

VETO OF H.R. 3161

MESSAGE

FROM

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

VETOING

H.R. 3161, AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 5, UNITED STATES CODE,
TO IMPROVE THE BASIC WORKWEEK OF FIREFIGHTING
PERSONNEL OF EXECUTIVE AGENCIES, AND FOR OTHER
PURPOSES



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To the House of Representatives :

I am returning, without my approval, H.R. 3161, a bill which would substantially reduce the workweek for Federal firefighters, while maintaining their pay at nearly the present level. I have three principal objections to this bill. First, this measure would reduce firefighters' workweek without reducing the premium pay which was designed for a longer standby schedule. In effect, it would raise firefighters' total hourly pay by more than 15 percent. If only the basic hourly pay is considered, without overtime pay, the increase is almost 30 percent. I do not believe this is justified, particularly in the light of the 5.5 percent pay cap I have recommended for Federal employees as part of my efforts to hold down inflation. Moreover, the length of the workweek for Federal firefighters must be considered in light of the nature of their duty. Fires tend to be less frequent at Federal installations than in urban areas. Comparatively, there is a very low incidence of fire and there are very few severe fires.

Second, H.R. 3161 would impair the ability of agency heads to manage the work force and regulate the workweek.

Third, H.R. 3161 would require the Department of Defense alone to hire 4,600 additional employees, at an annual cost of \$46.7 million, just to maintain existing fire protection. These additional personnel and payroll measures are unacceptable.

I am very proud of the superb record of Federal firefighters at our military installations. I know them to be hard-working and dedicated. The evidence is not compelling, however, that they are unfairly treated in matters of pay and length of workweek. And in extending unwarranted advantages to them, H.R. 3161 offends the ideals of fairness that should guide this administration. I am not prepared to accept its preferential approach.

JIMMY CARTER.

THE WHITE HOUSE, *June 19, 1978.*