

economic growth and environmental restoration and protection.

This bill represents another important step forward for the Florida Everglades—one of America's richest treasures. Three years ago, my Administration made the Everglades one of our highest environmental priorities, establishing a special task force to coordinate Federal activities in the area. In February of this year, the Vice President announced our comprehensive program to restore the Florida Everglades. Several weeks later, I signed a Farm Bill that provided a \$200 million downpayment on Everglades restoration; it was sponsored by the Florida delegation with support from Republican and Democratic leaders in the Congress. I called on the Congress again to enact our comprehensive Everglades restoration plan.

This legislation enacts the majority of that plan, establishing the Everglades and South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Program. It directs the Secretary of the Army to work in partnership with various State and Federal agencies participating in the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force to coordinate a long-term restoration effort. It authorizes a number of projects to restore and protect the South Florida ecosystem.

After decades of decline in the Everglades, the people of South Florida and the Nation should take great pride in the steps we have taken together to bring them back. Restoration will take many years of hard work and cooperation, but we know we are on the right track.

Apart from the Everglades provisions, this legislation also includes revisions to cost sharing, which require non-Federal interests to provide a minimum of 35 percent of the costs of both flood control projects and environmental protection and restoration projects authorized in the future. I would have preferred that the non-Federal share be increased to 50 percent and that the new cost sharing apply to projects authorized in this bill. Nevertheless, the changes here represent a significant first step toward greater non-Federal participation in key water resource projects of the future. These changes also represent recognition of the need for non-Federal beneficiaries to share more fully in the cost of such projects in these times

of Federal fiscal constraints. Flood control cost-sharing provisions also require the non-Federal project sponsors to develop flood management plans that will help reduce the potential for future flood damages.

I am concerned about the potential overall Federal cost of the bill. Under existing budget constraints, many projects and initiatives authorized by this bill cannot be funded within a reasonable timeframe. Thus, such authorizations may raise unrealistic expectations for non-Federal sponsors who expect timely project initiation and completion. I am also concerned about certain provisions of the bill that assign responsibilities to the Federal Government that more appropriately belong to State and local governments or the private sector, that are inconsistent with established cost-sharing rules, or that authorize projects that are not economically justified.

On balance though, this is important legislation that will not only help save the Everglades, but also promote responsible water resources projects and programs. I appreciate the diligent efforts of all involved to produce a bill that continues the vital role of the Army Corps of Engineers in building and maintaining a strong water resources program. This legislation will continue and in many ways strengthen the Federal/non-Federal partnership principles started in 1986. It will also allow the Army Corps of Engineers to maintain an orderly program for the construction of productive water resources projects.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
October 12, 1996.

NOTE: S. 640, approved October 12, was assigned Public Law No. 104-303. This statement was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 14.

**Remarks After Signing the Wildfire
Suppression Aircraft Transfer Act of
1996 and an Exchange With
Reporters in Albuquerque**

October 14, 1996

The President. Thank you, Senator Bingaman and Congressman Richardson. I want

to thank the representatives of New Mexico's firefighting community here from the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the volunteer firefighters, the New Mexico State forestry office. And of course, we've got some folks from the Albuquerque Fire Department over there, as well.

I'm delighted to be staying here for the next few days. As you look around New Mexico you can't help being awestruck by the awesome, the breathtaking natural beauty of this State and of the entire West, the deserts, the mountains, the play of light and color. We have to do everything we can to protect the treasures of New Mexico. The beauty we see here and, indeed, throughout the West is very deep, but it's also fragile. We know that wildfires can ravage the landscape, threaten people, devastate homes and farms and businesses.

This has been the worst year for wildfires in nearly four decades. I think I need to emphasize that because that is the importance of the legislation we signed today and the efforts that these firefighters and those whom they represent have made—the worst year in almost 40 years. The brave men and women who are with us today and the thousands of their colleagues put their lives on the line to protect their fellow citizens, our natural environment, as they battle these blazes. We owe them our thanks, and we should be deeply grateful that during this past year, despite the huge rash of wildfires, not a single firefighter lost his or her life in a wildfire. That's because their training, their dedication and because of the equipment that they have been provided.

We have to make sure that they have the very best possible equipment at their disposal. We can't tolerate a situation where any firefighter is unable to protect the public or themselves because of a lack of equipment, especially the air tankers that can muster such force and power to fight fires.

The legislation I have just signed will help these and other firefighters to do a better job with more safety, especially when they're faced with wildfires. Today, the Forest Service and other agencies rely on an aging and shrinking fleet of 39 air tankers to fight fires throughout our Nation. With this measure, we allow the Department of Defense to sell

excess military aircraft to private contractors for conversion into air tankers that then can be leased to our Government to drench the fires from the sky.

This is a public-private partnership in the best sense, providing a vital service to the American public and its safety, using the skills and resources of the private sector to maintain a full fleet of modern air tankers for use by the Forest Service. It's especially fitting that this becomes law at the end of National Fire Prevention Week, a time we honor fallen firefighters and redouble our own efforts to be prudent and prevent fires from happening in the first place.

Again, I want to thank those brave men and women who are here with me today. I thank Senator Bingaman for his leadership. I thank Congressman Richardson, whose district has been especially affected. I'd also like to thank Senators Kempthorne and Craig for what they did and Senator Lott for making it possible for us to bring up this bill late in the congressional session and get it passed eventually in both Houses on a voice vote. This was a good thing for America, and I was glad to sign the bill.

Thank you very much.

1996 Election

Q. Mr. President, Newt Gingrich yesterday—

Q. Mr. President, Dole says he may make a renewed effort in California. Do you believe the race in California has tightened within 10 points?

The President. Well, I can't answer that question. I don't know. But I will say this, if California is to become a battleground in the last 3 weeks of the election, that is something that I would welcome, because I believe the people there are fundamentally fair-minded and forward-looking. And when I became President, California had the weakest economy in the country. Since I've been President, they've had to endure earthquakes and fires and floods. And in spite of all of that, they have shown a remarkable turnaround in so many areas, and I'm very proud of the partnership we have had.

No administration in history has worked as hard on so many fronts to make so much progress as we have. So if that's going to be

the issue for the last 3 weeks, I would be happy to engage in that discussion, and I believe I know how it will come out.

Q. What are you going to do if Bob Dole goes negative?

The President. I can't—I'm going to do what I always do. I'm preparing to do my debate, to answer whatever questions may be asked. As I understand it, the people who are coming are picked from undecided voters, a fairly small percentage of people who still have questions on their minds. Whatever they ask I'll do my best to answer. But Senator Dole will decide his strategy, and I will decide mine, and we'll see what the people have to say afterwards. There's nothing else to say.

I look forward to it, just as I looked forward to the last one, and the most important thing, I hope, is that it will be something that people will feel better about when it's over. Many people said to me after the last debate that they thought that it had been fundamentally positive and that people had really learned from the debate what the differences between us are and what practical impact that would have in the next 4 years. That's all any of us could hope for, and that's what I hope will come out of this debate.

Thank you.

Q. What's your reaction to Newt Gingrich, sir?

Q. Mr. President, you said FBI numbers show lowest crime rate, but here in Albuquerque we've had a record number of homicides.

Q. Any comment on Newt Gingrich?

The President. It's election time.

Q. It's a waste of time, did you say?

The President. It's election time, I said.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:03 a.m. outside the Holiday Inn Pyramid Hotel, S. 2078, the Wild-fire Suppression Aircraft Transfer Act of 1996, approved October 14, was assigned Public Law No. 104-307. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Proclamation 6941—White Cane Safety Day, 1996

October 14, 1996

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

In the summer of 1996, the remarkable display of athletic excellence at the Tenth Paralympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia, inspired viewers around the world. Athletes from across our country, including many who are blind or visually impaired, participated in these games. The tenacity and commitment to excellence that these athletes showed in Atlanta are rich resources for our Nation. From their performance in the Paralympics, and indeed from their many contributions throughout our Nation's history, blind and visually impaired Americans have demonstrated how much they have to contribute.

Individuals with disabilities, like all people, use many tools in their everyday lives, some simple and some technologically sophisticated. The tool most commonly used by blind and visually impaired people is the white cane. This basic instrument enables them to detect obstacles, steps, drop-offs, and changes in surface textures. The independence that blind and visually impaired people gain through the use of the white cane enriches their lives—and those of all Americans—by allowing them to participate fully in and contribute generously to our society.

Blind and visually impaired individuals make valuable contributions to our society and our economy. But they need more than the white cane to achieve their full potential; they also need equal opportunity and protection from discrimination. That is why we must continue to vigorously enforce the Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibits discrimination against blind and visually impaired people and those with other disabilities, and ensures them access to services that all other Americans take for granted.