. In a very real sense today, the work the Congress did and the support that I and our administration gave to this legislation is purely and simply the product of what our men and women in uniform, from the highest rank to the lowest, told us needed to be done for them and for America.

So again I say, this is a day for celebration and thanksgiving, and more than anyone else, I feel that deep gratitude to you.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:15 p.m. on the River Terrace at the Pentagon. In his remarks, he referred to Senior M.Sgt. Robert E. Hall, Sergeant Major of the Army. S. 1059, approved October 5, was assigned Public Law No. 106-65.

Statement on Signing the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000

October 5, 1999

Today I have signed into law S. 1059, the "National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000." This Act authorizes FY 2000 appropriations for military activities of the Department of Defense, military construction, and defense activities of the Department of Energy. Although I have serious reservations about some portions of this Act, I believe S. 1059 provides for a strong national defense, maintains our military readiness, and supports our deep commitment to a better quality of life for our military personnel and their families.

The more we ask of our Armed Forces, the greater our obligation to give them the support, training, and equipment they need. We have a responsibility to give them the tools to take on new missions while maintaining their readiness to defend our country and defeat any adversary; to make sure they can deploy away from home, knowing their families have the quality of life they deserve; to attract talented young Americans to serve; and to make certain their service is not only rewarding, but well rewarded—from recruitment to retirement.

This Act helps us meet that responsibility. It endorses my comprehensive program of improvements to military pay and retirement benefits, which add up to the largest increase in military compensation in a generation. The Act increases bonuses for enlistment and reenlistment, providing incentives needed to recruit and retain skilled and motivated personnel and to maintain readiness.

The Act also helps make good on my pledge to keep our Armed Forces the best equipped fighting force on earth. It carries forward our modernization program by funding the F-22 stealth fighter, the V-22 Osprey, the Comanche helicopter, advanced destroyers, submarines and amphibious ships, and a new generation of precision munitions. I commend the Congress for recognizing the need to improve the way we dispose of property at closing military bases. In April of this year, I requested the authority to transfer former military base property to communities at no cost if they use the property for job-generating economic development. This new policy of no-cost Economic Development Conveyances will allow us to speed the transfer of such property to local communities and minimize the time that the property lies fallow. In this way, we can give an economic jump start to affected communities and help to stimulate the investments necessary to attract new job-creating businesses.

I am pleased with the Act's support for missile defense capabilities. The Act authorizes important funding for both theater and national missile defense. I am particularly pleased that the Act authorizes full funding for the Medium Extended Air Defense System cooperative program with Germany and Italy, authorizes funding for national missile defense military construction planning and design, and helps fix cost growth problems in the Patriot Advance Capability-3 and Navy Area Defense programs. The Act's requirement to develop Theater High Altitude Area Defense and Navy Theater Wide systems concurrently is being taken into account in the Department's review of its acquisition strategy for these upper-tier programs.

Although I believe most provisions of the Act—especially the quality of life enhancements—are beneficial and support a strong