

The Adoption and Safe Families Act, which I am about to sign, is consistent with the work of the 2002 report and our goals. It fundamentally alters our Nation's approach to foster care and adoption. And fundamentally, it will improve the well-being of hundreds of thousands of our most vulnerable children. The new legislation makes it clear that children's health and safety are the paramount concerns of our public child welfare system. It makes it clear that good foster care provides important safe havens for our children, but it is by definition a temporary, not a permanent, setting.

The new law will help us to speed children out of foster care into permanent families by setting meaningful time limits for child welfare decisions, by clarifying which family situations call for reasonable reunification efforts and which simply do not. It will provide States with financial incentives to increase the number of children adopted each year. It will ensure that adopted children with special needs never lose their health coverage—a big issue. Thank you, Congress, for doing that. It will reauthorize Federal funding for timely services to alleviate crisis before they become serious, that aid the reunification of families that help to meet post-adoption needs.

With these measures we help families stay together where reunification is possible and help find safe homes for children much more quickly when it is not. We've come together in an extraordinary example of bipartisan cooperation to meet the urgent needs of children at risk. We put our differences aside and put our children first.

This landmark legislation builds on other action taken in the last few years by Congress: the adoption tax credit I signed into law last August to make adopting children more affordable for families, especially those who adopt children with special needs; the Multiethnic Placement Act, enacted 2 years ago, ensuring that adoption is free from discrimination and delay, based on race, culture, or ethnicity; and the very first law I signed as President, the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, which enables parents to take time off to adopt a child without losing their jobs or their health insurance.

We have put in place here the building blocks of giving all of our children what should be their fundamental right—a chance at a decent, safe home; an honorable, orderly, positive upbringing; a chance to live out their dreams and fulfill their God-given capacities.

Now as we approach Thanksgiving, when families all across our country come together to give thanks for their blessings, I would like to encourage more families to consider opening their homes and their hearts to children who need loving homes. You may not want to go as far as the Badaeus have—[laughter]—but they are a shining example of how we grow—they are a shining example of how we grow when we give, how we can be blessed in return many times over. We thank them and all—all of the adoptive parents in the country.

For those who are now or have been foster or adoptive parents, I'd like to say thank you on behalf of a grateful Nation, and again say at Thanksgiving, let us thank God for our blessings and resolve to give more of our children the blessings they deserve.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:53 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Sue Ann Badeau and her adopted son, Aaron; Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado; Dave Thomas, founder and senior chairman of the board of directors, Wendy's International, Inc. H.R. 867, approved November 19, was assigned Public Law No. 105-89.

Statement on Signing the Veterans' Compensation Rate Amendments of 1997

November 19, 1997

Today I was pleased to sign into law H.R. 2367, the "Veterans' Compensation Rate Amendments of 1997."

Our Nation provides compensation payments to veterans who were disabled in service and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefits to the survivors of those who died in military service. By maintaining the real value of these payments, we honor their sacrifices.

This Act provides a 2.1 percent increase in compensation and DIC benefits, effective

December 1, 1997. This increase is the same percentage increase that Social Security beneficiaries and veterans' pension recipients will receive in January. Approximately 2.3 million veterans and over 300,000 surviving spouses and children will benefit from this increase.

Time will never erode the supreme value of our veterans' and servicemembers' efforts in defending the Nation's freedom. We also must not allow it to erode the value of our commitments to them. This legislation ensures that the worth of their richly deserved benefits keeps pace with consumer prices. As such, it maintains our obligation to those individuals whose sacrifices we will always remember.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
November 19, 1997.

NOTE: H.R. 2367, approved November 19, was assigned Public Law No. 105-98.

**Statement on Signing District of
Columbia Appropriations Legislation
November 19, 1997**

Today I am pleased to have signed into law H.R. 2607, the "District of Columbia Appropriations Act, 1998."

I am particularly pleased that the Act provides sufficient funding to implement the National Capital Revitalization and Self-Government Improvement Act of 1997 (Revitalization Act), which includes the main elements of the plan for the District of Columbia that I proposed in my 1998 budget in February. That plan, which was the most comprehensive plan that any Administration had ever proposed for the District, was designed to achieve two goals: to revitalize Washington, D.C., as the Nation's capital and to improve prospects for "home rule" to succeed. The Congress adopted the Revitalization Act as part of the historic balanced budget agreement that I signed into law last summer. Now, with this 1998 appropriations bill, the Congress has provided the funds to implement it.

The Act also drops several of the objectionable micro-management and other provi-

sions in the original House-passed version of the bill such as Federal funding for private school vouchers, the requirement to reopen Pennsylvania Avenue, the limitation on public assistance payments, the prohibition on Treasury borrowing authority for the District, and restrictions on the District's authority to make improvements in its financial management system.

The Act continues to contain abortion language that would prohibit the use of Federal and District funds to pay for abortions except in cases in which the life of the mother is endangered or in situations involving rape or incest. The continued prohibition on the use of local funds is an unwarranted intrusion into the affairs of the District.

In addition, the Act makes important changes to last year's immigration bill by offering more generous treatment to Central Americans than was available under that bill. These changes make good on the pledge I made during my trip to Central America last spring. Nevertheless, I have several concerns. First, I am troubled by the differences in relief offered to similarly situated persons. I believe, however, that these differences can be minimized in the implementation process. I therefore am asking the Attorney General to consider the ameliorative purposes of this legislation and the unique history and circumstances of the people covered by it in giving effect to its provisions. Second, I believe that similar relief should be made available to Haitians and will seek a legislative solution for this group. Finally, I ask the Congress to revisit its decision to continue to apply some of the harsher rules under last year's immigration bill to other persons with pending immigration cases who are not covered by H.R. 2607. I commend to the public my statement of November 14 for a further discussion of these issues.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
November 19, 1997.

NOTE: H.R. 2607, approved November 19, was assigned Public Law No. 105-100.