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HEALTH CARE -
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**PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON
REMARKS ON HEALTH CARE PRIORITIES
THE WHITE HOUSE
September 8, 1999**

Acknowledgments: Dr. Lanny Copeland and his wife, Mica [MY-ka]; Secs. Shalala and Herman; Surgeon Gen. Satcher; OPM Director LaChance.

Dr. Copeland is too modest to brag on his own children to all of you. But I just learned that his youngest daughter, who just started college about a week ago, is such a fine student she's already been guaranteed admission to medical school. I think that's wonderful.

You know, I've heard that there are doctors who have real reservations about their children going into medicine these days. They feel that for all the miracles of modern medicine, in today's health care system, doctors are often hamstrung by accountants and the needs of patients don't always come first. But the truth is, Dr. Copeland is overjoyed that his daughter Mary Anne is going to be a doctor. Why? Because he knows that we have the power to do what it takes to put patients first once again.

There are plenty of pessimists who say that there's very little chance for bipartisan progress on health care this fall. Well, I believe we're going to prove the pessimists wrong. After years and years of debate and often sharp disagreements, a bipartisan consensus is finally emerging. A consensus on the importance of strengthening and modernizing Medicare ... giving patients the health and privacy protections they need ... saving teenagers from the ravages of tobacco addiction ... expanding health coverage for disadvantaged children and disabled adults ... making long-term care more affordable. With many of these priorities, we finally have the votes from both Democrats and Republicans to pass strong legislation.

But let's be frank: This emerging consensus will amount to little if Republican leadership will not schedule the votes on important health care legislation. If the Republican leaders permit the votes, this fall can bring the most important health care reforms in decades. But if they do nothing but delay, they will only make the eventual cures harder to achieve. To me it's the same simple choice familiar to every doctor: proactive, preventative medicine now – or expensive, last-minute interventions later. The American people are counting on the Republican leaders to make the responsible choice.

First, we are counting on the Republican leaders to make the responsible choice to protect the 160 million Americans who rely on managed care – with a strong, enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights. In August, Reps. Dingell and Norwood introduced a strong, bipartisan Patients' Bill of Rights that now has the support of 221 Members. Republican leaders owe it to the American people to schedule a vote on this bill and on a similar bipartisan bill now waiting in the Senate. They owe the American people the right to see a specialist. The right to go to the nearest emergency room. The right to maintain the same doctor during a pregnancy or chemotherapy treatment. The right to an internal and external review process. The right to know that their doctor can openly discuss the best treatment options, not just the cheapest. The right to seek remedies when they are hurt by bad decisions.

More than 200 medical and health-care organizations strongly support these protections. The Congressional Budget Office says the protections would cost no more than two dollars per month per policy. There is absolutely no excuse for not passing the Patients' Bill of Rights. We know our families have the need. We know our Congress finally has summoned the bipartisan support. The Republican leadership must schedule a vote in the House and in the Senate on the bipartisan Patients' Bill of Rights. We cannot tolerate legislative gimmicks designed to weigh down these good, bipartisan bills with unnecessary provisions designed to reduce their chance of passage. And we will not tolerate further delays.

Second, we are counting on the Republican leaders to make the responsible choice to strengthen and modernize Medicare for the 21st century. For more than three decades, Medicare has been a lifeline to a dignified retirement, enriched the lives of the disabled, and eased the financial burdens on families as they cared for their loved ones. But with people living longer than ever and the retirement of the Baby Boomers approaching, the Medicare trust fund will become insolvent by 2015. So I have challenged the Congress to dedicate more than \$320 billion of our budget surplus for 10 years to extend the life of the trust fund from 2015 to 2027. I have challenged the Congress to introduce more modern mechanisms of competition – not only to improve quality, but to control costs in ways that have worked for the private sector. And I have challenged the Congress to modernize Medicare by helping seniors pay for the prescription drugs that have become essential to modern medicine.

Before the August recess, Sen. Roth conducted very constructive hearings on Medicare reform in the Senate Finance Committee. This was an important first step – and I encourage the Committee to pick up where it left off as soon as possible. There is ample room for bipartisan agreement. There is no reason why Congress cannot hold votes on a comprehensive Medicare reform package this year. Instead of squandering our surplus on bloated tax cuts, let's save our children from shouldering a great burden when we Baby Boomers retire. Let's work together to save Medicare.

Third, we are counting on the Republican leaders to make the responsible choice to allow people with disabilities to keep their health insurance when they go to work. In June, the Senate unanimously passed legislation sponsored by Sens. Jeffords, Kennedy, Roth, and Moynihan that would finally end the crazy system that says to people with disabilities: If you want to work, you have to give up your health insurance. Now it is time for the Republican leaders to schedule a vote on the comparable bill in the House. On this issue, I know we can all agree: No one should ever have to choose between keeping health care and taking a job.

Fourth, we are counting on the Republican leaders to make the responsible choice to protect the sanctity of medical records. As more of our medical records are stored electronically, the threats to our privacy increase. We know that protecting medical records has been a priority for both parties – but it is now high time to turn priority into product. The long-standing deadline for action by Congress came and went more than two weeks ago.

If Congress does not pass legislation to protect patient records, I will take executive action to put forward new protections this fall. In doing so, we will fulfill our obligation under the Kassebaum-Kennedy law passed three years ago. More important, we will be able to say to our families: Your medical information belongs to you, and you alone. Only you can control how that information is used.

Fifth, we are counting on the Republican leaders to make the responsible choice to prevent yet another generation of children from being lured into smoking. More than 400,000 Americans die each year from smoking-related diseases and almost 90 percent of them started smoking as teenagers. My budget takes an important step to reduce youth smoking by raising the price of cigarettes by 55 cents a pack. Numerous studies confirm that raising the price of cigarettes is one of the most effective ways to prevent kids from starting to smoke.

Raising the price of cigarettes is not only good health policy; it's good fiscal policy. For even as it helps to save lives, it will help to save the Social Security trust fund – and allow us to honor our abiding commitment to our parents and grandparents. For both these reasons, Congress should side with America's families and not the tobacco lobby. We cannot allow yet another opportunity to save lives go up in smoke.

Sixth, we are counting on the Republican leaders to make the responsible choice to expand health coverage for disadvantaged children. Two years ago, as part of our historic balanced budget agreement, Members of both parties worked together to set aside the resources so states can cover as many as five million new children. Today, I am proud to announce that we have just approved children's health plans submitted by Washington and Wyoming – and now every state has joined this initiative.

Unfortunately, even with full participation from the states, there are still millions of children who are eligible for help have not yet received it. So today, I call on Congress to fully fund my plan to help the states reach out to all the parents of eligible children. We started this together. Now let's make it work together.

Seventh, we are counting on the Republican leaders to make the responsible choice to help families coping with the strains and expenses of long-term care. In my balanced budget, I proposed a tax credit for the elderly, ailing, or disabled, and the families who care for them – and it has received support from Sen. Roth and other Republicans. Long-term care will become a bigger and bigger challenge as America ages. The Republican leaders must make long-term care a part of any tax cut they pass this fall.

Finally, we are counting on the Republican leaders to make the responsible choice to invest in public health. I'm talking about investing the resources to begin closing the devastating health disparities we see in Indian, African-American, Hispanic, and other minority communities. I'm talking about investing in treating and preventing mental illness. I'm talking about investing in the National Institutes of Health and Centers for Disease Control.

Conventional wisdom says that this list of health care priorities is too ambitious and that the parties are hopelessly at odds. Well I say, the conventional wisdom is wrong. Out in America, health care has never been a partisan issue. When you show up at an emergency room, no one wants to know whether you're a Republican or a Democrat. But even in Washington, we're now seeing the mood change. We're seeing that the bipartisan consensus for responsible change is building by the day.

So I share Dr. Copeland's optimism for the future his daughter will inherit when she becomes a doctor. And I believe we will make meaningful progress toward that future this year. The bipartisan votes are there on so many of the priorities that matter to our families. Now, we just need the majority

leaders to heed the will of this growing majority in Congress. We need them to make the same commitment to bipartisan progress that their own members are making. We need them to see this time of prosperity for what it truly is – the most remarkable opportunity ever to cure our health care system for the long term. We must seize this opportunity together. Thank you and God bless you.

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**PRESIDENT CLINTON CHALLENGES THE CONGRESS TO PASS A BIPARTISAN
HEALTH CARE AGENDA THIS FALL**
September 8, 1999

Today, at a White House event with a practicing family physician from Georgia, the President urged the Congress to make this fall a time of constructive achievement, not destructive politics and to pass the health care quality and coverage initiatives that have long been on the nation's agenda. The President unveiled a "health care checklist" detailing the work that still needs to be done, including passing: (1) a strong, enforceable, Patients' Bill of Rights; (2) Medicare reforms that strengthen and modernize the program; (3) long overdue medical records privacy protections; (4) health care options that empower Americans with disabilities to work free from concern over being uninsured; (5) legislation to increase the price of cigarettes and decrease the number of children who smoke; (6) increased funds for children's health insurance outreach; (7) critical provisions that provide Americans in need of long term care services or their caregivers financial assistance and support services; and (8) additional funds for essential public health priorities, such as biomedical research, mental health services, and Indian Health Services.

As he called on the Congress to move ahead, the President announced that he would take every administrative action possible in order to promote this important health care agenda. Today, the President announced that this fall, the Administration will release a proposed regulation to protect medical records privacy. He also announced that with today's approval of the Children's Health Insurance Programs (CHIP) in Washington and Wyoming, all 50 states and every territory now have an approved CHIP program.

URGED THE CONGRESS TO MAKE THE FALL A SEASON OF HEALTH CARE LEGISLATIVE ACHIEVEMENTS. Underscoring the fact that there are numerous health care initiatives that have been considered for extensive periods of time and now have broad-based bipartisan support, the President challenged the Congress to pass:

- ✓ **The bipartisan Norwood-Dingell Patients' Bill of Rights, without weakening or harmful amendments.** Noting that the Norwood-Dingell Patients' Bill of Rights already has a bipartisan majority in the House, the President urged Speaker Hastert to schedule a vote on this broadly supported legislation. He noted that over 200 health care and consumer organizations, including the AMA, have already endorsed this legislation and outlined his opposition to provisions that water down or threaten the bipartisan support it has already achieved.
- ✓ **Medicare reforms which strengthen and modernize the program.** The President praised Finance Committee Chairman Roth (R-DE) and ranking member Moynihan (D-NY) for committing to mark-up a Medicare reform package early this fall. He urged Chairman Roth to maintain this timetable and pass a strong, bipartisan initiative that will make the program more competitive, provide adequate financing to extend the life of the trust fund, and modernize the benefit package, including the provision of a long overdue and optional prescription drug benefit.

- ✓ **Legislation protecting the privacy of medical records.** The President noted that the statutory deadline for Congress to pass legislation in this area expired in August. He stated that he would uphold his commitment, made in the State of the Union Address, to release statutorily authorized regulations in the absence of Congressional action by no later than this fall. Although disappointed with the lack of action by the Congress, the President did continue to encourage Congress to pass bipartisan legislation in this area in order to provide broader authority in this area.
- ✓ **The Jeffords-Kennedy-Roth-Moynihan Work Incentives Improvement Act.** This legislation, which would enable individuals with disabilities to go to work without losing their eligibility for Medicare and Medicaid, passed the Senate by a unanimous vote. The legislation already has bipartisan support and has been cosponsored by over 230 members of the House. The President also urged Speaker Hastert to immediately schedule a vote on this historic legislation.
- ✓ **Legislation to increase funding for children's health insurance outreach and provide critical health insurance coverage to eligible legal immigrants.** The President urged the Congress to pass his proposal to increase funding for outreach activities by extending the life of and uses of the \$500 million fund for TANF-Medicaid outreach. He also called on Congress to restore Medicaid eligibility to legal immigrant children, pregnant women, and SSI recipients. As he urged Congress to act to improve our success in covering children, the President announced the approval of the CHIP programs in Washington and Wyoming. With this announcement, all 50 states and every territory now have an approved CHIP program.
- ✓ **Legislation to increase the price of cigarettes and decrease the number of children who smoke.** The President reiterated the unacceptable fact that more than 400,000 Americans die each year from smoking related diseases and that almost 90 percent of them started smoking as teenagers. He pointed out that increasing the cost of cigarettes is not only one of the most effective ways to prevent kids from starting to smoke, it is good fiscal policy. This is because revenue raised by this increase will help save the Social Security Trust Fund and maintain our commitment to the nation's parents and children.
- ✓ **Critically important long-term care initiative.** The President urged the Congress to pass a long-term care initiative to provide financial assistance, social support services, and new long-term care options to millions of Americans. Over five million Americans have significant limitations due to illness or disability and thus require long-term care. The President challenged the Congress to include these provisions in any tax bill they pass.
- ✓ **Additional funds for critical public health priorities.** The President urged the Congress to fund critical public health priorities, including new investments in biomedical and practice based research, mental health services, and the Indian Health Service. He pointed out that these programs have traditionally received broad based, bipartisan support and emphasized that this year should be no different.