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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

August 8, 1972

Dear Mr. Chairman:

During the last three and one-half years, I have often had occasion to lay before you my thoughts on issues important to our foreign policy and national security. Once again I wish to express my serious concern over a matter which could have a significant impact upon our attempts to bring an honorable and lasting peace to Southeast Asia, the question of a Laotian expenditure ceiling for Fiscal Year 1973.

Last year the North Vietnamese launched their largest effort ever to defeat the Royal Laotian Government. The ceiling on expenditures which the Congress had included in the Military Procurement Act complicated and made much more difficult the efforts of the Government of Laos to thwart that offensive.

It is clear that Laos has no aggressive intent. It is the North Vietnamese aggression in Laos and use of the trail system through southern Laos to support their forces in Cambodia and South Vietnam which have created the need for the Royal Laotian Government's defensive efforts. A ceiling on expenditures for Laos will merely restrict the ability of Laos to defend itself. It will not inhibit the North Vietnamese aggression. Indeed, the imposition of a ceiling in Fiscal Year 1973 will be an additional temptation to the North Vietnamese to try once more to defeat Laos. A ceiling would place limitations upon the timeliness, flexibility, and size of the response which the Royal Laotian Government could mount to defend itself and would increase the prospects of North Vietnamese success.

On file NSC release  
instructions apply.

Until Hanoi negotiates a just peace, its victims must be able to defend themselves effectively. The Administration program of \$429 million represents an efficient and economic allocation of resources to meet the expected threat. It is unlikely that amount will be exceeded. Nevertheless, imposing a ceiling -- even one which would not be exceeded in any event -- would encourage the North Vietnamese leaders to launch new attacks, and could serve to delay meaningful negotiations.

The Administration will administer and control the funds authorized and appropriated by the Congress with great care. There is no desire nor intent to increase our involvement in Laos. But the freedom to apply those resources quickly and flexibly to meet changes in the military situation is essential if Laos is to survive North Vietnamese aggression and if the resources made available are to be used to best effect.

For all these reasons I urge that no ceiling on expenditures for Laos be included in the Military Procurement Act of 1972.

Sincerely,



Honorable John Stennis  
Chairman, Armed Services Committee  
United States Senate

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