

Weekly Compilation of PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

Week Ending Saturday, January 9, 1971

Bill To Provide Special Retirement Benefits to Federal Firefighters

The President's Memorandum of Disapproval.
January 4, 1971

I have withheld my approval from S. 578, a bill which would provide special retirement benefits to Federal firefighters.

This bill would enable Federal firefighters to retire earlier than most other Federal employees, on the grounds that their duties are especially hazardous. While I am appreciative of the daily skill, devotion to duty and courage shown by these firefighters, I do not believe that this preferential legislation is wise or justifiable. Certain aspects of the enrolled bill cause me serious concern.

—Federal firefighters already receive compensation for the hazards of their work in the form of higher levels of pay and higher retirement benefits.

—there is no demonstrated need for permitting Federal firefighters to retire at an earlier than normal age. Civil Service retirement laws have limited early retirement only to those occupations such as law enforcement, in which there is a unique need to maintain a young work force. This is not the case with Federal firefighters who, because they work in a controlled environment and are exposed to a lower incidence of fires, do not face the same degree of hazard as employees of municipal fire departments many of whom are eligible for early retirement.

—the bill would be an unwarranted extension of an undesirable and inequitable practice by providing preferential treatment through the retirement system to one particular group of employees with hazardous duties, when there are many other Federal employees whose occupations subject them to severe hazards but who would not be eligible for the benefits of this legislation.

I believe that barring compelling reasons for divergence, a generally uniform policy for all Federal retirement programs is desirable, equitable and just. I do not feel that in the case of Federal firefighters such divergence from this policy is warranted.

Therefore, I am unable to approve S. 578.

RICHARD NIXON

East Pakistan Disaster Relief

Statement by the President Upon Announcing Increase of United States Grant of Food Grain to Pakistan.
January 4, 1971

The aftermath of the disaster that struck East Pakistan over a month ago continues to be a matter of deep concern. It was probably the worst natural disaster of this century, if not of recorded history, and the survivors still need help. As part of an international effort, this Government has contributed substantially to meeting initial emergency relief requirements. So far the United States has provided over \$9 million in emergency relief assistance, including food, clothing, medical supplies, and associated transport and delivery services. U.S. helicopters in East Pakistan have airlifted over a million pounds of supplies directly to the disaster area.

Now that the immediate emergency requirements have been met, we are turning our full attention to sustaining the lives of the disaster victims and to aid them to once again lead productive lives.

Many of the survivors have lost virtually all of their possessions. Unless given the means to provide for themselves and to protect themselves they may yet perish. Hundreds of thousands of tons of food grains have also been lost, and unless there is substantial help from abroad there will be an even greater human tragedy in East Pakistan.