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Statement on Senate Action on the District of Columbia, Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill

November 2, 1999

Today, by a narrow margin, Congress completed action on a deeply flawed spending bill that I will veto. This bill is a catalog of missed opportunities, misguided priorities, and mindless cuts. It forces America's schoolchildren to pay the price for Congress' failure to make responsible choices. I will not let it become law.

The bill—which includes the Labor/Health and Human Services/Education appropriations measure—makes a blind, across-the-board cut that will hurt everything from national defense to veterans' programs, from education to the environment. It reneges on last year's bipartisan commitment to fund 100,000 teachers and reduce class size in the early grades, replacing this proven approach with a risky block grant that opens the door to private school vouchers. It fails to include a key accountability initiative to help turn around failing schools. And it shortchanges many other priorities, including efforts to enhance worker safety, expand child care, detect emerging infectious diseases, and protect Americans from the threat of bioterrorism.

This debate is not just about how much we spend but also how wisely we spend. I sent Congress a budget, for education, health care, and other programs, that invests in results and is fully paid for. But Congress continues to pursue an agenda of irresponsible cuts and ill-conceived allocations. The patience of the American public is wearing thin. It is time for Congress to put aside partisanship and make the targeted investments our Nation's future demands.

Remarks Following Discussions With Chairman Arafat and Prime Minister Barak and an Exchange With Reporters in Oslo

November 2, 1999

Middle East Framework Agreement

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, we have just completed a very good meeting. I feel that we have revitalized the peace process, and we've got these final status—the framework talks off to a very good start.

The two sides have not only named their teams; they have agreed that the leaders will personally continue to meet on a regular basis. They have agreed to work very hard to avoid public comments or actions which will cause enormous difficulty for the other side in the next 100 days or so when they're trying to come to agreement on the framework. And they have agreed with me that we might well have a summit at the end of this process if enough progress has been made to make us all believe that, in good faith, we can actually get an agreement at a summit.

Q. Is that the framework process, Mr. President?

The President. The framework process, yes.

Q. When will you have that summit?

Q. [*Inaudible*]—their intentions, though?

The President. Well, when and whether depends upon what we're doing. We have a very ambitious timetable here. I think the timetable is the middle of February that they've agreed to have the framework agreement. So you won't have to wait long for answers to the details. We'll all be in high gear between now and then.

Thank you very much.

Q. Mr. President, is this more than you expected to come out of Oslo? Are you surprised?

The President. I feel quite good about it. I feel very good about it. I'm very pleased by it.