

Remarks on Returning Without Approval to the House of Representatives the District of Columbia, Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill and an Exchange With Reporters

November 3, 1999

Shootings in Honolulu and Seattle

The President. Good afternoon. Let me begin by saying that I join with all Americans in expressing shock and profound sorrow at the shootings which have occurred over the last 2 days in Honolulu and Seattle. I have been briefed on both situations. The Federal Government has offered all appropriate assistance to local officials. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and with their families.

Veto of H.R. 3064

Yesterday I returned from Oslo, Norway, where, with American support, Israeli and Palestinian leaders entered a new critical phase in their efforts to resolve their ancient conflict. Tomorrow I will begin a journey to places here in America that are only just beginning to feel the benefits of our remarkable economic recovery, an expansion which, in February, will become the longest in the history of our country. I will highlight new ideas and efforts that can make these communities and those like them all across America new markets for American investment, entrepreneurship, and opportunity.

In the last 7 years, our country has gone from conditions of economic distress, social division, and political drift to a nation headed in the right direction for the 21st century. But to truly fulfill our promise, we must all continue to do our jobs. And Congress, in that vein, must produce the right kind of budget, a budget that reflects the values of our people, respects the need for Government to live within its means, and looks to our future.

Moments ago I vetoed a bill because it does not meet those criteria, a Labor, Health, and Education bill that Congress sent me yesterday. The bill is a catalog of missed op-

portunities, misguided priorities, and mindless cuts in everything from education to national defense to the environment. It forces school children to pay for the failure of Congress to make responsible choices. And it fails to reflect our deepest values.

We value education. Yet this bill fails to invest the right way in education. It reneges on last year's bipartisan agreement to fund 100,000 new, highly trained teachers to reduce class size in the early grades. And at the same time, it opens the door for Federal funds to be used for private school vouchers. We need more teachers in smaller classes in our public schools, instead.

The bill fails to include my initiative to demand accountability by helping school districts to turn around failing schools or close them down. And it shortchanges other priorities, from enhancing worker safety to expanding child care to immunizing our children, at the moment when we have finally reached our goal of immunizing 90 percent of them, to protecting Americans from the threat of bioterrorism.

We value fiscal responsibility. But this bill abdicates that responsibility by imposing across-the-board cuts that clearly will damage vital priorities, even as the Republican majority has larded the budget with wasteful projects.

For example, Congress would spend hundreds of millions of dollars for projects the Pentagon did not ask for. Yet this bill would force the military to cut jobs for tens of thousands of soldiers and other military personnel. It would mean fewer FBI agents to fight crime, no food assistance to tens of thousands of low-income women, infants and children, and less help to master the basics to over 100,000 children in our poorest school districts.

We value a clean environment. But the budget Congress has passed would roll back important environmental protections. We value the safety of our families and the fact that we now have the lowest crime rate in 30 years and the lowest murder rate in 32 years. But their budget fails to put 50,000 new community police officers in our neighborhoods where the crime rates are highest, to keep those rates coming down until we're the safest big country in the world. We value

peace and freedom and security. But their budget would undermine our ability to lead the world in pursuit of these goals.

Some Members of Congress have said they're willing to restore funding for one critical effort they left out of the bill that was passed, our commitment to the Middle East peace process. That is very good but not good enough. We also need a budget that will enable America to advance our critical interests all around the world, including paying our U.N. dues, continuing America's work to reduce nuclear weapon threats in Russia, and doing our fair share of the world's efforts to reduce the debt of the poorest nations.

Now Congress is more than a month behind schedule. I know a lot of the Members want to leave town. But the American people want Congress to lead first and to do their work first. There are a lot of important matters that remain unfinished. Let me just mention a few of them.

Our Nation continues on this day to be reminded of the horrors of gun violence. We need to do more to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and children. Congress needs to send me commonsense legislation that closes the gun show loophole, bans the importation of large ammunition clips, and has child safety locks as a requirement of new gun sales.

To ensure that every American and every health plan has the protections they need, Congress should pass the Patients' Bill of Rights. To meet the challenge of an aging America, Congress should act on my plan to extend the life of Social Security to 2050 and to reform Medicare and add a prescription drug coverage.

To ensure the financial health of our hospitals, nursing homes, and other health care providers, Congress must moderate the cuts that resulted from the Balanced Budget Act of 1997. To give millions of people with disabilities a chance to experience the dignity of work without losing health coverage, Congress must send me the "Work Incentives Improvement Act." To give hardworking families a chance to share in our growing prosperity, Congress should pass an increase in the minimum wage.

To keep our economy on the cutting edge of scientific and technological change, Con-

gress must extend the research and development tax credit, and it should expand others, as well, such as our welfare-to-work tax credit, which has helped to give us welfare rolls that are about half what they were 7 years ago.

To provide our children the schools they need, Congress should pass tax credits to build or modernize 6,000 schools. To shine the light of prosperity on communities like those I will visit in the next couple of days, Congress must pass the new markets tax credits to give investors the same incentives to invest in new markets here we give them to invest around the world.

The budget I sent Congress shows that we can do all this in a way that is paid for, doesn't spend the Social Security surplus, allows us to pay down the debt over the next 15 years so that we can be debt-free for the first time since 1835. So I urge Congress to put partisanship aside and work with me to complete the work the American people sent us here to do.

Just before I came here, I had a very good talk with Speaker Hastert and Senator Lott. I have not given up and neither have they. We have agreed that we will continue to work, beginning this evening, as hard as we can to try to resolve the differences that remain between us. If we do that, if the Democrats and the Republicans in the House and the Senate work with the White House, we can still make this a very good legislative session for the American people and, again, set ourselves on our way to a new century of promise.

Thank you very much.

Budget Process

Q. Mr. President, it sounds like from what you say that there's really been very little progress. These are the same issues we've been talking about for a while. How would you rate the budget talks so far, and is there any chance that it's going to get done before your trip to Europe?

The President. Well, let me just say this: On several occasions I've had the feeling that we had an agreement and that some of the leaders in the Republican Party wanted to make an agreement, and then they were, in effect, undercut. And so I think that if we

were allowed to working with the chairs of the appropriations committees and the other appropriate committee chairs, I think we could reach agreement.

But we will never reach agreement unless there is honorable compromise. That is always found in the center. So I feel—I sympathize with their position because whenever we make an agreement, then there's an attempt by some in the Congress to pull them back to the right. But we have to find agreement in the center.

I will say again, I had a good talk with Senator Lott and Speaker Hastert, and I am committed to working with them. And I told them that I understood they wanted to leave town, and I was not trying to keep them here. But I was trying to finish the job the American people sent us here to do and that I and our people would be prepared to work virtually around the clock to get an agreement that is consistent with what I pledged to the American people and what I believe that they want.

Trade With China

Q. Mr. President, what is the status of the WTO negotiations with China? Have you made a new offer to the Chinese, or do you still want the deal that you almost had back in April?

The President. Well, a lot of people have said we had an agreement in April, and we walked away from it because there was opposition from the American labor movement. I've read that a hundred times. That is absolutely not true. Number one, we didn't have an agreement, and number two, let me remind you of what the climate was at that time. It wasn't because of what the labor leaders were saying. Some of the very people now who want the WTO agreement with China, at that time were banging away at China on a whole wide range of issues, which all of you remember very well. So I don't want to go forward implying that we had an agreement before because we didn't. And the Chinese say we didn't.

Now, I have, as has been reported in the press, I have made an effort to restart these negotiations. I have told President Jiang that I think we ought to go forward. But I don't believe that I can facilitate a successful reso-

lution of this by discussing the details in any way. I won't agree to anything I don't believe is in the interests of the American people. That's all I can tell you.

And I think that it is in the long-term interests of our people and in the interests of an open China that is a responsible partner—in a world in which China will be at some point in the 21st century, if it keeps growing, the biggest economy in the world—that they be part of the rule-based system of global trading and investment.

So I hope that we can work it out. And I'll do my best. I do want to say that if we could work it out, I am completely committed to trying to get passed in the Congress permanent normal trading status for China. And I do believe that we can prevail now. I think there's a sense in both parties that this is a very large issue that is important for our Nation's long-term security and economic well-being. And I will do what I can to achieve it.

Violence in American Life

Q. Mr. President, when you were briefed as you were today on yet another shooting, be it in a workplace or a schoolyard, do you believe that this has just become something fundamental and inevitable in American life, or is there something that can be done to alter the dynamic?

The President. Well, I think there are a lot of things that can be done. But let me say, if you go back over the last 20 years, we have had periodic outbursts of shootings where more than one person was killed. But let's not forget, 13 of our kids get shot every day, killed every day. And just because they die one and two at a time in distant places or tough neighborhoods, we don't—and I'm not criticizing you, we're almost enured to it. I don't think we understand fully just how much more violent the United States is than other countries. That's the point I'm trying to make.

And I don't want to diminish the agony of these two incidents that are truly awful or what happened at Columbine or all the other schools. But I think we have to acknowledge the fact that we have been willing to tolerate a much higher level of violence than we should have.

Now, the good news is, in spite of these terrible incidents, we have the lowest murder rate in 32 years, the lowest overall crime rate in 30 years. If you want it to be lower, you have to do more of what we have been doing. You have to put more community police on the street; you have to do more work in the schools to teach children to avoid violence; and you have to do more to keep guns out of the wrong hands.

What we are doing—and I don't mean we, the Federal Government; I mean we, the American people, starting with the police on the street and the community leaders—is working. We should be not desperate here; we should be determined. But every time one of these things happens, all I can say is what we are doing is working, but we haven't done it enough, and we need more efforts in the directions that we're going. We do not have to tolerate this level of violence.

There will never be a time when any society can guarantee that no one will ever kill anybody else. And we have, as all of you know, well over 200 million guns in our society right now; nobody knows exactly how many. But we can do much, much more, without interfering with people's hunting and sporting rights, to keep guns out of the wrong hands. And we can do more to put more police on the street. We can do more to work with our children. And we have to do all of that.

But there is no silver bullet here. If people are really upset about it, they should ask us to do what has brought us to this point. If you compare it now with 7 years ago, we're in better shape. If you compare where we are now with where any other country in the world would find a tolerable level of violence, we are not in good shape, and we have to do more.

African and Caribbean Basin Trade

Q. Mr. President, now that the Senate has overcome the delaying tactics, do you expect the African trade bill and the enhancement of the Caribbean Basin initiative to be passed during this term?

The President. I certainly hope so. There is strong bipartisan support for both of those things. It's a way of our being good neighbors; it's a way of our being responsible part-

ners; and it's very good economics for the United States over the long run.

I would just point out that, with regard to our neighbors in the Caribbean and Central America, they have actually suffered an unintended consequence of the agreement we made with Canada and Mexico because there were preferences given to Mexico that did not go to them. And so we ought to at least put them on equal footing.

We can do that without being unfair to our Mexican neighbors, but we've got to be good neighbors with the people in the Caribbean and Central America. We don't want to put them in the position where the only way they can make a living is to be transit points for the drugrunners of the world. And this is very important.

And the Africa trade bill, the potential that has to reward the Africans that have good government and are following market economies is enormous. Some of you went with me on my trip to Africa. And I would hope that you came out of it with the same feeling I did. You go to a place like Uganda, which has had the biggest drop in AIDS rates of any country in the world, I believe, over the last 5 years, showing you what competent, well-organized, well-directed countries can do because the people are intelligent, they're innovative, they can do all kinds of things. And we have a big future in Africa, and I think that we owe it to the American people, as well as to our world responsibilities, to pass both these things.

I hope they will pass. I was elated that the Senate voted to invoke cloture and to proceed to the bill, and I'll continue to push it.

1999 Elections

Q. Mr. President, if in the elections last night, the Democrats and Republicans each can claim a bit of a victory, how do you analyze those results?

The President. Well, of course, I feel very good about it because of what has happened—Mississippi was truly historic and several other places. And I also feel good because in the places where the Republicans won, they won by running on education, on health care, on economic development, on

progressive issues, and entering into a constructive contest of ideas to try to build a dynamic center in America. That was the analysis even across the river here in Virginia, where, basically, the Democrats did well in northern Virginia, the Republicans did well elsewhere.

But if you look at the—what is the debate about, and it seems to me that the real message coming out of this was that the people who offer positive programs that bring people together and move people forward are going to get a good hearing from the voters. I think that is the message. And that is the message that we ought to keep in mind here as we try to bring these budget negotiations to a successful conclusion.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:40 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Jiang Zemin of China.

Message to the House of Representatives Returning Without Approval the District of Columbia, Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill
November 3, 1999

To the House of Representatives:

I am returning herewith without my approval H.R. 3064, the FY 2000 District of Columbia and Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

I am vetoing H.R. 3064 because the bill, including the offsets section, is deeply flawed. It includes a misguided 0.97 percent across-the-board reduction that will hurt everything from national defense to education and environmental programs. The legislation also contains crippling cuts in key education, labor, and health priorities and undermines our capacity to manage these programs effectively. The enrolled bill delays the availability of \$10.9 billion for the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control, and other important health and social services programs, resulting in delays in important medical research and health services to low-income Americans. The bill is clearly unac-

ceptable. I have submitted a budget that would fund these priorities without spending the Social Security surplus, and I am committed to working with the Congress to identify acceptable offsets for additional spending for programs that are important to all Americans.

The bill also fails to fulfill the bipartisan commitment to raise student achievement by authorizing and financing class size reduction. It does not guarantee any continued funding for the 29,000 teachers hired with FY 1999 funds, or the additional 8,000 teachers to be hired under my FY 2000 proposal. Moreover, the bill language turns the program into a virtual block grant that could be spent on vouchers and other unspecified activities. In addition, the bill fails to fund my proposed investments in teacher quality by not funding Troops to Teachers (\$18 million) and by cutting \$35 million from my request for Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants. These programs would bring more highly qualified teachers into the schools, especially in high-poverty, high-need school districts.

The bill cuts \$189 million from my request for Title I Education for the Disadvantaged, resulting in 300,000 fewer children in low-income communities receiving needed services. The bill also fails to improve accountability or help States turn around the lowest-performing schools because it does not include my proposal to set aside 2.5 percent for these purposes. Additionally, the bill provides only \$300 million for 21st Century Community Learning Centers, only half my \$600 million request. At this level, the conference report would deny after-school services to more than 400,000 students.

The bill provides only \$180 million for GEAR UP, \$60 million below my request, to help disadvantaged students prepare for college beginning in the seventh grade. This level would serve nearly 131,000 fewer low-income students. In addition, the bill does not adequately fund my Hispanic Education Agenda. It provides no funds for the Adult Education English as a Second Language/Civics Initiative to help limited English proficient adults learn English and gain life skills necessary for successful citizenship and civil participation. The bill underfunds programs designed to improve educational outcomes