36 Special Message to the Congress Urging Passage of the West Coast Dock Strike Resolution and the Crippling Strikes Prevention Act. *February 2, 1972*

To the Congress of the United States:

As the dock strike on the West Coast continues to impose a cruel and intolerable burden upon the American people, I appeal once again to the Congress for emergency action to end these transportation disputes.

There are now two bills before the Congress dealing with transportation stoppages, and immediate action is urgently required on both:

—S.J. Resolution 187, which would quickly halt the West Coast strike and lead to a fair and early settlement under binding arbitration.

—And the Crippling Strikes Prevention Act, S. 560, which would grant the executive branch sufficient authority so that future disruptions in the transportation industry could be averted.

The American public is rightly frustrated today by the inaction of Congress in ending the West Coast strike. Some crops are rotting while others are stalled in their bins, export customers are looking for more dependable trading partners, and jobs and businesses are threatened with extinction. Tens of thousands of people, who share no part of this dispute, are suffering needlessly.

Yet our Government stands idly by, paralyzed because the executive branch has exhausted all available remedies and a majority in the Congress has been unwilling to enact necessary legislation. This failure to act in time of need speaks directly to the question of why some Americans have lost confidence in their government.

We must act now, swiftly and decisively. Twelve days ago I proposed special legislation to end this strike and asked for enactment within a week. That deadline has passed without a response, and I must report to the American people today that I cannot predict when relief will come. To say that I am disappointed is to state the case in its mildest terms.

For those who argue that the Government should not interfere with collective bargaining, the short answer is that the bargaining in this case has thus far failed—and failed badly for 15 months. I share the belief that Government ordinarily should not tamper with the freedom of bargaining, but when the processes have broken down and the Nation's health and safety are at stake we in public office have no right to turn our heads.

I am also aware that some members of Congress believe this strike will soon be settled at the bargaining table. I sincerely

hope they are right, and I urge the parties to continue their bargaining, but the 15 months of fruitless bargaining which have already passed convince me that we cannot depend on this solution.

Issues of Great Urgency

In the absence of an agreement, the critical question is whether all of us in Washington sense the urgency of these issues. I can assure you that the farmer whose grain is wasting away and the exporter who has lost his contract regard this strike as a matter of utmost urgency, and I plead with the Congress to recognize their plight.

For two years I have been trying to impress upon the Congress the need for new legislation in this field. In 1970, during the 91st Congress, and again in 1971 during the 92nd Congress, I proposed the comprehensive crippling strikes prevention program so that future transportation stoppages could be resolved. There has been precious little affirmative response. Yet I am confident that if the Congress had enacted those measures, there might have been no strike on the West Coast and the issues in dispute would have been fairly settled.

Let us resolve that this stoppage on the West Coast will be the last of its kind. The Congress should act immediately to end the West Coast strike and, with utmost dispatch, pass the Crippling Strikes Prevention Act.

The Crippling Strikes Prevention Act

Certainly the more far-reaching of the two proposals on which I am seeking action is the Crippling Strikes Prevention Act. It would give the President additional—and, in my opinion, essential—new authority to deal with emergency disputes in the railroad, airline, maritime, longshore, and trucking industries.

First, it would discontinue the emergency strike provisions of the Railway Labor Act of 1926 and provide that all transportation disputes be settled under the Taft-Hartley Act. Currently, disputes in the railroad and airline industries are subject to the Railway Labor Act while all other emergency transportation disputes are governed by the Taft-Hartley Act. Of the two acts, the railway labor law is clearly the inferior. Under it, the President can delay a strike or lockout for 60 days by appointing an Emergency Board to study the issues and recommend a settlement. Unfortunately, these provisions only seem to discourage hard bargaining because the parties are hesitant to compromise their position before the Board is appointed, and then, recognizing that the Board will probably seek a middle position, the parties tend to adopt a more extreme stance in order to pull the Board in their direction. Thus the gap widens between the disputants and because neither the Board nor the President has any additional authority, strikes often resume at the end of the 60-day period. These resumptions have occurred at the rate of more than one per year since 1947, and four times during this administration alone I have been forced to ask Congress for special legislation. This is a sorry record, best consigned to our history books.

Three New Options

Secondly, I propose a major revision of the Taft-Hartley Act to give the President three new options in the case of all emer-

gency disputes in the transportation industry. Under current provisions of this Act, the President may appoint a Board of Inquiry when he believes that a work stoppage imperils the Nation's health or safety. Upon receiving a report from the Board on the status of the strike, the President may direct the Attorney General to petition a Federal District Court to enjoin the strike for an 80-day "cooling-off" period. But there the formal authority of the Federal Government ends: the Board of Inquiry may issue no recommendation on a settlement and the President has no additional options when the 80-day period elapses except to ask for emergency legislation. On nine of 30 occasions when this machinery has been invoked since 1947, a strike or lockout has resumed after the 80-day period, as it has now on the West Coast.

To permit a more flexible Federal response, I propose that the President be granted three options when the "cooling-off" period fails to produce a settlement:

—First, he could extend the period for 30 days, a most useful device if the dispute seems to be near an end.

—Secondly, he could require partial operation of the troubled industry, so that those segments essential to the national health or safety could be kept in operation for an additional 180 days.

—Or thirdly, he could invoke a "final offer selection" procedure whereby the final offers of each party would be submitted to a neutral panel. This panel would select, without amendment, the most reasonable of the offers as the final and binding contract between the parties. Unlike bargaining which now occurs under the Railway Labor Act or under arbitration, this approach would encourage the parties to narrow their positions so that they could persuade the panel of their reasonableness. Thus genuine negotiations and settlement would be encouraged automatically.

Among the additional features of this proposal is the establishment of a National Special Industries Commission to conduct a two-year study of labor relations in industries which are especially subject to national emergency disputes.

As I informed the Congress two years ago, the Crippling Strikes Prevention Act creates a balance between two cherished but sometimes inconsistent principles: the protection of the national health and safety against damaging work stoppages, and the protection of collective bargaining from interference by the Government. "Ideally," I said then, "we would provide maximum public protection with minimum Federal interference."

Without doubt, my proposal would tip the present scales back in the direction of greater protection for the public, but we must face up to the hard realities that the old way simply has not worked. The scales, in fact, have been heavily weighted against the public. The actions I propose would not only correct the balance but would also preserve and enhance the processes of collective bargaining.

The West Coast Dispute

The present tie-up on the West Coast vividly illustrates why we need the Crippling Strikes Prevention Act. Both the failure of negotiations and the resulting economic losses have been a painful lesson for us all.

Talks and negotiations between the parties have dragged on for 15 months,

and I have used every remedy at my command, but to no avail. The Taft-Hartley machinery has been tried, and it has failed. Two extensions in time have been arranged by Government mediators, and twice the mediators' efforts have fallen short. And I have met personally with the parties. Yet this strike has resumed. In my view, it is abundantly clear that present legislation is inadequate and that we need comprehensive solutions.

Only now are we beginning to realize the full damages of the first 100-day strike which closed down the West Coast ports between July 1 and October 9, 1971. I recounted some of these losses to the Congress in my message 12 days ago, but the facts bear emphasis:

—It is estimated that American exports would have been $600 million higher during this 100-day period except for the work stoppage.

—The strike was particularly hard on our farmers, who have been exporting the product of one cropland acre out of four. During the June–September period, farm exports from the West Coast dropped from $288 million in the same period in 1970 to $73 million in 1971.

—Wheat farmers suffered the worst calamities of all, as their sales to major Far Eastern markets fell off drastically. Japan, for instance, purchases over 50 percent of her wheat from the United States. Since April, we have lost sales to Japan of at least 25 million bushels of wheat valued at $40 million. Ominously, the day after the strike resumed last month, the Japanese purchased 8.7 million bushels of wheat for a spring delivery, but only 1.6 million bushels were bought from the United States.

—Our merchant fleet also sustained heavy losses, as did exporters of vegetables, rice, cotton, and livestock, and wood products, and numerous related industries.

Appalling Human Costs

Overall, the 100-day strike thrust a spike into our progress toward economic recovery, threatened our balance of payments, and undermined the confidence of foreign buyers who need to rely upon dependable deliveries. But the most appalling costs were in human terms—those tens of thousands who were not parties to the dispute but suffered because of it.

Those same people are suffering needlessly again, as the costs of resuming the strike begin to mount. I met yesterday with the Governors of California and Washington, whose States along with Oregon lost an estimated total of $29.5 million a day during the 100-day strike, and they have reported to me that the cost of this resumption is intolerable to their economies. The State of Hawaii is also beginning to feel the punishment. If the strike persists for several weeks, we can anticipate a significant increase in unemployment on the West Coast and huge financial losses for many people across the country.

We can and must end this dispute. Because the parties have already been bargaining under different ground rules for many months, I do not think it would be fair or wise in this case to impose the "final offer selection" solution which I am proposing in the more comprehensive Crippling Strikes Prevention Act. I also see no merit in another "cooling-off" ex-

tension, because it offers little hope of resolution and it only increases the uncertainty in foreign markets. Instead, I urge the adoption of a plan for settlement by arbitration. As I explained to the Congress 12 days ago, I am asking that a three-member arbitration board be appointed by the Secretary of Labor to hear all the issues and then issue a settlement that would be binding for at least 18 months. No strike or lockout would be permitted from the day this legislation is enacted until the expiration of the binding settlement established by the board.

I strongly favor free collective bargaining, but the time has come for decisive action. I call upon the Congress to take such action on both this emergency bill and the Crippling Strikes Prevention Act.

RICHARD NIXON

The White House,
February 2, 1972.

NOTE: On the same day, the White House released a fact sheet and the transcript of a news briefing on the message. Participants in the news briefing were Laurence H. Silberman, Under Secretary of Labor, and Clark MacGregor, Counsel to the President for Congressional Relations.

On February 1, 1972, the White House released the transcript of a news briefing by Governors Ronald Reagan of California and Daniel J. Evans of Washington and Secretary of Labor James D. Hodgson on the dock strike and the proposed legislation, after the Governors had met with the President.