

automatic guaranteed job at Cessna at high wages and good benefits.

And some of these people have very, very difficult home circumstances. They're not just—they're not taking the most well-educated people who just temporarily hit a bad patch and get on welfare. A lot of these folks are high school dropouts. Many of them are women who have been abused in a domestic setting. And they actually have a housing development across the street from the training center to give temporary housing to anybody who either doesn't have a car or has been kicked out of their house because of a violent situation.

And I'm telling you, it was the most exhilarating thing. I was introduced by two women who graduated from this program, and then I met their children. And when it was all over, I looked at the man who was with me and I said, "This is why I got into public life: to be a part of things like this, to change lives in this way, to do something that works."

And of course, having a good economy has helped. They have 1,000 more employees than they had 4 or 5 years ago. But the main thing is, it's fresh evidence that we can make the country work if we do something that makes sense and we do it together and it's consistent with our values.

So for all of you who have made any contribution to the fact that we have the lowest unemployment rate and the lowest crime rate in 24 years and the biggest drop in welfare in history, and we've grown the economy while making the air and water cleaner and the food supply safer and having fewer toxic waste dumps, that we've built more jobs but tried to help families with the family and medical leave law and tax cuts to raise their kids or adopt children or send their kids to college—I hope you'll take a lot of pride in that.

We've got a lot of challenges up the road, but at least no one in America could doubt today that we can make this country work and that when we make it work for everybody, you see the kind of profoundly humbling and awesome stories I saw in Wichita yesterday.

I'd also like to remind you that elections are contests of ideas and perceptions. And I think in a rational world, where everybody

had equal access to the voters, our party would be in better shape than it is today, because in '93 we had a big fight over the economic direction of the country, and I think the evidence says we were right and they were wrong. But they profited from it.

In '94 we had a big fight over our crime policy, and we stood up to the people who said I was going to take their guns away if we passed the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban. And I think the evidence is we were right and they were wrong.

I think the evidence is our environmental policy, our education policy, our family leave policy—all these things, I think, our party has been on the right side of history and on the right side of the basic values of America. And I think the more people like you help us to get our message out and make our points, the more you'll change America and the more, parenthetically, people will know who did what, when, and why.

So there is a direct connection between what I saw in Wichita yesterday and your presence here tonight. And we have to make a lot more of those stories in the future. And I'm very grateful to you for your role in doing that.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:44 p.m. in the Chesapeake Room at the City Club of Washington.

Statement on Signing the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1998

November 18, 1997

I have signed into law H.R. 1119, the "National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1998." This Act authorizes fiscal year 1998 appropriations for military activities of the Department of Defense, military construction, and defense activities of the Department of Energy. Although I have reservations about some provisions in this Act, it supports a large number of my Administration's defense program and policy priorities. Moreover, the conferees' revision of the bill satisfactorily addresses several onerous provisions that were included in previous versions that my Administration opposed.

This Act provides for a strong national defense, maintains high military readiness, supports our commitments to a better quality of life for our Armed Forces and their families, and authorizes investment programs necessary to modernize the equipment that our forces use. By providing the necessary support for our forces, it ensures continuing American global leadership.

The Act demonstrates that we can maintain a robust defense while achieving a balanced Federal budget. It supports a wide range of quality of life initiatives, including a 2.8 percent military pay raise, an increase in aviation officer career incentive pay, a doubling of the aviation officer career retention bonus, and increases in hazardous duty pay and the family separation allowance. I am also pleased that this Act provides resources to support most of the recommendations of the Department of Defense's Quadrennial Defense Review. In particular, it supports major procurement programs, such as the F-22 and V-22 aircraft, central to modernizing our forces for the 21st century.

The Act also provides strong support for the Chemical Demilitarization Program, crucial for implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention for which the Senate provided advice and consent to ratification earlier this year. It also provides the President new authority to call up 30,000 volunteers from the Individual Ready Reserve for active duty. This gives the Secretary of Defense greater flexibility in tailoring reserve call-ups and enables him to make greater use of the unique skills found in the Individual Ready Reserve.

I am very disappointed, however, that H.R. 1119 imposes restrictions on the Department of Defense's ability to contract with the private sector for the maintenance of weapon systems and components. Both the Quadrennial Defense Review and the Defense Reform Task Force recommended relief from current laws that constrain the Department's efforts to competitively outsource depot maintenance workload. By further restricting, rather than facilitating, such competitive outsourcing, the Act will limit the Department's flexibility to increase efficiency, preserve readiness, and save taxpayer dollars. The Act also changes the terms under which public-private competitions for work

at closing maintenance depots can be conducted. Some of these changes should prove helpful, but other changes will likely make the Department's job more difficult. Nevertheless, the Secretary of Defense has indicated that the Department has flexibility to proceed with the remaining public-private competitions in a way that is fair to both sides. The Secretary has pledged to implement the Act so as to encourage all bidders, public and private, and to do everything possible to ensure that the competitions occur on a level playing field. Such an approach will achieve my Administration's goals of strongly supporting our military forces while providing savings that can be applied to the modernization of our forces.

The Act also attempts to severely limit the President's flexibility to conduct foreign policy by mandating permanent controls on the export of certain high-performance computers to specific countries, including Israel, Russia, and China. It would limit the President's ability to adapt computer export controls to changing security needs and technology trends. The Act would impose unrealistic congressional notification, licensing, and post-shipment requirements that would have the unintended effect of decreasing our ability to identify and prevent exports affecting national security. My Administration intends to work with the Congress to pass legislation that would restore the President's flexibility on computer export controls and allow us to concentrate on preventing exports of real national security concern.

Other provisions of H.R. 1119 raise serious constitutional issues. Because of the President's constitutional role, the Congress may not prevent the President from controlling the disclosure of classified and other sensitive information by subordinate officials of the executive branch (section 1305). Because the Constitution vests the conduct of foreign affairs in the President, the Congress may not dictate the President's negotiations with foreign governments (section 1221). Nor may the Congress place in its own officers, such as the Comptroller General, the power to execute the law (section 217). These provisions will be construed and carried out in keeping with the President's constitutional responsibilities.

Finally, I am disappointed that the Act did not authorize the additional two Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) rounds that the Secretary of Defense requested. The Quadrennial Defense Review and the Secretary's Defense Reform Task Force both concluded that the Department of Defense is burdened by the excessive cost of maintaining a base infrastructure much larger than is required to support our Armed Forces. The money spent maintaining that infrastructure is badly needed for modernization of aging weapons and equipment so that our forces remain the world's best in the 21st century. I call on the Congress to support the Department of Defense request for additional BRAC rounds.

In summary, though the Act raises some concerns, it strengthens our national security by supporting my Administration's plans to modernize and prepare our Armed Forces, advances the quality of life for our forces, and helps assure continued American leadership.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
November 18, 1997.

NOTE: H.R. 1119, approved November 18, was assigned Public Law No. 105-85. This statement was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 19.

Remarks on Signing the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997

November 19, 1997

Thank you, Sue Ann. Thank you, Aaron. And I want to thank the Badeau family for showing up. I think it's fair to say it was a greater effort for them than for anyone else here. [Laughter] I appreciate the rest of your presence. It was easier for me than anybody; I just had to come downstairs. [Laughter] But I'm grateful that they're here.

Secretary Shalala, I thank you and your staff for your remarkable work on this. And I thank the members of the White House staff, all the Members of Congress who are present here. And especially I thank Senators Rockefeller and Chafee and Congressman

Camp and Kennelly for their work and for what they said here.

Congratulations to the Adoption 2002 Excellence Award winners. I thank all the advocates who are here. And I say a special word of thanks, along with all the others who have said it, to the First Lady, who has been passionately committed to this issue for at least 25 years now that I know. Thank you, Governor Romer, for coming. And thank you, Dave Thomas, for what you've done.

Again let me say to all the Members of Congress who are here, Republicans and Democrats alike, I am very grateful for what you've done. This, after all is what we got in public life for, isn't it? [Applause]

Before I make my brief remarks, if you'll forgive me and understand, I have to make one public statement today about the situation in Iraq.

As I have said before, I prefer to resolve this situation peacefully, with our friends and allies, and I am working hard to do just that. But I want to be clear again about the necessary objective of any diplomacy now underway. Iraq must comply with the unanimous will of the international community and let the weapons inspectors resume their work to prevent Iraq from developing an arsenal of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. The inspectors must be able to do so without interference. That's our top line; that's our bottom line. I want to achieve it diplomatically. But we're taking every step to make sure we are prepared to pursue whatever options are necessary.

I do not want these children we are trying to put in stable homes to grow up into a world where they are threatened by terrorists with biological and chemical weapons. It is not right.

It's hard to believe now, but it was just a little less than a year ago when I directed our administration to develop a plan to double the number of children we move from foster care to adoptive homes by the year 2002. We know that foster parents provide safe and caring families for children. But the children should not be trapped in them forever, especially when there are open arms waiting to welcome them into permanent homes.