

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SEPTEMBER 30, 1976

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I am today signing H.R. 14846, the Military Construction Authorization Act for fiscal year 1977. H.R. 14846 provides a comprehensive construction program for fiscal year 1977 keyed to recognized military requirements.

Three months ago, I vetoed its predecessor, H.R. 12384, because it contained highly objectionable provisions that would have delayed for at least a year almost any action to close or realign a major military installation. Such unnecessary delay would have wasted defense dollars which are needed to strengthen our military capabilities and would also have substantially limited my powers as Commander-in-Chief over our military installations. This was obviously unacceptable and Congress sustained my veto.

The bill which I am signing today represents a substantial compromise on behalf of the Congress and refreshes my faith in the system of checks and balances established by our Constitution. The requirement of a year's delay which I vetoed has been replaced in H.R. 14846 by a sixty-day waiting period. While I believe that current procedures provide adequate time for the Congress and other interested parties to review base realignment actions, the sixty-day waiting period represents a compromise which I accept.

Since the sixty-day delay is imposed after the completion of required studies and the announcement of the official realignment decision, further delay would waste essential defense resources. Thus, I am directing the Secretary of Defense to implement realignment plans at the conclusion of this sixty-day period.

Finally, my concern for the economic difficulties faced by individuals and communities affected by defense realignments is well-known. On July 12 of this year, I directed the heads of twenty Federal departments and agencies to strengthen their efforts to deal with all aspects of the problem. It should be noted that concerned departments and agencies have worked effectively with 136 communities in forty States over the past 6 years and have achieved notable results.

I am equally committed, however, to the principle that our economic adjustment efforts in communities affected by realignments must remain separate from national defense decisions to realign military installations. This legislation does not make base realignment decisions contingent upon the economic impact such decisions may have upon communities where affected bases are located. In this regard, the Senate Committee report on this bill states:

"... the decision to close or reduce a military installation must be based on military necessity with due regard for

more

environmental impact. Military bases cannot be maintained to support other than national defense requirements."

In summary, H.R. 14846 provides a satisfactory and much needed military construction program for fiscal year 1977. I am confident that the bill will enable us to meet our essential military requirements in a responsible and cost-effective manner.

#