

Statement on the 1998 Uniform Crime Report

October 17, 1999

The 1998 Uniform Crime Report released by the FBI today shows that serious crime has continued to fall in every region of our Nation for the seventh straight year. The murder rate is at its lowest since 1967. The overall violent crime rate is down, and gun crimes, rapes, robberies, assaults, and juvenile crime have all dropped to their lowest levels in over a decade. This is good news for America's families, and it shows we can indeed turn the tide on crime.

My administration's strategy of 100,000 more police, fewer guns in the hands of criminals, thanks to the Brady law, and more tools for communities to combat crime is working to make our streets safer and our communities stronger. But tragedies from Littleton to Los Angeles show that we must do more to protect our communities from gun violence. Even as crime falls, we must not let down our guard. That is why we must redouble our efforts to build on what works—by fully funding our COPS program to put more police on the street and by passing commonsense gun legislation to keep guns out of the wrong hands. Together we can make America the safest big nation in the world.

NOTE: This statement was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 15 but was embargoed for release until 6 p.m., October 17.

Remarks Following a Meeting With the Economic Team and an Exchange With Reporters

October 18, 1999

Federal Budget

The President. Good morning. I have just completed a meeting with my economic team to see what we can do to reach overall budget agreement with the congressional leadership. In just 4 days, the resolution that temporarily funds the Government will expire. And yet, Congress still has not sent me a budget that maintains our fiscal discipline, pays down Social Security, reforms Medicare, and honors

the priorities of the American people, especially including education, and including 50,000 more community police for our children, for our streets, and a steadfast commitment to preserve and protect our environment.

Now, there is an overwhelming consensus across our country, and even here in Washington, that we face no challenge more critical than the education of our children. When our children graduate, they will be the largest and most diverse group of graduates in our history. They will be in a vastly more global and complex and information-dominated economy than ever before. For their sake, and the sake of our continued prosperity, we have wisely made—as a people—education our number one priority.

That means shrinking class size while increasing quality by fulfilling our commitment to put 100,000 teachers in the classroom—something the Republicans in Congress supported last year. It means making sure our children are ready for the year 2000 by ensuring that every one of them has access to computers in their classrooms. It means keeping schools open after school and during the summer. It means expanding mentoring and Head Start. It means having strategies that impose high standards and accountability, give schools funds to turn around themselves if they're failing, but shuts them down if they can't turn around. It means more funds for charter schools.

Now, if we're going to make these critical investments and maintain our fiscal discipline to keep our economy strong, we're going to have to make tough choices, and we're going to have to make them together. There are 4 days until the continuing resolution expires. Inaction is not an option. I will do everything I can to meet our priorities in a responsible way.

As I have said repeatedly in recent weeks, indeed, for years, my door is open to Members of both parties who are willing to work with us. If we're going to finish the job the American people sent us here to do—reach real results in educating our children, fighting crime, protecting our environment—then we have to put politics aside and seek common ground.

In that spirit, I am inviting the congressional leadership to come here and meet with me and our economic team at the White House, to see if we can agree on an overall budget framework. Yes, there are differences of opinion. But I don't think they're so great that we can't make progress by working together in a genuine bipartisan spirit. I'm committed to doing so and to resolving the remaining differences. If the congressional leadership will join me, we can make this a season of real progress for our people.

Thank you.

Spending Caps

Q. Sir, what about the spending caps on Social Security money? Are you willing to say before the congressional leadership comes here that you'll negotiate lifting the caps?

The President. Well, first of all, they've already been lifted. I mean, they have—they're into spending the Social Security surplus, and everyone but them—everybody else has acknowledged it. I mean, their own Congressional Budget Office says that. I have given them offsets. I will work with them with further offsets. I would like to see them do better on that.

But we can't not fund these critical education priorities. We can't not have an adequate environmental budget. And we can't not fulfill our responsibilities to the rest of the world. You know, I vetoed the foreign operations bill this morning because it seems to me to be the next big chapter in the new American isolationism, right after the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. There's no money to fund the Wye peace accord for peace in the Middle East; no money to fund our continuing work with the Russians to reduce their nuclear threat; no money to help us with debt relief to the poorest countries in Latin America and Asia; and several other problems.

So I think that—but on the other hand, according to Congressional Budget Office, they've already spent billions of dollars that are in the nongeneral revenue, or the Social Security revenue, portion of the surplus. I will work with them on offsets; I will work with them on getting a balanced budget out

of here that meets all of our Nation's priorities.

But we need to sit down and do it together. You know, we can continue this standoff, and I will fight for what I believe in, as I have ever since they took over Congress in 1995. But in the years where we have worked together—in '96 and '97 and '98—we've produced good results for the American people. And we ought to do that in 1999, and that's my commitment.

Continuing Resolution

Q. Is it inevitable that another continuing resolution will be necessary?

The President. I think probably, but it ought to be short. And, you know, what I want to do is to put all these bills together and see what the real critical differences are. I know they're not going to do 100 percent of what I want them to do. But there are certain bottom lines for the American people that I have, that I have to fight for. And we need to see how all this spending works together, and then do our best to agree on a responsible way to pay for it. And that's what I'd like to do.

And I'm not interested in being able to walk out of here and win a battle on whether they spent the Social Security surplus or not. As a matter of fact, they have, and it's been acknowledged for months, but that's not the point. The point is, we need a responsible budget here.

We're on a path to paying down America's debt. Because the tax cut was rejected, vetoed, we can still get America out of debt over the next 15 years. We can still extend the life of the Social Security Trust Fund beyond the lifecycle of the baby boomers. And we can still have the funds to reform and modernize Medicare and meet these other priorities.

If you look over the 5-year period—if you look over the horizon, here—this country is moving in the right direction. And we shouldn't allow these momentary difficulties to deter us from doing what is right now, so we can keep on the right path.

Pakistan

Q. Mr. President, on Pakistan, what's your reaction to General Musharraf's speech yesterday? There's no indication of any timetable for moving toward elections, or for democracy.

The President. Well, a lot of what he said on the substance, including the conciliatory tone he took towards India, I thought was quite good. But I was quite disappointed that there was no commitment to a timetable to move toward democracy. And I certainly hope that will be forthcoming.

Carol Moseley-Braun Ambassadorial Nomination

Q. What do you think about Senator Helms' blocking Carol Moseley-Braun's nomination? Reported obstruction—

The President. Well, I hope he won't do that. You know, again, there has been an unprecedented amount of playing politics with Ambassadors, here. And again, it sends a signal to the rest of the world that there is a new isolationism in the country, that we don't really care whether we have Ambassadors in other places. We've got a hold on four other Ambassadors that—no one has questioned anything about their qualifications—for totally irrelevant reasons. And I think these things are not good for America.

So I would hope that Senator Moseley-Braun and the other Ambassadors would be quickly confirmed. And I will work as hard as I can to see that's done.

Support for Gore Campaign

Q. Does it bother you, sir, that Vice President Gore says he may decide he doesn't need your help in the campaign?

The President. No.

Q. Why not?

The President. Because he has to—I agree with him. I think he ought to make that decision at the time, based on the—for one thing, no one can help anyone else in the campaign beyond a certain point. You can make phone calls; you can go door-to-door; you can volunteer; you can call your friends.

But when I was Governor, I remember one of the best elections I ever had was in 1984, when President Reagan—who was at his all-time peak of popularity in 1984 and

got 62 percent of the vote, I think, running for reelection—came to my State to campaign against me, and I got the same vote he did.

And so—people are—elections, the American people know that in a representative form of government, they give the people that they vote for certain responsibilities. And then at election time, they're back in the driver's seat. So I think that that's a decision that we ought to make—or he ought to make—at an appropriate time, just—I agree with what he said about it.

And I also think that it won't matter who says it, as much as it matters what is said. I just want the American people to make this judgment based on what's best for them. Who is the most likely to continue to change this country in the right direction? Who's the most likely to save Social Security and Medicare? Who's the most likely to advance childhood education? Who's the most likely to grow the economy and protect the environment? Who's the most likely to get this country out of debt for the first time since 1835? That's the only thing that matters.

This election is not about all the players that get written about in Washington. This election is about the American people. And they are perfectly happy to make the decision that is theirs every 4 years. And they will make it for themselves. And the candidates will be the major players; everybody else, to a greater or lesser degree, is in a subordinate role, as they always have been.

Press Secretary Joe Lockhart. Thank you, pool. Thank you.

Relationship With Republican Congress

Q. [Inaudible]—with the Republican leadership heading into this budget showdown?

The President. Well, you know, I have always had a very cordial relationship with Senator Lott, and with Mr. Hastert since he's been there, the Speaker. And, you know, every Mr. DeLay came up here the other day for this adoption event, and we had a good visit. I wouldn't—you know, I don't agree with them on the substance of a lot of this.

But I don't—I've said this a hundred times. Let me say it one more time. I have

never, to the best of my knowledge, let political conflicts—even ones that had deeply personal overtones—get in the way of working with people who were also sent here. They were sent here just like I was, by the American people.

And this is not an emotional issue. This is a job. We've got a job to do for the American people. We were hired to do it, and we need to do it. And so I feel good about it. And I hope that they'll come down here, and I hope we can work together and work something out. I'll do my best.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:15 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Pakistani Gen. Pervez Musharraf, army chief of staff, who led a coup d'etat in Pakistan on October 12. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Message to the House of Representatives Returning Without Approval the “Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2000”
October 18, 1999

To the House of Representatives:

I am returning herewith without my approval H.R. 2606, the “Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2000.”

The central lesson we have learned in this century is that we cannot protect American interests at home without active engagement abroad. Common sense tells us, and hard experience has confirmed, that we must lead in the world, working with other nations to defuse crises, repel dangers, promote more open economic and political systems, and strengthen the rule of law. These have been the guiding principles of American foreign policy for generations. They have served the American people well, and greatly helped to advance the cause of peace and freedom around the world.

This bill rejects all of those principles. It puts at risk America's 50-year tradition of leadership for a safer, more prosperous and democratic world. It is an abandonment of hope in our Nation's capacity to shape that

kind of world. It implies that we are too small and insecure to meet our share of international responsibilities, too shortsighted to see that doing so is in our national interest. It is another sign of a new isolationism that would have America bury its head in the sand at the height of our power and prosperity.

In the short term, H.R. 2606 fails to address critical national security needs. It suggests we can afford to underfund our efforts to keep deadly weapons from falling into dangerous hands and walk away without peril from our essential work toward peace in places of conflict. Just as seriously, it fails to address America's long-term interests. It reduces assistance to nations struggling to build democratic societies and open markets and backs away from our commitment to help people trapped in poverty to stand on their feet. This, too, threatens our security because future threats will come from regions and nations where instability and misery prevail and future opportunities will come from nations on the road to freedom and growth.

By denying America a decent investment in diplomacy, this bill suggests we should meet threats to our security with our military might alone. That is a dangerous proposition. For if we underfund our diplomacy, we will end up overusing our military. Problems we might have been able to resolve peacefully will turn into crises we can only resolve at a cost of life and treasure. Shortchanging our arsenal of peace is as risky as shortchanging our arsenal of war.

The overall funding provided by H.R. 2606 is inadequate. It is about half the amount available in real terms to President Reagan in 1985, and it is 14 percent below the level that I requested. I proposed to fund this higher level within the budget limits and without spending any of the Social Security surplus. The specific shortfalls in the current bill are numerous and unacceptable.

For example, it is shocking that the Congress has failed to fulfill our obligations to Israel and its neighbors as they take risks and make difficult decisions to advance the Middle East peace process. My Administration, like all its predecessors, has fought hard to promote peace in the Middle East. This bill