

Juvenile Diabetes

Remarks in a Conversation on Medicare in Lansing, Michigan,
July 22, 1999

The President. Thank you, and good morning. I would like to begin by saying I am honored to be here. I thank all of you for coming. Somebody fell out of the chair—are you all right? [Laughter] I wish I had a nickel for every time I've done that. [Laughter] You okay now? Good.

Well, this is appropriate. I want to thank your attorney general, Jennifer Granholm, [p.1454] for joining us; and Mayor Hollister, the State legislators, county commissioners, and city council members who are here. And I thank President Anderson of the Lansing Community College for making me feel so welcome here.

I love community colleges, and I'm going to go visit with some of the students after I finish here, and I'm going to tell them they should also be for this. The younger they are the more strongly they should feel about this, what we're trying to do here.

I would like to thank our sponsors today, the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare—the president Martha McSteen; the executive vice president, Max Richtman, are here. I thank the National Council of Senior Citizens and their executive director, Steve Protulis, who is here. The Older Women's League National Board president, Betty Lee Ongley; Judith Lee of the Older Women's League; John D'Agistino of the Michigan State Council of Senior Citizens.

I'd also like to thank in her absence your Congresswoman, Debbie Stabenow, who was going to come with me today, but they're voting on an issue which is very critical to whether we can do what I hope to do with Medicare. But she has been a wonderful supporter of our efforts to preserve Medicare and to add the prescription drug benefit. And I know she did a study here in this district on seniors' prescription drug options and cost, and some of you may have been responsible for the position she is now taking in Washington. But I am very, very grateful for it. And I know Debbie's mother, Ann Greer, is here. So I thank her for coming.

And let me say to all of you—and I want to thank Jane for doing this. You know, I met her about 3 minutes ago, and I—she's got to come out here with me and do this program. And I think the odds are she'll do better than I will. [Laughter] So I'm not worried.

Let me say, today I want to have this opportunity to talk with all of you—we have people of all ages here—about the great national debate going on not only in Washington but in our country, a debate that we never thought we'd be having. You know, I came to Lansing first when I was running for President in 1992, and the people of Michigan have been very good to me and to Hillary and to Vice President and Mrs. Gore. I'm very grateful for that.

But it occurred to me if I had come here in '92, and I'd say, "I want you to support me because if you do we've got a \$290 billion deficit today, but I'll be back here in 6 years and we'll talk about what to do with the surplus." Now, I think it's fair to say that if I had said that people would have said, "He seems like a nice young man, but he's terribly out of touch"—[laughter]—"he doesn't have any idea what he's talking about. This guy is too far gone to have this job." But that's what we're doing here.

The President. Well, if it was up to me, I would remove the age limits, the earnings limits on Social Security recipients, because I think that's another good thing they ought to do. But it ought to be voluntary; you shouldn't have to do it just to pay for your medicine.

I promised the lady over there who said most of the people who lived in your place were single. Now, keep in mind, we start out with the premium of \$24 a month, and that premium covers half the prescription drug costs, up to \$2,000 a year. It will go eventually to a premium of about \$44 a month that will cover half prescription drug costs up to \$5,000 a year. And I think it's important to get up above \$2,000, because a lot of people really do have big-time drug costs.

Now, the people who wouldn't have to pay the premium or the co-pay are people below 135 percent of poverty. That's \$14,000 for a couple, but \$11,000 for individuals. That's a lot of folks. And then, if you're up to \$12,750 for an individual or \$17,000 for a couple, your costs would be phased in, so there would be some benefit there.

But nearly everybody would be better off unless they have a good—the only plans that are better than this, by and large, are those that you got from your employer if your employer still covers prescription drugs. This is totally voluntary. Nobody has to do this. And we also have funds in here to give significant subsidies to the employers who do this to encourage them to keep on doing it and to encourage other employers to do it. So I think it's a well-balanced program and a good way to start.

[The conversation continued. Dr. Kirshna Sawhney, a cardiologist, stated his support for the President's prescription medicine proposal and also pointed out the need for reform of the Medicare payment system to hospitals. He said premier health care facilities in Michigan are losing \$80 million to \$100 million each year under the current system.]

The President. I'd like to make two points after your very fine statement. First, on the second point you raised, I had a chance to discuss that yesterday at my press conference. When we passed the Balanced Budget Bill in 1997, the—we had to say, how much are we going to spend on Medicare over the next 5 years. And we estimated what it would take to meet our budget target. Then, the Congressional Budget Office said, no, it will take deeper cuts than that, and we said if you do that it will cost a lot more money. But we had to do it the way they wanted.

Now, this is not a partisan attack; nobody did this on purpose. There was an honest disagreement here. But it turned out that our people were right, and so actually more money was taken out of the hospital system in America than was intended to take out. And to that extent by a few billion dollars, not an enormous amount, but the surplus in that sense is bigger than it was intended to be. And we have got to correct that. I have offered a plan that will at least partially take care of it, and we're now in intense meetings with people who are concerned about it; we are going to have to do that.

Now, let me make the point about the person you said, the gentleman who died. I was aghast—last week we had another health care debate on the patients' Bill of Rights, and one of the people who was against our position said, these people keep using stories—you know, anybody can tell a story, that's not necessarily representative.

Well, first of all, I don't know about you, but I think people's stories are—I mean, that's what life is all about. What is life but [p.1465] your story? [Applause] And, secondly, I—but the point I want to make is this doctor—the most important point this doctor has made is that the man who died is not an unusual case. That is the point I want to make. And that's—the pharmacist, Heather, was making the same point—there are lots of people like this.

And let me just use the example you mentioned. **Diabetes** is one of the most important examples of this. Complications from **diabetes** can be, as you know, dire and can be fatal. And you have a very large number of older people with adult-onset **diabetes** that have to be managed. It is expensive, but people can have normal lives.

The patients have to do a lot of the management of **diabetes**. They have to do it. And if they don't do their medication, the odds that something really terrible will happen before very long are very, very high. Almost 100 percent.

But if you look at the sheer numbers of people with **diabetes** alone, just take **diabetes**, then the story is about statistics, too, big numbers of people.

I thank you very much, sir.

She says we've got to quit. You've been great. Are you going to be the heavy? I should be the heavy.

Ms. Aldrich. No, they told me I had to tell you to be quiet. I said, really? [Laughter] I bet there are some Republicans that might like that job.

The President. Republicans—Hillary would like it. A lot of people would like it. [Laughter]

Ms. Aldrich. We are, indeed, out of time. So sorry, but they're telling me, and I have to take my cues. But Mr. President, we want to thank you so much for being here. And did you have some closing remarks that you'd like to make to us?

The President. I just wanted to say again, this is a wonderful moment. We told some said, heartwrenching stories today, and I wish I could hear from all of you. But keep in mind, this is a great thing. Our country is so blessed now. We've got the lowest peacetime unemployment in 40 years, the longest peacetime economic expansion in history. We've got this big surplus, the biggest one we've ever had. We think it will last for a decade or more. More really, as long as we don't mess up the budget.

We have to decide. I already said what to me the choice is—it is your money. If you want it back now, you can tell your elected representatives. Nobody can say you didn't pay it in; you want it back. I don't quarrel with that. But I think it is much better for you to stabilize Social Security and Medicare, add the prescription drug benefit at a price we can afford, let people 55 to 65 pay into it who don't have health insurance, have a modest tax cut that doesn't undermine our ability to do that or our ability to invest in education and medical research and defense, and get the country debt-free.

You'd be amazed how many really wealthy businessmen come up to me and say, "You raised my taxes to balance the budget back in '93"—we did the top 1 percent, 1.5 percent got an income tax increase—"and I was mad at the time, but I made so much more money in the stock market than I paid in taxes, it's not funny."

Low interest rates make people money. The flipside of that is if interest rates went up 1 percent in this country, it would cost you more money than I can give you in a tax cut if you borrow any money for anything.

So what I think we have to say—I just want you to think about this and then communicate your feelings. And again, do it in a friendly way. Do it in the tone we've been talking about today. Tell them the stories you know, Doctor. Every doctor, every nurse, every pharmacist, every family should sit down and take the time—I know you think that Members of Congress, and the White House, the President—I have a thousand volunteers at the White House, most of them just read mail. And then I get a representative sample of that mail every 2 or 3 weeks. And we all calibrate that. And the Members of Congress, you'd be amazed how many Members of Congress actually read letters that they get. They do have an impact.

So these faxes and E-mails and letters and telephone calls, they register on people, especially if they're not done in a kind of harsh, political way, but just saying, this is what I think is right for our country. And I hope you'll do it.

Thank you, and God bless you. [p.1466]

Note: The President spoke at 11:45 a.m. in the gymnasium at Lansing Community College. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor David C. Hollister of Lansing; James F. Anderton IV, president, Lansing Community College; Judith Lee, assistant executive director, Older Women's League; and John D'Agistino, president, Michigan State Council of Senior Citizens.

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Remarks to the White House Conference on Building Economic Self-Determination in Indian Communities, August 6, 1998

The President. Thank you. Thank you for the wonderful welcome. Thank you for the song. Thank you, Dominic, for giving us a picture of opportunity and hope for the future. I'm very glad that you're not only a good student but a good entrepreneur and a good promoter. Dominic was kind enough to give me one of his bracelets before I came out. [Laughter] So I'm his latest walking advertisement, and I'm glad to shill for him. [Laughter]

I would like to thank the members of the administration, the 15 agencies that have come together with the White House to sponsor this conference. I thank Secretary Daley, Secretary Riley, Secretary Glickman, Small Business Administrator Aida Alvarez, who are here. I'd like to thank Deputy Assistant Secretary Michael Anderson, Kevin Gover, Mark Van Norman, Angela Hammond, and two young people on our staff, Julie Fernandes and Mary Smith, who work with Mickey Ibarra and Lynn Cutler; all of them worked very hard on this conference. I thank them. [Applause] Thank you.

I'm proud to be here with Chief Marge Anderson, Governor Walter Dasheno; Chief Joyce Dugan, Chairman Frank Ettawageshik, Chairman Roland Harris, Chairwoman Kathryn Harrison, President Ivan Makil, Governor Mary Thomas, Chairman Brian Wallace, President John Yellow Bird Steele. I thank all of you.

I have looked forward to this day for quite a long time. The Iroquois teach us that every decision we make, every action we take, must be judged not only on the impact it makes today but on the impact it makes on the next [p.1577] seven generations. It is, therefore, fitting on the eve of a new century and a new millennium, that we come together today to determine what we must do to build a stronger future for our children, for our grandchildren, for future generations of Native Americans, and indeed, for all Americans.

For too many Americans, our understanding of Native Americans is frozen in time, in sepia-toned photography of legendary chieftains, in the ancient names of rivers, lakes, and mountain ranges, in the chapters of old history books. But as we have all seen at this conference, the more than 2 million members of tribal nations in the United States, from energetic, young entrepreneurs like Dominic to innovative leaders like the ones sitting here with me today, are a vital part of today's America and must be an even more vital part of tomorrow's America.

We are living in a time of great opportunity and hope, with our economy the strongest in a generation. Soon we will have the first balanced budget and surplus in 29 years, the lowest unemployment in 28 years, the highest homeownership in history. Social problems are finally beginning to bend to our efforts as a Nation: the crime rate, the lowest in 25 years; the welfare rolls, the smallest percentage of our people in 29 years. We are taking strong steps toward the America I dreamed of when I first ran for this office beginning in late 1991, an America where there is opportunity for all, responsibility from all, a community of all our people.

It is a time of unprecedented prosperity for some of our tribes as well. Gaming and a variety of innovative enterprises have enabled tribes to free their people from lives of poverty and dependence. The new wealth is sparking a cultural renaissance in parts of Indian country, as tribes build new community centers, museums, language schools, elder care centers.

But we also know the hard truth, that on far too many reservations across America such glowing statistics and reports mean very little indeed. While some tribes have found new success in our new economy, too many more remain caught in a cycle of poverty, unemployment, and disease. The facts are all too familiar. More than a third of all Native Americans still live in poverty. With unemployment at a 28-year low, still, on some reservations more than 70 percent of all adults do not have regular work. **Diabetes** in Indian country has reached epidemic proportions. Other preventable diseases and alcoholism continue to diminish the quality of life for hundreds of thousands.

At a time of such great prosperity, when we know we don't have a person to waste, this is an unacceptable condition. That's why we're here today, to find new ways to empower our people, especially our children, with the tools and the opportunity to build brighter futures for themselves and their families. Our Government alone cannot solve the problems of Indian country, nor can tribal governments be left to fend alone for themselves.

Everyone must do his or her part, tribal and Federal governments, along with the private sector. We all have to work together to empower our people with the tools they need to succeed. Most of all, every individual must take responsibility to seize the opportunities of this new time and to break the cycle of poverty.

As President, I have worked very hard to honor tribal sovereignty and to strengthen our government-to-government relationships. Long ago, many of your ancestors gave up land, water, and mineral rights in exchange for peace, security, health care, education from the Federal Government. It is a solemn pact. And while the United States Government did not live up to its side of the bargain in the past, we can and we must honor it today and into that new millennium.

Four years ago, when I became the first President since James Monroe in the 1820's to invite the leaders of every tribe to the White House, I issued a memorandum directing all Federal agencies to consult with the Indian tribes before making decisions on matters affecting your people. This spring I strengthened that directive so that decisions made by the Federal Government regarding Indian country are always made in cooperation with the tribes.

In the last 6 months, Jackie Johnson has joined the staff at HUD, Carrie Billy at Education, Rhonda Whiting at the Small Business Administration, to help coordinate and promote Native American initiatives at these [p.1578] agencies. Raynell Morris will join the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs to help Mickey Ibarra and Lynn Cutler with Native American initiatives and outreach. I welcome all to my administration.

We also, as all of you know, have been working very hard for more than a year now on a race initiative designed to address the opportunity gaps for all Americans, and I thank those of you who have had a role in that. The most recent public event we did with the race initiative was an hour-long conversation on Jim Lehrer's Public Broadcasting System show. The Native American community was represented by a delightful, energetic young man named Sherman Alexie, whose new movie, "Smoke Signals," is receiving very good reviews around the country, and I had it brought to me at the White House and watched it. He's got a great talent, and I wish him well.

Today I want to talk about opportunity and about three tools of opportunity every American needs to thrive in the 21st century, how we can bring these tools to every person in every corner of Indian country, from Pine Ridge, South Dakota, to Window Rock, Arizona, to Cherokee, North Carolina.

[At this point, an audience member cheered.]

The President. That's okay. [Laughter]

The first and most important tool of opportunity, of course, is education. Throughout history, in the United States, education has been the key to a better life for generations of Americans. This will clearly be even more true in a global, knowledge-based economy that will reward children, but only children who have the skills to succeed and to keep learning for a lifetime.

Today fewer than two-thirds of our Native Americans over the age of 25 hold high school degrees. Fewer than 10 percent go on to college. If the trend continues, then the future for Native American children will become even bleaker. The opportunity gap between them and their peers will widen to a dangerous chasm. In a few moments, therefore, I will sign an Executive order directing our administration to work together with tribal and State governments to improve Native American achievement in math and reading, to raise high school and post-secondary graduation rates, to reduce the influence of poverty and substance abuse on student performance, to create safe drug-free schools, to expand the use of science and technology. I believe in this. I have done what I could to support Native American higher education and will continue to do so.

We have also tried to open the doors of college to all, with more Pell grants, tax credits which make the first 2 years of college now virtually free to all Americans, increased work-study slots, and AmeriCorps community service slots—other things we have tried to do to make college education more affordable. But we have to have more people who are able to take advantage of it.

The second tool is high-quality health care. Native American communities will never reach their full potential if people continue to be hobbled by disease, diseases often preventable, easily treatable. Native Americans are 3 times as likely to suffer from **diabetes** as white people. Therefore, they should get 3 times the benefit of the remarkable advances that we made in the last year in the **diabetes** prevention effort.

The American **Diabetes** Association said that what we did for **diabetes** not too long ago was the most important step forward since the discovery of insulin—in treatment, in prevention, in research. Every tribe should know what is in the law, what the benefits are, and should be in a position to take maximum advantage of it.

Last summer, as I said when I signed this legislation, I wanted to make sure that it helped all Americans with **diabetes** but especially those in our Native American communities. Earlier this year, I launched an initiative to help eliminate health disparities between racial and ethnic minority groups by the year 2010. I want you to make sure Congress fully funds this initiative as well.

Today I am pleased to announce that we're going to make an adjustment in our new children's health insurance program to ensure that Native American children get the health care they need. [Applause] Thank you. In the balanced budget bill which passed Congress last year, we had \$24 billion over a 5-year period to extend health insurance to 5 million more children. The action I'm taking today [p.1579] makes sure that the money is fairly allocated so that Native American children who are disproportionately without health insurance will now have their fair chance to be covered.

I also want you to know that I am committed to working with Congress and Secretary Shalala to elevate the Director of the Indian Health Service, Dr. Michael Trujillo, who is here today, to the rank of Assistant Secretary for Health and Human Services. By elevating the head of the Indian Health Service, we can ensure that the health needs of our Native Americans get the full consideration they deserve when it comes to setting health policy in our country.

The third tool is economic opportunity, in the form of jobs, credit, small business. Very few grocery stores, gas stations, restaurants, and banks are doing business on reservations. As a result, money that could be used to build tribal economies and create jobs is spent too often off reservation.

I've issued a new directive to boost economic development in Indian country. The directive will do three things. It will ask the Department of Commerce to work with the Interior Department and with the tribal governments to study and develop a plan to meet the technology infrastructure needs of Indian country. No tribe will be able to attract new business if it doesn't have the phone, fax, Internet, and other technology capabilities essential to the 21st century.

The directive calls on several agencies to coordinate and strengthen our existing Native American economic development initiatives. And I might say in particular, I think micro-credit institutions have a terrific potential to do even more than some of you have already done for the last several years in Indian country. The community development financial institutions that we have established in this country in the last few years have played an important role in providing credit to people who otherwise could not get it to start small businesses or to expand small businesses. I have asked the Congress for a significant expansion in the Community Development Financial Institutions Act. I believe in microlending.

The United States last year through our aid programs financed 2 million small loans in developing nations around the world. Think how much good we could do if we could finance 2 million small loans in developing communities in the United States of America. We're also directing the Department of Treasury and HUD to work with tribal governments to create and improve one-stop mortgage shopping centers to help more Native Americans obtain loans more easily. And our first pilot will be in the Navajo nation.

Last, I am proud to announce the plan by the United States Department of Agriculture to help seven tribes to get a foothold in our high-tech economy. The Department will help these tribes establish small technology companies to obtain Government contracts for software development and other services.

I have asked HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo to visit several reservations to determine what more his department and our administration can do to boost economic development there. A few weeks ago he met with leaders of 60 Alaskan native villages; today he's visiting Pine Ridge and Lower Brule Indian reservations in South Dakota.

The next millennium must be a time of great progress and prosperity for our Native American communities, and we can make it so. Today American Indian population is still very young. In the last census, 39 percent of all Native Americans were under the age of 20. I kind of wish I were one of them. [Laughter]

But this statistic is one that should bring us great hope, even as it poses your and my greatest challenge. We have a new large generation of young people who, if given the tools, the encouragement, and the opportunity, can work together to lead their families out of the stifling poverty and despair of the past.

So let us work to bring this generation and the next seven generations a world of abundant hope and opportunity, where all tribes have vanquished poverty and disease and all people have the tools to achieve their greatest potential.

I leave you with the words of the Lakota song we heard a few moments ago. "Beneath the President's flag, the people stand, that they may grow for generations to come." Let us stand together under America's flag to [p. 1580] build that kind of future for generations to come.

Thank you, and God bless you.

Note: The President spoke at 1:55 p.m. in the Independence Ballroom at the Grand Hyatt Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Dominic Ortiz, owner, Pottawatomie Traders; Marge Anderson, chief, Mille Lacs Reservation; Walter Dasheno, governor, Pueblo Santa Clara; Joyce Dugan, chief, Eastern Band of Cherokee; Frank Ettawageshik, president, Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa; Roland Harris, chairman, Mohegan Indian Tribe; Kathryn Harrison, chairperson, Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde; Ivan Makil, president, Salt River Maricopa Indian Community; Mary Thomas, governor, Gila River Indian Community; Brian Wallace, chairman, Washoe Tribal Council; and John Yellow Bird Steele, president, Oglala Sioux.

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Remarks at Georgetown University Medical Center,
August 8, 1997

Thank you very much. I would like to thank Dr. Wiesel and all the people here at the Georgetown Medical Center for hosting us. I want to thank Mary Delaney and Chief Joyce Dugan and Sandra Puczynski for their speeches and for their example. As you might imagine, over the course of my tenure I have had occasion to come to quite a number of ceremonies like this. I don't believe I have ever heard three people back to back speak so powerfully, so clearly, so eloquently about a matter of great national concern. And I think we should give them all another hand. [Applause]

I'd like to thank all of the people who are here today, diabetes patients, families, activists, and advocates. Especially, I'd like to acknowledge the people on the platform: Stephen Satalino, the chair of the American **Diabetes** Association. Joan Beaubaire, the former head of the **Juvenile Diabetes** Foundation, is also here. Her son works for me at the White House, so I get a little extra prodding on this from time to time. [Laughter]

I'd like to say a special word of thanks to Mary Tyler Moore, who has awakened the conscience of our Nation and indeed the entire world about this issue, for her long and tireless and selfless efforts. Thank you, Mary.

I want to thank Dr. Phillip Gorden, the head of diabetes research at NIH. He's here with us today. And the NIH will play a major role in the work that we are discussing here.

None of us could write the history of the century that is about to end without a big chapter on the miracles modern medicine and science have wrought in our lives. Polio, mumps, diphtheria, the diseases that robbed so many families of beloved infants and toddlers for centuries have been virtually eradicated. Premature babies who just a decade ago would not have had a chance at life beyond the intensive care unit are growing into happy and healthy children. Powerful treatments are prolonging the lives and improving [p. 1219] the quality of lives of people with HIV and AIDS all across our country, raising new hopes for people living with the disease.

But there are still frontiers to conquer and still too many among us whose lives and futures are dimmed by disease and illness, as we have heard so powerfully today. Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in our country, and perhaps equally profoundly affects the lives of millions and millions of people who have it every day.

The historic balanced budget legislation I signed on Tuesday is about more than balancing the books; it also honors our values, increases our chances of keeping the American dream alive in the 21st century and improves the lives of every American. There are some little-known but very important provisions in this new balanced budget that will take us a tremendous step forward in our fight against diabetes. These investments total more than \$2 billion over the next 5 years. They will strengthen our efforts to find a cure, to help our most vulnerable citizens better manage the disease, to prevent some of its most traumatic, costly, and life-threatening complications.

These investments represented the committed efforts of many Members of Congress and our administration. But I must recognize, especially two: first, Congresswoman Elizabeth Furse, whose daughter is here and who has diabetes, led the Bipartisan Congressional Diabetes Caucus in an absolutely tireless fight to include the Medicare investments that are in this bill. And I thank her. She has done magnificently. Thank you.

And I must tell you, I wish very much that the Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich, could be with us today. When we have a disagreement, it is normally well publicized. [Laughter] And widely understood. [Laughter] But I wish the American people could see the numerous private conversations that we have had together in quiet rooms about diabetes.

He watched his mother-in-law live with diabetes and became a great champion for people struggling with it, a tireless advocate for greater investments in research, prevention, and care, and one of the very first people who ever spoke to me not only about the human dimensions of the disease but the enormous percentage of our public funds in Medicare and, to a lesser extent, in Medicaid, that could be devoted to other purposes were it not for the crushing burden of diabetes-related problems directly resultant from our failure to invest as we begin to invest today. I know we play a leading role in making these new initiatives a part of the budget, and I appreciate both what he and Elizabeth and others have done.

Now, this new legislation will do three things. It expands Medicare benefits for the more than 3 million senior citizens diagnosed with diabetes. Mary talked about that. We all know that early investments in prevention can save us millions in expensive treatments down the line. If left untreated, diabetes can lead to devastating complications such as blindness, amputations, and kidney disease. This new benefit will make testing strips and other methods of monitoring blood glucose levels, as well as instructions on how best to manage the complicated disease, available to all Medicare beneficiaries with diabetes.

It will empower Medicare patients to take better care of themselves at home and to avoid complications that can lead to costly hospital stays and destroy health.

Second, the new legislation will enable Health and Human Services Secretary, Donna Shalala, to boost funding for Type I or **juvenile diabetes** research by \$150 million over the next 5 years. Nearly one million Americans have Type I diabetes, and as many as half of them are children. Even when the disease is managed carefully, the patients almost always experience further complications. That's why we cannot rest until we find a cure that will free our children from this disease. And this unprecedented grant will help us to do that.

Third, we will provide a 5-year, \$150-million grant to the Indian Health Service for diabetes prevention, research, and treatment in our Native American communities. And I want to say a special word of thanks to Senator Domenici of New Mexico for his special efforts on this project.

As Chief Dugan has made it clear, Native Americans are 3 times as likely as white Americans to have this disease; far less likely to find adequate treatment for it. Too many Native Americans are suffering from the [p.1220] grimmest complications of diabetes. This grant will bring public health services, schools, and nutrition programs together to reach children and families living on reservations and to provide them with the information and tools to prevent and manage diabetes.

And I might say, I told Chief Dugan before I came up here that my grandmother's grandmother was a Cherokee who would be very proud that there is a woman chief who is doing such a magnificent job. Thank you.

Next month, our scientists at NIH will be hosting a workshop to bring researchers from all across the country to share ideas and discuss the most promising avenues of diabetes research. And we will establish a new and unprecedented public-private partnership to bring our Nation's leading health care providers, purchasers, and consumers together to develop uniform guidelines for diabetes care. Through the guidelines, we can ensure that all doctors provide their patients with thorough and vigilant care, such as regular eye and foot exams, to stay as healthy as possible.

Taken together, these initiatives can make life-changing differences for millions of Americans. I was very heartened to hear the American Diabetes Association say that these new investments in diabetes are as important for people with diabetes as the discovery of insulin in 1921. Let us pray that it will be so.

Let me finally say that discussing this in rather clinical terms cannot possibly convey the human impact that Sandra did in talking about her child. On the way over here today, I was remembering that 23 years ago plus now, when I began my career in political life, the first chairman of my campaign was only a year older than me and was already a bank president at the age of 28 or 29, but he died a few years ago from complications from diabetes. When I lived in Arkansas, I used to sing in a church choir with a man who had to quit singing because of complications from diabetes, and I have these vivid memories every Sunday of standing there looking at him sitting in the church with the pain on his face of not being able to do it anymore.

This morning I got a note from a friend of mine I'd like to read to you. "For the last 17 years my son has gone to sleep scared, scared that his blood sugar would drop and his body would be ripped apart with a diabetic seizure. Every day for the last 17 years, my son and his family have worried about the opposite effects of having his blood sugar remain at too high a level and thereby causing the early onset of blindness, heart failure, and loss of limb. Until today, there simply wasn't enough money available for scientific research to have a real hope to find a cure. Now there is."

It is easy to say that in the last 50 years we experienced in science the age of physics, the age of space travel and the beginning of genetic research but that in the next 50 years, the 21st century in science will be an age of biology. The important thing is that for people and their families with diabetes, it can be an age of longer, happier, richer lives.

Thank you very much.

Note: The President spoke at 11:27 a.m. in the auditorium. In his remarks, he referred to Sam W. Wiesel, executive vice president for health sciences, Georgetown University Medical Center; Mary Delaney, a local resident who suffers from diabetes; Chief Joyce Dugan of the eastern band of Cherokee Indians; Sandra Puczynski of Ohio, mother whose daughter suffers from **diabetes**; and actress Mary Tyler Moore, international chairman, **Juvenile Diabetes** Foundation International.

Source: United States. Executive Office of the President, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, Week Ending Friday, August 8, 1997 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997), 33:1218-1220

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Medicare Disparities

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PR Newswire

July 7, 2000, Friday 2:34 PM Eastern Time

SECTION: STATE AND REGIONAL NEWS**DISTRIBUTION:** TO STATE AND MEDICAL EDITORS**LENGTH:** 806 words**HEADLINE:** Medicare Lawsuit Dismissed;
Judge Urges New Congressional Action to Promptly Correct Medicare Injustice; Cites Gross, Unequal Treatment of Seniors**DATELINE:** ST. PAUL, Minn., July 7**BODY:**

United States District Court Judge Donald D. Alsop has dismissed a lawsuit filed November 17, 1999 by the Minnesota Senior Federation, Metro Region, and Minnesota Attorney General Mike Hatch against the United States of America and Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna E. Shalala, alleging discriminatory Medicare rates. While Judge Alsop reached his conclusion because he believes the Medicare case does not violate the Constitution, he had strong words for Medicare's inequities and recognizes the need for new Congressional legislation soon.

The court's decision "is not to be considered a judicial endorsement of a reimbursement system which even the defendants concede results in gross unequal treatment of senior citizens," said Judge Alsop. "It is to be hoped that those with ultimate authority to remedy this wrong -- indeed those who created it -- will promptly recognize the injustice they have created and enact legislation to correct it."

The Minnesota Senior Federation applauds Judge Alsop's prompt resolution of this complicated issue, and while it is disappointed in the court's decision, the Federation is strongly encouraged by Judge Alsop's acknowledgment of Medicare injustice.

"We consider the dismissal a temporary setback, but Judge Alsop's comments have unquestionably reinforced the need to push forward and to continue to organize consumers nationwide to, as Judge Alsop suggests, change legislation and correct the unequal treatment of seniors," said Peter Wyckoff, executive director of the Minnesota Senior Federation, Metro Region. "Medicare reimbursement inequities affect seniors across America. And you can bet that this will remain a hot issue during this important political year."

Wyckoff said that the Federation's efforts will probably include an appeal. "We are presently considering appeal issues, and I can tell you that we will only be stepping up our actions to get Congress to pass new laws." The Minnesota Senior Federation continues to organize throughout Minnesota and throughout other key states unfairly affected by **Medicare disparities**. Numerous other attorneys general have joined Minnesota to fight for **Medicare** equity by either filing individual law suits or filing Amici Curiae (Friend of the Court) briefs.

Medicare, the nation's largest health insurance program serving approximately 39 million elderly and disabled Americans, was enacted in 1965 as a uniform, nondiscriminatory, nationwide program based on equality in funding and equality in the provision of a standardized package of health

benefits to beneficiaries regardless of where they reside. In 1972, Congress enacted, and the Department of Health and Human Services implemented, amendments to the Social Security Act designed to provide Medicare to beneficiaries through managed care organizations, using a reimbursement formula. That formula has allegedly transformed from a nondiscriminatory, uniform national program into one in which the availability and cost varies county by county, despite that all beneficiaries make equal contributions into the Medicare system.

Minnesota's lawsuit claimed that the current Medicare program has created a unfair, two-tier health care system for older Americans based simply on where they live, and that Congress and the Health Care Finance Administration allow for over a 200-percent variance in Medicare reimbursement to counties across the country, allegedly making the practice biased and discriminatory. In addition to the Minnesota Senior Federation and the Minnesota attorney general, plaintiffs included 72-year-old Mary Sarno, who resides in Florida. Because her daughter lives in Minnesota, Ms. Sarno wants to move to Minnesota, but she cannot because the Medicare Part C health coverage in Minnesota is insufficient to meet her healthcare expenses and needs as compared to her current Medicare managed plan in Florida where she pays no annual premium, no co-payment for visiting her doctor, and pays nothing for prescription drug coverage or for emergency medical services. By contrast, if enrolled in a Medicare managed care plan in Dakota County, Minn., she would pay a significant annual premium of over \$1,000, incur a \$30 co-payment for emergency services and a \$30 co-payment for urgent care. She would also have to pay for all of her outpatient prescription drug expenses.

The Minnesota Senior Federation is a 25-year-old advocacy and educational organization for seniors. The organization is based in St. Paul, Minn. and has 27,000 statewide members.

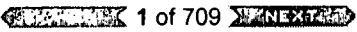
SOURCE Minnesota Senior Federation

CONTACT: Peter Wyckoff of Minnesota Senior Federation, Metro Region, 651-645-0261 Ext 114, 651-486-9114 home

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The Associated Press State & Local Wire

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June 25, 2000, Sunday, BC cycle

SECTION: State and Regional**LENGTH:** 712 words**HEADLINE:** Disparity grows in health care access for urban residents, some say**DATELINE:** DETROIT**BODY:**

The closure of three Detroit hospitals - who had a mission to serve the poor and uninsured - because of cuts in **Medicare** and Medicaid reimbursement has created a **disparity** between the city and the suburbs in access to health care, some say.

The hospitals, Mercy, Sinai and Saratoga, all closed in the last three years. Detroit also has lost 50 percent of its primary-care centers, and local health systems report \$750 million in losses because of uncompensated care in 1998 alone, according to the Detroit Coalition for Health Care Access.

And the percentage of people lacking health insurance in Detroit jumped from 15 percent in 1996 to 20 percent of the population in 1998, the last year for which data is available. Experts expect newer figures to show the same pace.

Among those affected by the health care crisis is Kenya James. James, uninsured and unemployed, has been so frustrated about her lack of access to medical and dental care that she recently posed as her younger, insured sister to get treatment for a toothache.

The dentist threw her out of his office.

Recently, the 20-year-old sat in a crowded examination ward for six hours at Detroit Receiving Hospital, waiting for a doctor to treat an infected finger, but hoping that he might also look at that bad tooth, which now has swollen the right side of her face.

"I can't get birth control," James told The Detroit News. "I can't get dental care. I don't have a regular doctor - never did. My back hurts. I need glasses."

Some experts fret about what they see as a subtle, yet disturbing trend that increasingly seems to turn the working poor, who often have no benefits, and the uninsured into marginalized patients caught in a revolving-door system of haphazard health care delivery.

"There's something very insidious and subtle going on," said Richard Douglass, an Eastern Michigan University professor of health administration.

"It's not just race, it's not just class. It's the assumption that people with limited access who feel trapped will tolerate lower standards."

Douglass said the average waiting time in Detroit clinics is 25 minutes to an hour, according to preliminary research. In Novi, it's less than five minutes. In Ann Arbor, it's three minutes.

At St. John Detroit Riverview Hospital, the hospital hands out bag lunches to keep the diabetics and elderly from passing out during long waits.

"It's been intense," said Dr. Marjorie K. Moss, 38, an emergency physician at the 262-bed hospital. "These are lost souls. They're lost in terms of continuity of care. It's our job to start a new relationship with them - under very difficult circumstances."

But at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, things are vastly different.

Margaret V. Davis, a 79-year-old Medicare patient, recently recovered following a cardiac catheterization in a Beaumont Hospital room dominated by a backlit mural on the ceiling. The unusual decoration is designed to ease boredom and tension for patients.

"We were just kidding around and telling her this was a spa," said daughter Diane Turowski, 42, of South Lyon.

To Davis and her daughters, there doesn't appear to be much of a crisis in health care access and delivery.

"The difference between their (Detroit) patients and our patients is that ours have resources," said Andrew G. Wilson Jr., Beaumont chief of emergency medicine.

"Ours have money, in a word. They have what money can buy, which is health care insurance and doctors. Some of them can afford to pay out of their own pockets for health care."

At Beaumont, cardiac patients can sit in an elegant library that's all cherrywood furniture and fancy carpet, and use computers to access the Internet to learn more about their illness.

The hospital has plans for a \$163 million addition to the 929-bed Royal Oak hospital and a \$16 million expansion of its emergency room. Riverview plans a \$3 million expansion to its emergency room.

Still, Beaumont administrators say they're not thriving.

"All hospitals are in the same boat. The majority of patients that you serve are on Medicare or Medicaid - and those have been cut significantly," said Robbie Scodellaro, a Beaumont associate hospital director and controller.

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THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN

June 16, 2000, Friday CITY EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Washington Bureau**LENGTH:** 346 words**HEADLINE:** Bipartisan bill would help rural hospitals**BYLINE:** Jennifer Johnson**DATELINE:** WASHINGTON**BODY:**

A bipartisan bill designed to help struggling rural hospitals was introduced Thursday in the House and Senate.

The bill would boost Medicare payments to rural hospitals and establish a permanent program to protect hospitals that serve mostly Medicare patients.

Rep. Frank Lucas, R-Cheyenne, a co-sponsor of the bill, said large Medicare patient loads are common among rural hospitals.

At a news conference on Capitol Hill, Senate author Kent Conrad, D-N.D., said too many **disparities** can be found between the amount of money rural hospitals receive for **Medicare** reimbursements compared with urban hospitals.

A temporary program was established in 1989 to protect hospitals with a high proportion of Medicare patients. The bill would make the program permanent. Oklahoma has 16 Medicare-dependent hospitals - those with less than 100 beds and at least 60 percent Medicare patients.

Lucas said the improvements proposed in the bill would go a long way toward solving rural hospitals' financial problems.

If his hometown hospital were to close, he said, the nearest one would be 45 minutes away.

"That's an incredible distance to travel when you have a life-threatening emergency," Lucas said.

A study by the Oklahoma Hospital Association projected that 23

Oklahoma hospitals - almost all rural - may be forced to close their doors over the next five years if they don't get help.

Hospitals often are the economic center for rural towns, Lucas said.

"The disappearance of a hospital can mean the disappearance of a community," he said.

Some hospitals have survived by scaling down to "critical-access hospitals." A federal program that began in September gave Oklahoma \$ 678,000 for these hospitals.

To qualify for money, hospitals must operate no more than 15 patient beds, be at least 35 miles from the nearest hospital, keep patients a maximum of four days and offer emergency medical services.

The hospitals get federal reimbursements for services, though the payments for lab services were reduced last year.

GRAPHIC: Rep. Frank Lucas

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PR Newswire

May 15, 2000, Monday

SECTION: FINANCIAL NEWS**DISTRIBUTION:** TO MEDICAL AND NATIONAL EDITORS**LENGTH:** 706 words**HEADLINE:** Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Persist Between Majority and Minority Americans, Says Patient Care(R) Magazine**DATELINE:** MONTVALE, N.J., May 15**BODY:**

Despite initiatives in health promotion, innovations in diagnosis and treatment of disease, and advances in technology that have improved the overall health of the majority of Americans, racial and ethnic minority populations have benefited less from these advances. These disparities and ways to improve health care for diverse populations are addressed in "Caring for Diverse Populations," a special issue of Patient Care, a journal for primary care physicians.

Significant disparities in access to care, utilization of services, and health outcomes exist between majority and minority Americans today. For example:

- African Americans suffer 30% higher cardiovascular mortality, 25% higher cancer mortality, and 60% higher diabetes-related mortality than whites.
- Hispanic Americans are the most likely to be uninsured and the least likely to have a usual source of care.
- The stomach cancer mortality rate for Alaska Native men is 215% higher than for white males.
- Minority immunization rates are much lower than whites, averaging twice the rate of underimmunization.
- A greater percentage of African Americans and Hispanic Americans are infected with HIV than are whites, Asians, and Native Americans.

There are many factors that contribute to disparities in health. Research is demonstrating the effects of social determinants-poverty, social class, racism, gender, education, housing, occupation, disability status, and access to care-on health outcomes. Investigators are increasingly reporting racial and ethnic disparities in quality of care. For example, in a number of studies that controlled for socioeconomic status and access to care, disparities were documented for cardiac procedures,

mammography, analgesia use, surgical treatment of lung cancer, management of pneumonia and congestive heart failure, and a variety of general services covered by **Medicare**.

Demographic changes anticipated over the next few decades are expected to magnify these **disparities**, with groups currently experiencing poorer health status growing as a proportion of the total U.S. population. Several federal initiatives are underway to address minority health outcomes. These include the President's Initiative to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health and Healthy People 2010.

Said special issue medical co-editors, Joseph R. Betancourt, MD, MPH, and Robert C. Like, MD, MS, in their editorial, "We have at our disposal a broad armamentarium to diagnose and treat the predisposing conditions that lead to this disproportionate morbidity and mortality in minority populations. It is of the utmost importance that primary care physicians utilize appropriate intervention strategies in addressing these disparities." Dr. Betancourt is associate director, Center for Multicultural and Minority Health, Cornell University. Dr. Like is associate professor and director, Center for Healthy Families and Cultural Diversity, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

In this special issue, Patient Care highlights racial and ethnic disparities in health and illness, explains root causes of these disparities, and shares practical methods and resources for action and intervention. Topics covered include immunization rates, cancer screening and management, prevention of diabetes and cardiovascular disease in minority patients, asthma management in minority groups and the poor, identifying HIV infection in minority populations, prescribing medications in diverse populations, and racial and ethnic differences in response to treatment.

Patient Care (<http://www.patientcareonline.com>) focuses on the diagnosis and treatment of problems that are encountered by the office-based primary care physician. The magazine is published by Medical Economics Company (<http://www.medec.com>).

SOURCE Medical Economics Company

CONTACT: Deborah Kaplan, Editor of Patient Care, 201-358-7244, deborah.kaplan@medec.com; or Vernon Lewis, Director, Corporate Communications of Medical Economics, 201-358-7381, vernon.lewis@medec.com

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State Health Monitor

June 1, 2000

SECTION: No. 7, Vol. 3; Pg. 6**IAC-ACC-NO:** 62743771**LENGTH:** 265 words**HEADLINE:** Capitol Hill Reacts to State Suits Over **Medicare Rate Disparities.****AUTHOR-ABSTRACT:**

THIS IS THE FULL TEXT: COPYRIGHT 2000 Atlantic Information Services, Inc. Subscription: \$ 402.00 per year. Published monthly. 1100 17th St. N.W., Suite 300, Washington, DC 20036.

BODY:

A number of states, led by Minnesota and Wisconsin, have recently filed suit or seek to sue the federal government over rate disparities ranging from about \$ 400 per beneficiary per month in some areas of the nation to over \$ 800 in other areas.

Opponents of the current Medicare HMO payment system say unfairly low payment rates keep HMOs out of the market and generate higher costs for state Medicaid programs and beneficiaries in those states.

A bipartisan group of senators late last month introduced legislation that would create a fairer Medicare HMO payment system, and seek more balanced Medicare payments across the nation.

The Medicare Fairness in Reimbursement Act -- introduced by Sens. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), Craig Thomas (R-Wyo.) Larry Craig (R-Idaho) and Russell Feingold (D-Wis.) -- would require HCFA to adjust Medicare fee-for-service payments so that no state pays more than 105% above the national average for items and services, and no state pays less than 95% of the average. Similar adjustment would then be made to HMO payments.

Some 30 states would benefit from fairer Medicare payments under the bill, Harkin says. Iowa workers pay the same payroll tax to support Medicare and Iowa seniors pay the same monthly premium; however, Medicare payments per Iowa senior have lagged behind other states, Harkin says.

Iowa ranks 48th among the 50 states in Medicare payments. Medicare per beneficiary payments in Iowa averaged just \$ 3,456 in 1998, about one-third less than the \$ 5,034 national average.

Call Harkin's office at (202) 224-3254.

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The New York Times♦ [View Related Topics](#)

April 11, 2000, Tuesday, Late Edition - Final

SECTION: Section A; Page 28; Column 1; Editorial Desk**LENGTH:** 345 words**HEADLINE:** Drug Prices and Medicare**BODY:**

The Department of Health and Human Services issued a report yesterday that highlighted alarming **disparities** in prescription drug costs for **Medicare** beneficiaries. The **Medicare** recipients who lack drug coverage are charged significantly more -- and are thus forced to do without medicine more often -- than Medicare recipients who have obtained drug coverage one way or another.

Currently, about a third of Medicare beneficiaries have no drug coverage at all. The rest have drug coverage through plans provided by former employers, Medigap plans that they buy themselves, Medicaid, or through Medicare health maintenance organizations that provide drug benefits.

The new study found that Medicare recipients without drug coverage were typically charged 15 percent more for the same drug at the pharmacy than were individuals whose drug costs had been negotiated by insurers or by pharmacy benefit managers, companies that administer and negotiate drug prices for health plans. That is because those large entities are able to obtain price discounts for drugs from pharmacy chains. The report does not even take into account direct rebates from manufacturers that insurers and benefit managers can get for increasing a manufacturer's market share in a particular drug field. Such rebates can further reduce the price of prescription drugs between 2 and 35 percent.

The price disparities make a persuasive case for providing a drug benefit for all Medicare beneficiaries. A key part of President Clinton's Medicare drug benefit plan would allow those currently without drug coverage to get lower drug prices by using pharmacy benefit managers to negotiate with retailers and manufacturers. Several competing proposals in Congress also include contracting with private benefit managers to get group price discounts, though the plans differ in details.

The market is working unfairly against the elderly who have no drug coverage. Medicare reform must give them the means to use their collective purchasing power in getting better prices on prescription drugs.

<http://www.nytimes.com>**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH**LOAD-DATE:** April 11, 2000

The President's Radio Address,
February 19, 2000

Good morning. On February 12, 1926, as a tribute to the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln, the noted African-American scholar and historian Carter G. Woodson initiated Black History Week, the forerunner of what has become Black History Month.

This observance is important because many of the stereotypes and much of the distrust between the races are the result of historical inaccuracies or omissions that have persisted over too many years. The truth is, whether we're talking about the heroic freedom-fighting efforts of the Black Moses, Harriet Tubman, or the landmark legal accomplishments of Thurgood Marshall, we're really talking about vital aspects of all Americans' history. But too many Americans are not aware of the extraordinary contributions African-Americans have made to the life of our Nation, and that's a tragedy.

Together, we have come a mighty long way. Today, we're in the midst of the longest and strongest economic expansion in our Nation's history—nearly 21 million new jobs; unemployment at 4 percent, the lowest rate in 30 years; incomes up across all groups of American workers; and among African-Americans, poverty and unemployment rates at the lowest levels ever recorded. Crime, which has been especially devastating to many African-American neighborhoods, is now the lowest it's been in 25 years. We've cut taxes for millions of hard-pressed working families and cut the welfare rolls in half, while moving millions of people—almost 7 million of them—from welfare to work.

But still there are wide and disturbing **disparities in health**, income, perceptions of justice, and educational achievements that break down along the color line. It is clear we must do more to close these gaps and give all our citizens a chance both to contribute to and share in our growing prosperity and promise. That is one of the reasons I created a One America Office in the White House last year, and why the Vice President and I have worked so hard to bring loans and new investments to distressed communities through empowerment zones, the Community Reinvestment Act, community development banks, and now, through our new markets initiative.

Especially, we need to make sure our young people are prepared for this new economy, by helping every child enter school ready to learn and graduate ready to succeed. More Americans—and more African-Americans—are going on to college than ever before. But we must give every child that chance, and we must help their families shoulder the burden.

Today I'm pleased to announce that the Department of Labor is awarding \$223 million in youth opportunity grants to bring education and job training to up to 44,000 young people in 36 communities, from Watts to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. This will provide a lifeline of opportunity to any young person willing to work for a better future. And it's a key component of our broader youth opportunity agenda.

We've requested an increase of \$1.3 billion this year to bring an array of education and training assistance to at-risk youth, from the GEAR UP and TRIO mentoring and support programs to get more kids on the right track to success, to an increase in Pell grants to help more of them afford the cost of college.

These youth opportunity grants will draw on the experience and dedication of people like Jacqueline Sharp Massey of Baltimore's Career Academy. For 20 years, Jacqueline (p.348) has made history of her own by helping, literally, hundreds of young people to turn their lives around—people like 20-year-old Michael Dupree, who, with the help of the Academy, has gone from being a high school dropout to a biotechnology lab assistant and a member of Baltimore's Youth Council.

Sixty years ago today the Army Air Corps activated its second squadron of African-American fighter pilots in Tuskegee, Alabama. That squadron and three others fought fascism in the air and racism on the ground. As Tuskegee Airmen, the sky was their limit. And they helped to lead the way to this modern digital age in which there are virtually no limits to how high our people can fly. Their story is a precious contribution to our common history and very much worth remembering this Black History Month.

Their belief in an America that would respect their courage and honor their service is the foundation of the America we all want to live in—one where every person is treated with dignity and respect, and all our children have the chance to live their dreams.

That's the America we should work for in the new millennium.

Thanks for listening.

Note: The address was recorded at 6:25 p.m. on February 18 in the East Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on February 19. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 18 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Source: United States. Executive Office of the President, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, Week Ending Friday, February 25, 2000 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000), 36:347-348

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Statement on Education Appropriations Legislation, September 23, 1999

The House Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations subcommittee today passed a partisan bill that would seriously undermine our efforts to strengthen public education, protect workers, and move people from welfare to work.

This bill is proof that America's highest priority—improving our schools—remains the Republican Congress' lowest priority. The bill eliminates our effort to hire quality teachers to reduce class size in the early grades. It denies hundreds of thousands of young people access to after-school programs, fails to improve and expand Head Start, cuts the successful America Reads program, cuts educational technology, and eliminates the GEAR UP program, which helps young people prepare early for success in college. It fails to give public schools the resources to succeed, and does nothing to demand accountability for results.

The bill also terminates the successful School-To-Work program and Youth Opportunity Grants, and makes deep cuts in programs that help dislocated workers, provide worker protections, and ensure worker safety. It undermines America's efforts to move people from welfare to work by reneging on our bipartisan commitment to the States on welfare reform. It contains a range of unacceptable provisions, which would prevent the government from effectively protecting the health and safety of the American people.

The subcommittee bill would also underfund public **health** priorities, including preventive **health**, mental **health** and substance abuse, **health care** access for the poor, and our efforts to reduce racial **health disparities** and the spread of AIDS worldwide. It would prevent us from continuing to provide important patient protections for American workers and improving our Nation's organ distribution system. It also would threaten our ability to manage key entitlement programs, such as Medicare and Medicaid.

I warned earlier today that the tax bill sent to me as part of the Republican budget plan would lead to major reductions in key national investments in education and other programs. The subcommittee's bill today is another step in the same misguided direction.

This bill is unacceptable. Our Nation's children deserve much better. I sent the Congress a budget for the programs covered by this bill that provided for essential investments in America's needs and was fully provided for. If this bill were to come to me in its current form, I would veto it. Instead, I urge the House not to pass the subcommittee's bill and to work on a bipartisan basis with my administration on acceptable legislation.

Source: United States. Executive Office of the President, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, Week Ending Friday, September 24, 1999 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995), 35:1799

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Proclamation 7220—National Hispanic Heritage Month, 1999,
September 14, 1999

By the President of the United States
of America
A Proclamation

During National Hispanic Heritage Month, we reflect on the history of a people who were part of this land long before the birth of the United States. Hispanics were among the earliest European settlers in the New World, and Hispanics as a people—like their many cultures—share a rich history and great diversity. Hispanic Americans have roots in Europe, Africa, and South and Central America and close cultural ties to Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, South America, and Spain. This diversity has brought variety and richness to the mosaic that is America and has strengthened our national character with invaluable perspective, experiences, and values.

Through the years, Hispanic Americans have played an integral role in our Nation's success in science, the arts, business, government, and every other field of endeavor, and their talent, creativity, and achievements continue to energize our national life. For example, Hispanic Americans serve as NASA astronauts, including Dr. Ellen Ochoa, the first Hispanic woman in space. Mario Molina of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology shared a Nobel Prize in chemistry for research that raised awareness of the threat that chlorofluorocarbons pose to the earth's protective ozone layer. Cuban-American writer Oscar Hijuelos earned a Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

The achievements of today's Hispanic Americans build upon a long tradition of contributions by Hispanics in many varied fields. Before Dr. Ochoa and other Hispanic Americans began to explore the frontiers of space, Hernando de Soto and Francisco Vasquez de Coronado ventured into the vast uncharted land of the New World. A thousand years before Mario Molina calculated the effects of human actions on the atmosphere, Mayan priests accurately predicted solar and lunar eclipses. And before Oscar Hijuelos described a Cuban family's emigration to 1940s America, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra gave us the classic adventures of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

Today, people of Hispanic heritage are an increasingly important and growing segment of our Nation's population. Studies show that, in just a few years, Hispanics will form the largest minority group in the United States. In little more than a decade, Hispanic Americans will wield buying power of nearly \$1 trillion per year. And by the middle of the next century, if population trends continue, almost one-fourth of our population [p.1743] will be Spanish-speaking. The success of these citizens is vital to our continued national prosperity, and we must ensure that they are empowered with the tools and opportunities they need to thrive in the next century.

That is why my Administration has worked to widen the circle of economic opportunity, enforce our civil rights laws, invest in health and education, and promote racial reconciliation. We have launched a major initiative to mobilize the resources and expertise of the Federal Government, the private sector, and local communities to end racial and ethnic **disparities in health conditions and health care**. We established the first-ever Office of Minority **Health** Research and Alternative Medicine at the National Institutes of Health. We also have sought to expand our Hispanic Education Action Plan with an additional \$480 million for improving educational programs and institutions serving high concentrations of Hispanic students. We cannot seize the enormous opportunities of the 21st century if a large percentage of our children lack the skills and knowledge they need to reach their full potential.

In honor of the many contributions that Hispanic Americans have made and continue to make to our Nation and our culture, the Congress, by Public Law 100-402, has authorized and requested the President to issue annually a proclamation designating September 15 through October 15 as "National Hispanic Heritage Month."

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim September 15 through October 15, 1999, as National Hispanic Heritage Month. I call upon government officials, educators, and the people of the United States to honor this observance with appropriate ceremonies, activities, and programs, and I encourage all Americans to rededicate themselves to the pursuit of equality.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this fourteenth day of September, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-fourth.

William J. Clinton

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., September 16, 1999]

Note: This proclamation was published in the Federal Register on September 17.

Source: United States. Executive Office of the President, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, Week Ending Friday, September 17, 1999 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995), 35:1742-1743

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Remarks to the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation,
September 19, 1998

Thank you very much. Thank you. You know, Maxine Waters would be so much more effective as the chair of the Congressional Black Caucus if she weren't so shy and retiring—[laughter]—so reluctant to express her opinion. [Laughter]

Thank you, my friends, for years of friendship. Thank you for the work we began back [p.1842] in 1991. To the chair of the dinner, Congressman Clyburn, and the chair of the Foundation, Congresswoman Clayton—and congratulations on your recent outstanding primary victory—to the dean of this caucus and a great fighter for the American way, John Conyers, thank you.

To two great lions of the century we are about to end, Rosa Parks and Dr. Dorothy Height. To three great friends of mine who have left or are now leaving the Congress, Ron Dellums, Floyd Flake, and Louis Stokes, I echo everything the Vice President said about you.

And to the family of Congressman Charles Diggs, Jr., I thank you for giving the awards to Secretary Herman and Secretary Slater, to Frank Raines and Congressman Rush and the other winners who have given so much to our country.

I thank the members of our administration who are here tonight: Attorney General Reno, Secretary Cuomo, SBA Administrator Alvarez. To the marvelous White House staff members who are here: Minyon Moore, Goody Marshall, Maria Echaveste, Bob Nash, Janis Kearney, Ben Johnson, Al Maldon, Tracey Thornton, Cheryl Mills, Judith Winston, Betty Currie, Janet Murguia, and goodness knows who else is here—they hate to miss this dinner. To all the members of the administration who are here, along with all the members of the caucus, I thank you.

After the speeches which have been given, the outstanding remarks of the Vice President—and let me say one thing about him. I sometimes regret that one of the burdens of being Vice President is having to brag on the President and never getting to brag on himself. Many things will be said, good and perhaps some not so good, about this administration. One thing that will never be in question is that in the history of our Republic no person has ever held the office of Vice President who had more influence on more decisions and did more good in more areas for more people in this country than Vice President Al Gore.

I have a speech I want to give, but first I'd like to say something from the heart. I want to thank you for standing up for America with me. I want to thank you for standing up for me and understanding the true meaning of repentance and atonement. I want to thank you for standing up consistently for people over politics, for progress over partisanship, for principle over power, for unity over division. I want to thank you for standing up, beyond race, for the very best in America. I am very, very grateful.

I am grateful for what the Congressional Black Caucus has done for the past 28 years to expand and enhance the promise of America and to lead our country toward a single shining ideal, perhaps captured best in that wonderful phrase from John Lewis' autobiography, "the beloved community," one that dwells not on difference but instead gains strength from expanding diversity, one rooted in humane laws and generous spirits in which all children's talents are matched by their opportunities, in which all Americans join hands and, in John's words, "courageously walk with the wind." God knows your journey has not been easy. The winds have often blown bitter and cold. But always this caucus has walked with the wind.

Today, because of the long road you have walked, the house we call America is safer and stronger than ever. As I think back on what we have done together in the last 5½ years, I think of these things. We cut taxes for 15 million hard-working families through the earned-income tax credit, and when the Republicans tried to slash it, we said no. We increased the minimum wage to give 10 million Americans a well-deserved raise. And now we're trying to increase it again in a way that would affect 12 million of our fellow citizens, to ensure that people who work full time can raise their children out of poverty and that all people share in the bounty of our present prosperity.

Together we fought for and won the biggest increase in children's health care in more than three decades. It can add insurance—health insurance—to 5 million children in working families across this country. We expanded the Head Start program to help our children get off on the right foot, and we're going to expand it some more. We made it possible for nearly 2 million more women and infants to get the nutritional care they need. With the Family and Medical Leave Act, we gave millions of people the [p.1843] chance to take time off from work to care for an ailing parent or bond with a newborn child.

We have opened the doors of higher education with the HOPE scholarship, with more Pell grants, with tax credits for all higher education, with the deductibility of student loans. We have done that for every single qualified American who's willing to work for it. Money can no longer be considered an insurmountable obstacle. And you did that. You should be very, very proud.

Together with the Vice President's leadership, we created more than 100 empowerment zones and enterprise communities, established community development banks, doubled small business loans to minorities and tripled them to women. When people wanted to scrap affirmative action we said, "Mend it. Don't end it," because we believe the best investment in America makes us all stronger.

Together we shaped and passed the historic crime bill, overcoming immense pressure with the Brady bill, the assault weapons ban, more police on our streets and, yes, more prevention for our children to keep them out of trouble in the first place.

Now, look what you have done: nearly 17 million jobs, the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years, the lowest African-American and Hispanic unemployment rates in a generation, the lowest African-American poverty rate since statistics have been kept, the fastest real wage growth in 20 years, a record number of new small businesses every year, violent crime down 6 years in a row, and the lowest crime rate in 25 years. None of this could have happened without the leadership, the friendship, the ideas of the Congressional Black Caucus.

And I thank the Vice President for his litany of our African-American appointments and for pointing out—in a phrase I will steal the first chance I get—that we are not successful in spite of our diversity; we are successful because of it. We can never say that enough. That is the truth, and America is better because all Americans can feel a part of this administration.

Now, here's the real question: What are we to do with this treasured moment of prosperity and progress? What are we to do with our resources? What are we to do with the self-confidence it has generated in America? Some people think that now is the time to kick back and relax. Others seem to think they can play games with our future with some of the proposals now before the Congress. I say we can look back a long way to the book of Genesis to see what we should do.

Remember Joseph? What did he do in a time of plenty? He did not rest. When people thought he was too farsighted and too burdensome, he instructed them to stockpile rich bounties of grain like sand to the sea. He knew the times of plenty had to be the busiest, the most productive, the most determined times of all. Wisdom and history teaches us that in times of prosperity we need to be more visionary, more vigorous, more determined to deal with the long-term challenges before us, and that we will only pay a price if we indulge ourselves in idleness or distractions.

I say we cannot rest until we save Social Security for the 21st century. Remember what we are facing today. In 1993, it was projected that the deficit would be about \$300 billion and rising. In just a few days, a little more than a week, we'll have the first balanced budget and surplus in 29 years. Ninety-two percent—ninety-two percent of the gap was closed by the votes of members of this caucus and our party without any help. Then we did have a bipartisan balanced budget bill that had, thanks to your efforts, the health care and education initiatives I mentioned.

So now we are going to have a surplus because of the hard work and productivity of the American people. Some say it's just a few weeks before the election, we ought to have a tax cut. I'm not against tax cuts. This year, in the balanced budget bill, the American people will get, most of them, a \$500 tax credit for every child at home; the HOPE scholarship and other credits for college education; the right to withdraw from an IRA without penalty for education, for health care, for buying a first-time home. That's a good thing. But they're paid for in the balanced budget.

And in my budget there are more tax cuts. There are tax cuts for education, to build and [p.1844] repair old schools; tax cuts to help families with the cost of child care; tax cuts to help small businesses take out pensions for their employees who don't have them today. But every one of them is paid for in the balanced budget.

By the time the baby boomers like me—and I'm the oldest of them—that's hard to say. [Laughter] By the time we retire, all of us in the baby boom generation, 18 years of us, there will only be about two people working for every one person drawing Social Security if the predictions are right.

Now, we have three choices. Number one, we can do nothing and wait until the crash comes, because the present system is not sustainable, and then we can simply cut the living standards of our seniors. For people like me it will be fine; I'll have a good pension. But don't forget, half the people in this country over 65 today are out of poverty because of Social Security. Or we can wait until that day comes, and we can say, "We can't do that to our parents and grandparents, so we can just simply raise the taxes a lot on the working families of this country to maintain the system just exactly as it is." And in so doing, people like me will have to face the prospect that we've lowered the standard of living of our children and our children's ability to raise our grandchildren. Or we can say, "If we start now with a sensible, modest proposal, we can save Social Security and save the future for our children and grandchildren." I don't think it's even close, and I don't think you do either.

But that means we can't rest. We have to work. We can't rest until all the children in all the communities have a world-class education. We have a budget before the Congress to hire 100,000 more teachers; to take those class sizes in the early grades down to 18; to rebuild or modernize 5,000 schools; to hook all the classrooms in the poorest schools, too, up to the Internet by the year 2000; to reward the school districts that are trying to reform and help kids, like Chicago, where there are so many kids in summer school it's the sixth biggest school district in America and over 40,000 kids get three square meals a day there; to hire 35,000 more teachers by paying their way through college and saying you can pay your student loan off if you'll go into the inner-city or into another underserved area and teach our kids who need it; by passing Congressman Fattah's high hopes proposal so that we can have the ability to mentor kids in junior high school and tell them, "If you'll stay out of trouble, stay in school, learn your lessons, we will tell you right now you will be able to go on to college and here's how much money you will get to make sure it gets done." That's what we have to do. We cannot rest. We have work to do.

We can't rest until we pass the Patients' Bill of Rights. Now, that sounds like a high-flown term. Here's what it means. It means that with 160 million Americans in managed care systems, we still don't think an accountant ought to be making a decision a doctor should make. We believe if somebody walks out of this dinner tonight and, God forbid, is in a car accident, they ought to be able to go to the nearest emergency room, not one 5 or 6 miles away because it happens to be covered by the plan. We believe if somebody needs a specialist and their doctor says they need a specialist, they ought to be able to get a specialist and not be told no. We believe if a woman is 6 months pregnant and her insurance plan changes carriers, her employer, they ought not to be able to tell her to get a different obstetrician until after the baby is born. That's what we believe.

And we believe the other party's bill is wrong for America, because it doesn't guarantee any of these rights. It enables people to invade the privacy of your records even more, and it leaves 100 million Americans out. We cannot rest. We have work to do.

We cannot rest while HIV and AIDS is escalating in the African-American community. Secretary Shalala just announced the first installment of a comprehensive prevention, education, and care plan in the African-American community. Working with Maxine Waters, Lou Stokes, and others in the CBC, we can and we must do more. But we're only 2 weeks away from this budget year, and Congress has still not passed the health bud- get. We cannot rest. We have work to do.

We cannot rest until we eliminate the unacceptable **disparities in health** that racial and ethnic minorities experience in America today. We are not one nation when it comes [p.1845] to infant mortality, heart disease, and prostate cancer for African-Americans. It is nearly double the rate for white Americans.

There are other problems that Hispanics and Asians and other minorities have. That is why I challenged the Nation to eliminate these disparities by 2010, and asked Congress to pass \$400 million to achieve this goal. Almost time for the new budget year, it still hasn't passed yet. We cannot rest. We have work to do.

Let me say this. The unemployment rate, the poverty rates, all those rates you hear about the African-American population, they're true. But they disguise a fact that is unacceptable: There are still disparities. We cannot rest until every community, every neighborhood, every block, every family has the chance to reap the benefits of our economic growth. That is why we have to fund the empowerment initiatives that the Vice President and Secretary Cuomo have worked so hard for, to provide housing assistance for those leaving welfare and entering work, to expand funding for the community development banks, to step up enforcement of fair housing laws, to revitalize more urban brownfield areas, and to restore summer jobs for our young people. We're less than 2 weeks away from a new budget year, and that has not been passed yet. We cannot rest. We have work to do.

We cannot rest while any communities are thoroughly segregated by income or by race. The Federal Government should lead the way in word and deed. I have directed Secretary Cuomo to seek a major legislative overhaul in the admission policy for public housing, to deconcentrate poverty, mix incomes, and thereby mix racial balances for Americans.

Tonight I ask all of you to send a clear message to Congress with me: Don't send me a public housing bill that doesn't include our admission reforms, reforms that will make public housing a model of one America in the 21st century. And I might add, we're less than 2 weeks away from a new budget year, and I still don't have the increase I asked for in the budget of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. We cannot rest. We have work to do.

And let me say one or two more words about this census. We can't rest until we have a fair one. Listen to this. In 1990, about 4½ percent of African Americans were not counted. In Los Angeles County alone, nearly 40,000 African-American children were left out. This has enormous consequences for how we distribute the bounty of America, for how we draw our political distinctions, for the policies that we follow. This is a fundamental issue. This is a civil rights issue. Why? Why would the Republican leadership in Congress refuse methods of counting that even—listen to this—that even Republican experts say is the best way to count all Americans. We must count every American for one simple reason: Every American counts. We cannot rest. We have work to do on this census issue.

We cannot rest until we act as leaders to contain the global financial and economic crisis that grips Russia and Asia. Why? Because a third of our own economic growth in these last years has come from our trade with other nations. We have to try to build an adequate trade and financial system for a new century that takes into legitimate account the interests of working people, the interest of the environment, the interest all countries have in avoiding depressions and unusual boom and bust cycles. Why? Because it is in our interest in a world growing ever smaller to keep people free and give them a chance to work their way to prosperity, and because we can't be an island of prosperity in a sea of failure, as Alan Greenspan said so eloquently the other day.

That means we've got to help the International Monetary Fund put out these economic fires across the world by paying our fair dues. It's in our interest to help emerging countries in Africa, in Latin America, in Asia. Hillary and I saw the African renaissance with many of you this past spring, a trip that changed me forever. Across the continent I saw hope rising, business growing, democracy gaining strength. Yes, I saw profound, continuing problems and enormous challenges, but I saw in the bright eyes of children and the stern resolve of their parents the potential of a wonderful future. [p.1846]

We have to work together to see that Africa's children, like America's, have a democratic, peaceful, prosperous future; to expand trade and partnership by passing our Africa trade bill; to deal effectively with the violent conflicts that continue to plague Africa today and threaten its future; to ensure that Africa's hospitality is not used to perpetuate acts of terrorism, as it was so terribly in the bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. I have asked Dr. David Satcher, our Surgeon General, to go to East Africa this month with a team of medical experts to do what they can to help people who are still ailing there.

There is still no action in Congress, after all these months, on the Africa trade bill or on the International Monetary Fund. But world events are not waiting for Congress. My friends, if you believe we have responsibilities in the world and you believe ultimately those responsibilities affect the welfare of your families, your children, and the future of this country, I say we cannot rest. We have work to do.

We cannot rest until we solve the oldest, most stubborn, most painful challenge of our Nation, the continuing challenge of race. Yesterday, for the final time, I met with my Advisory Board on Race and received their report. I am proud of their work, the guidance they have given us for policy, for dialog, for specific practices in every community in this country. But we know we've only just begun a work that will take a lifetime, only just begun to find ways finally to lift the burden of race and redeem the full promise of America.

You know, our Founders knew we weren't perfect, but they always strived for perfect ideals. They built us a country based on a Constitution that was literally made for reconciliation, for the honorable and principled resolution of differences, rooted in the simple proposition that God created us all equal. Therefore, the implicit mandate of the Constitution is that each of us should respect and treat our neighbors as we, ourselves, would like to be treated. It is still our most sure guidepost today. We can build an America where discrimination is something you have to look in the history books to find. But we've still got work to do.

If it takes until my last day on this Earth, I owe it to you, to the American people who have been so good to me for so long, to keep working on guiding our people across all the great divides into that one beloved community. My friends, this is not a time to rest. It's a time to work. Just as God is not finished with any of us yet, we must not be finished with God's work. We must not be finished with seeking peace or justice or freedom, equality, human dignity, and reconciliation.

Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests; but the son of man has no place to rest his head. There is never going to be an end to this work. And the present moment of promise imposes upon all of us a special responsibility. So let there be no end to your faith, your energy, your courage, and your commitment.

And let me say one other thing. You and I need some help. And this November we'll be given a chance to get it. We have worked hard to make America a better place, and it is. We have worked hard to empower our people, and we have. But now they must use that power to be heard, to say what we shall do and where we shall go. This is a moment of decision for us. Will it be progress or partisanship, people or politics, principle or power?

The scripture says that we should mount up with wings as eagles; we should run and not grow tired; we should walk and not faint. We should not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. For all the many things I am grateful to the Black Caucus for, the most important thing is that I know you have never lost heart and that in your heart there is a longing for the best, not just for African-Americans but for all Americans. We can help them get there, and they can lead us home.

Thank you, and God bless you all. Thank you.

Note: The President spoke at 10:17 p.m. at the Washington Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to civil rights activist Rosa Parks; Dorothy Height, chair and president emerita, National Council of Negro Women; and Franklin D. Raines, former Director, Office of Management and Budget. [p.1847]

Source: United States. Executive Office of the President, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, Week Ending Friday, September 25, 1998 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1998), 34:1841-1846

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The President's Radio Address, February 21, 1998

Good morning. February is Black History Month, the time when we celebrate the rich heritage of the African-American community and rededicate ourselves to the value of equal opportunity for all Americans that is at the heart of the American ideal. Today I want to talk about an important step we're taking to make sure all Americans, no matter what their background, have a better opportunity to live healthier lives.

In the last 6 years, we've worked hard to make quality health care more accessible and affordable and to place more emphasis on prevention. And this approach is working. Since 1993, our Nation's health has greatly improved. Infant mortality has reached an all-time low, childhood immunization levels are at an all-time high, and AIDS death rates are falling for the first time in the history of the epidemic. Americans are living longer and are in better health than ever before.

This is good news we should all celebrate. But we must not be blind to the alarming fact that too many Americans do not share in the fruits of our progress, and nowhere are the divisions of race and ethnicity more sharply drawn than in the health of our people.

Consider: Infant mortality rates are twice as high for African-Americans as for white Americans; African-American men suffer from heart disease at nearly twice the rate [p.304] of whites; African-Americans are more likely to die from breast cancer and prostate cancer. Overall, cancer fatalities are disproportionately high among both Latinos and blacks. Vietnamese women are 5 times as likely to have cervical cancer; Chinese-Americans, 4 to 5 times as likely to have liver cancer. Hepatitis B is much more prominent among Asian-Americans than the rest of the populations. Native Americans suffer higher rates of infant mortality and heart disease. And for diabetes, Hispanic rates are twice the national average, and Native American rates, 3 times the national average.

Research shows that, overall, all these groups are less likely to be immunized against disease, less likely to be routinely tested for cancer, less likely to get regular check-ups. We do not know all the reasons for these disturbing gaps. Perhaps inadequate education, disproportionate poverty, discrimination in the delivery of health services, cultural differences are all contributing factors. But we do know this: No matter what the reason, racial and ethnic **disparities in health** are unacceptable in a country that values equality and equal opportunity for all. And that is why we must act now with a comprehensive initiative that focuses on health care and prevention for racial and ethnic minorities.

This is our national goal: By the year 2010, we must eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in infant mortality, diabetes, cancer screening and management, heart disease, AIDS, and immunization.

My balanced budget plan devotes an unprecedented \$400 million to spur promising prevention and outreach programs to help us meet this challenge. I'm asking our top public health officials, led by Secretary Donna Shalala, to convene a task force to find new ways of targeting existing Federal programs to reduce racial and ethnic disparities. Our new Surgeon General, Dr. David Satcher, will launch a comprehensive campaign to educate the public and work with community leaders and health professionals to reach more Americans.

These steps, along with our drive to give 5 million more children, many of them minorities, health insurance, and our huge increase in overall medical research, will bring us closer to our goal. But to truly eliminate these disparities and ensure better health for all Americans, all Americans must do their part.

I'm pleased to announce that Grant-Makers in Health, a major coalition of over 136 philanthropic foundations across the country, is joining our efforts. Together, we'll host a national conference this spring to help solve this national problem, community by community.

Above all, Americans must take more responsibility for our own health and the health of our children, for good health is the greatest gift God can bestow, and it is each of our duty to protect it. America has the best health care system in the world, but we can't take full pride in that system until we know that every American has the best health care in the world. With these steps, I'm confident that we can meet the challenge and go forward as one America into the 21st century, stronger and healthier than ever before.

Thanks for listening.

Note: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.

Source: United States. Executive Office of the President, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, Week Ending Friday, February 27, 1998 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1998), 34:302-304

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Remarks in an Outreach Meeting on the Race Initiative,
January 12, 1998

The President. Well, welcome. I'm glad to see all of you, and I thank you for coming in, some of you from a very great distance. I will be very brief. We're about 6 months into this effort, and I think we've gotten quite a bit done, and we've certainly generated a fair amount of controversy. And we're hoping for a good next 6 months. We've got a very ambitious schedule laid out. But we thought it would be quite helpful to bring a group in and just listen to you talk about where you think we are with the issue, what you think still needs to be done, what this Advisory Board and our project can and cannot reasonably expect to do within this year. And maybe we can talk about some of the things that we expect to be in the budget and some other issues.

But I'll say more as we go along through the meeting, but I'd rather take the maximum amount of time to be listening to you. And maybe we could just start with Wade.

Wade Henderson. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Nice tie.

[Wade Henderson, executive director, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, thanked the President for his initiative, noted that a challenge to affirmative action may appear on the November ballot in the State of Washington, and asked for the President's leadership to oppose it. He then urged a commitment to vigorous enforcement of existing civil rights laws, including a Federal zero-tolerance policy on discrimination and increased funding; suggested that the President direct the attention of business leaders toward addressing the growing gap in terms of the benefits of the Nation's robust economy between the haves and the have-nots; and suggested the creation of incentives to attract bright, committed, dedicated professionals to the teaching profession in order to ensure that more high-quality instruction is made available in both inner-city and rural school systems.]

The President. I agree with that. Let me say on the first, on the discrimination, just [p.51] very, very briefly, we're working on that. We have a good budget and a good plan. And I think we ought to go hard toward the people who say they are against discrimination but they oppose affirmative action in the Republican majority, and say, "Well, if you are, why won't you fund the EEOC? Give us the tools to do the job."

On the economy, we'll have a very aggressive set of proposals that go right at what you're suggesting and also in education. Of course, we've already suggested that we—and have offered a program of loan forgiveness for people who will go into educationally underperforming school districts to teach. But we have some other things to offer in that regard.

I think all these are important because we have to find ways to unify the American people around this agenda in ways that actually change the future outcomes for people. And so I appreciate that. I think that's very good.

Who wants to go next? Go ahead.

[Alfred Rotondaro, executive director, National Italian-American Foundation, stated that it would be a tragedy if the work of the racial commission stops this year and suggested it should enlist the Nation's opinion leaders, including white ethnic organizations, in an effort to continue the fight against social injustice or racism. He also stated that the problem involved elements of class and stressed the importance of changing the attitudes of urban minority children toward academic excellence. Nan Rich, president, National Council of Jewish Women, stated that her suggestions should be advanced in the context of public-private-nonprofit partnerships. She then emphasized increasing economic opportunity for women and minority groups and corporate training to increase cultural diversity awareness. She also suggested that early childhood programs focus on diversity. Mayor Joseph Serna, Jr., of Sacramento, CA, stated that California faced the dilemma of scapegoating of immigrants and cited California's Proposition 187 and Proposition 209 as wedge issues which divide people along racial lines. He suggested encouraging citizenship in the Latino and Asian communities and directing the Immigration and Naturalization Service to move more quickly in the process of naturalization.]

The President. You know, when I came here, it was taking an unconscionably long time for people to get through the system, and we tried to accelerate it. And the Congress had such a negative reaction to it, the Republican majority did, they tried to investigate the whole INS because we took the position that you shouldn't have to wait years and years and years, after you had already been here 5 years, to have the Government decide whether you could become a citizen or not. I still think that's the right thing to do. I think it's entirely too bureaucratic, and I think we should do better.

Karen Narasaki. Mr. President, I'm very glad to hear you say that, because the backlog persists. It's already 2 million individuals, and it's 2 years long. That's how many would-be citizens we would have——

The President. But we were taking it down—to be fair—until we were viciously and unfairly attacked for making the law work the way it's supposed to.

[Ms. Narasaki, executive director, National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, thanked the President for including more funding for food stamps in the budget, saying it would help the most vulnerable in society. She also thanked him for appointing Acting Assistant Attorney General Bill Lann Lee and thereby putting a face on the affirmative action debate. She urged the President to help narrow the race discussion, homing in on such topics as bilingual education and affirmative action. She advocated challenging religious leaders, including the Christian Coalition, and the entertainment and housing industries to participate in the discussion. Representative John Lewis of Georgia stated that the President should address the question of race in his State of the Union Address, making it a moral issue, and that he should not back off on the affirmative action debate. Stewart Kwoh, president and executive director, Asia Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California, said that the appointment of Acting Assistant Attorney General Lee built the best multiracial coalition in decades. He then suggested the President request direct action from local leaders to improve race relations, as well as incorporating race relations improvement into Federal programs at the local level, such as AmeriCorps.] [p.52]

The President. That's interesting because I've been just—sort of in support of what you said, we have—one of the most clearly successful things we've done, even though it's not—we don't have it on prime time television in ads or anything, because we don't have that kind of money, but we put up this Internet home page with promising practices in communities around the country. And substantial numbers of people have tapped into it to see what's being done someplace else, and can they apply it in their own community, and is there some way to build on it? It's been very, very impressive.

The other thing you said about recruiting leadership I think is—the one thing that we did was we wrote several thousand young people and asked them to take some initiative, and hundreds of them wrote us back with very specific things, saying what they were going to do. So that's some indication that if we identify a given list of people, whether they're mayors, city council people, county officials, you name it, and ask them to do something specific, that they'll do that.

Hugh.

[Hugh B. Price, president and chief executive officer, National Urban League, underscored the need to close the gap between young people who are achieving in school and those who aren't, advocating an almost warlike mobilization on that issue, and urged attention to those inner-city neighborhoods still unaffected by downtown revitalization efforts. He also raised the issue of police interaction with civilians, including attitudes of minorities toward police authority as well as problems in police practices.]

The President. The profiling, I think, is a serious problem. We've talked a lot about it. I think I've seen—the three most glaring examples that I've seen since I've been President are the repeated examples black Americans have given of being stopped by police for no apparent reason—we had a black journalists group in here not very long ago, and every African-American male in the room had been stopped within the last few years for no apparent reason; the stopping of Hispanics for no apparent reason near the border—as part of drug—and the immediate assumption, after the Oklahoma City bombing, that some Arab-American had been involved. You know that I was able to sort of put a puncture in that within 24 hours, but it was—when I cautioned the American people not to do that. But we just—it's still a part of how we related to each other that we have to deal with.

Eleanor, go ahead. I'm sorry.

[Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton of the District of Columbia praised the President for confronting race without an in-your-face crisis, noting that there was more communication across racial lines during the era of the civil rights movement than today and that people comfortable in their separate racial niches tend to reinforce their own views. She emphasized the importance of filling the chairmanship of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, as well as adequately funding it. She also stated that the State of the Union Address should present a call for action to the Nation and a call for Congress to avoid making affirmative action a wedge issue, and suggested that the President have a private conversation with Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. Roger Wilkins, professor of history and American culture, George Mason University, thanked the President and described a similar meeting with President Lyndon B. Johnson, saying that John Franklin had not been present because he was in jail.]

The President. That's why he looks so young; he had all those resting days. [Laughter]

[Mr. Wilkins stated that the conversation is important and that the effort should not end in a year, urging the President to use his office as a teaching lectern to remind the Nation of its history of denying opportunity to blacks. He also suggested establishing a Presidential medal to honor teachers, making teachers' pay a major issue, and focusing on joblessness as a detriment to good parenting.]

The President. Let me say, one of the—just a couple of things real quick. Is it—one of the big entertainment organizations sponsors every year a big event honoring teachers. Is it Disney? Disney. Maybe we should see if we should do something with them. [p.53]

On this unemployment, one of you mentioned this earlier—I think it was Hugh that mentioned it—but we announced today, it was in the paper, that we're going to spend a ton of money to try to focus on just training people to take jobs in technology companies. And the reason—how that happened was I read two things at the same time several weeks ago.

I get—a month after the unemployment rates comes out, the people who do the unemployment rates give you the State-by-State for that month, so like every month you're getting this month's national unemployment rate and last month's State-by-State. So I don't have the December State-by-States, but I do have it for November. In November, two States, North Dakota and one other—Nebraska, I think—had 1.9 percent unemployment. Now, that is essentially negative unemployment because any economist will tell you there's somewhere between 2 and 3 percent of the people walking around all the time. I mean, they're moving; they're getting married; they change States; they do something; something is always happening to a couple percent of the people that are just—in the way we measure unemployment.

And Washington, DC, had 7.8, or whatever it was. And at the same time—this was this month. Anyway, the month before when this happened, the same day I pick up this article in the Washington Post which says that in all these suburban counties around Washington, DC, there's this huge shortage of high-technology workers. Well, if Washington, DC, had an unemployment rate of 2 percent instead of nearly 8 percent, we'd have about a quarter of the problems we've got here, maybe a tenth.

And so it occurred to me that a lot of—but a lot of these jobs in high-technology areas do not require 4-year college degrees. They do require technology training; they do require advanced skills over what you would get just coming out of high school. But they do not require a 4-year college degree. So what this announcement in the paper is about—it's Alexis Herman and some others, we've been working on this—we're trying to figure out whether, not just in DC but anywhere around the country where you've got this suburban ring of job demand and a high unemployment core, whether we can go in there and do profiles on people and see who is capable of getting these skills. And we're going to try and do it in some of the less urbanized areas, too. One of the problems—a lot of our Native Americans without jobs, without good jobs, live in highly dispersed areas where it's not as easy to get there.

But anyway, if this works—that is, if 4 months from now we can show you that we did "X" amount of training and the people that formerly would have gone into minimum wage jobs are now going into jobs that pay above-average wages, where they actually get retirement and health insurance and other things, because they got this—it will rather dramatically change the nature of job training and the whole strategy that the Federal Government has generally followed.

So, anyway—but I appreciate what you're saying about it.

Bob, you were next, I think.

[Representative Robert Matsui commended the President for the diversity within his administration. He stated that affirmative action was a critical issue because its elimination would have a profound negative impact on the Nation. He also stressed the need to address inner-city poverty by involving the private sector in long-term planning, as well as technology and empowerment zone initiatives.]

The President. Thank you. Go ahead.

[Asifa Quraishi, president, Karamahi Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights, described the diversity within the American-Muslim community and its problem of harassment as a response to international political events, stating that the American public must separate those events from individual minority citizens and see American Muslims as being American citizens first.]

The President. You know, when I was—I made a big point to try to make that exact same point, interestingly enough, when I spoke in the Jordanian Parliament when we went to sign the peace agreement between Israel and Jordan, and how the United States had no quarrel with Islam. And it was amazing the impact it had when I went back to the place where I was—I didn't stay in this^[p.54] hotel, but I went back to this hotel and this public crowd there. It was amazing the impact that it had on the young people that were there. And then I got to Jerusalem, and I had an Arab Palestinian employee in one of the hotels where I was—came up to me and mentioned it to me. So even abroad it's a big deal.

And here at home, there was a very kind of troubling story here in our local press in the last week about a Muslim school that had 50 students, and they were trying to expand it, and they were looking for a new home. And people in the various places where they were looking were afraid that this would be funded by people who would be preaching terrorism and all that.

And I think it's exceedingly important that we disassociate religious conviction, and particularly being of Middle Eastern or South Asian heritage, from some iron connection to all the problems we're having there. And we're going to have to work on it more because the Muslim population is growing so substantially in this country.

[Raul Yzaguirre, president, National Council of La Raza, suggested using the Advisory Board as a teaching tool for the long term to help the Nation build a national identity based on the respect of all its constituent groups, including victims of conquest and colonialism. John Echohawk, executive director, Native American Rights Fund, advocated an effort to teach the American public about the legal and political status of tribal governments in the Federal system as the appropriate context for combating such problems as unemployment and low educational attainment.]

The President. Let me just say very briefly on this one subject, I think it's also quite important—and we've been working at this steadily for 5 years, and I thank Senator Daschle, particularly—I want to thank him because he knows a lot about these issues. But the Native American tribes have a—I don't want to tie the analogy too tight, but they have experienced in the last several decades a situation in dealing with the United States that is not unlike that experienced by the District of Columbia.

I always tell people, the problem that DC's had—one problem that DC has is sort of the "not quite" place. It's not quite independent, and it's not quite dependent. It's not quite a State, but it's not quite a city that we treat like a city. It's sort of "not quite." And we've had a policy that, if it had an honest label—an honest label—toward Native American tribes, would be something like sovereign dependence, or dependent sovereignty.

And what I have tried to do is not only to recognize the sovereignty of the tribes when it came to national resource and environmental issues and even issues where I maybe didn't always agree because it wasn't my place to decide—some of the gaming issues and other things that the law gives it to the tribes to decide. I think there is this whole other sort of superstructure of the way the Federal Government dealt with Native Americans relating mostly to their economic needs and their educational needs, which in my view was not focused enough toward economic and educational and health care and other empowerment issues, where I think we could—we'll never have the right sort of sovereignty relationship until the tools for success are there.

And I really—we've worked at this for 5 years. We haven't quite got it down yet exactly right, but I think we're making a lot of progress. And I appreciate the help you've given us.

Tom, and John—go ahead, John.

[Historian John Hope Franklin, Chairman, President's Advisory Board on Race, noted that affirmative action favoring whites operated in the Nation for a much longer time than that favoring minorities. He also suggested that the President strongly publicize actions and events relating to the race initiative because that had not attracted much media attention thus far.]

The President. Thank you very much. I also want to thank you for the extraordinary amount of time and energy you've put into this. It's been humbling to the rest of us.

Tom.

[Senator Tom Daschle stated that the Democrats in Congress need to amplify the President's leadership. He noted the extremely negative statistics on reservations throughout [p.55] the Midwest, citing an 85 percent unemployment rate on reservations in North Dakota, as opposed to a 1.9 percent rate off reservations, as an example of the great need.]

The President. Before we go I'd like to just leave you with this thought, just sort of food for thought to keep you churning on this. First, I'll make a request. I would like anything you can do to help us get more things that work in to the commission staff, so we can put it on the Internet and get it out, let people see that there are—people always write or they E-mail us and they say, "What can we do?" We'd like to say, here's something that's working somewhere; why don't you do it? That's important. Anything you can do to help us recruit any kind of new leadership to enlist in this cause, we'd like to have your help on that.

But anyway, let me finish. Here's the thing I'd like to leave you with, just sort of as food for thought, to continue this discussion and try to narrow it further. And I may be unfairly summarizing someone else's work, so I'll try not to—I hope I'm not being unfair. Bill Raspberry had an interesting column the other day in which he said this race effort is a big deal, and there's three things involved in it, and maybe nobody could ever deal with all three things. He said, first of all, there's the feeling of racial prejudice, how people feel about each other. And secondly, he said, there is the existence of illegal discrimination that our laws prohibit. And thirdly, there is the existence of outcomes which are dramatically different by race; your life chances and education, income, employment, and ownership and health care, among other things, are dramatically different based on your race.

He said, I once thought we could fight all three of them in the sixties because we had an enemy, the Southern white people, and everybody else was on the same side. Now, at least when it comes to—maybe everybody feels some discrimination towards somebody else or—he says, now the problem is if we're all responsible for all this, it's hard to get enough allies to work on what really counts, which is changing the life experiences of the people, in terms of their outcomes. Most leaders of any group would give anything just to end whatever the **disparities** are in education, in **health care**, and in employment, income, and ownership. And I'm sort of amplifying, but I think this is a fair representation of what he said.

So he made the suggestion—he said, what we need to do is get everybody on the same side, start out, and then see if we can work back to—so the logical extension—this was not in there, but the logical extension of the argument was if you could get everybody working on the same side on what to do about job outcomes, maybe you would come back and have a broader consensus on an affirmative action program than you think, or at least the people who are against it would then recognize their moral responsibility to put something credible in its place.

I thought that was an interesting argument, when you deal with—if you just deal with the three things I mentioned. It doesn't get you out of the primary obligation to enforce the laws against discrimination adequately, but it was an interesting way to think about it. If you ask everybody—for example, if you ask everybody who is on both sides of this English-as-a-second-language issue in California to start with the disparate educational outcomes and work back, you might get to a different place.

One of the things that always bothers me about all these litmus test issues—and I'm not innocent in this, so I'm not casting a stone—is that depending on which side of the litmus test you're on, once you figure out your crowd's winning, then you go on and worry about something else. Then when you figure out—when you realize your side's losing, you can't worry about anything else; but you can't have an honest conversation, because you're trying too hard to keep from getting killed in the next referendum or whatever.

In terms of the affirmative action referendum, all I can tell you is that I made a couple of statements in California in 209, and maybe I could have done more, and I think if the thing had gone on 3 more weeks, it would have come out differently on 209. I'm glad I was asked to be a part of the effort against the repeal in Houston, and it succeeded; it's the only one that has. But the real issue is if you left it alone and no one ever debated it again, we've had enough experience to [p.56] know that it is insufficient to change the disparate outcomes. So what if we started on trying to figure out how we could close the gaps and work back; we might find that we had a lot more agreement than we thought.

Now, in the initial polling—I think this will change a lot, as the referendum is debated. And I confess, I have not read exactly what—the initial polling in California, on the English, the bilingual education initiative, is deeply troubling to defenders of bilingual education because the initial polling has 70 percent of Hispanic voters voting for the initiative.

Now, what does that mean? That doesn't necessarily mean that they understand the implications of this initiative and they want to vote for it. But what it does mean is that Hispanic parents are concerned about whether their children stay in the programs for too long, or whether the programs are sufficiently effective to let them learn everything else as well as they need to learn.

So instead of getting into the fight, could we at least start with dealing with what people's perception of the problem is, and then work back to the solution; then if you do that, you've got some alternative to put in place if you want to fight the initiative. In other words, you don't have to play their game; you don't have to let it be a wedge issue if you decide to articulate it in a way that forces everybody else to come talk to you about what the real issue is—which is, you want all these children whose first language is not English to be able to learn everything they need to learn, on time as much as possible, and to be English-proficient, if they're going to live in this country, as quickly as they can be.

But there are—depending on what age you come here and what your situation is and what your native language is and how difficult it is and what the subject is, it is more or less difficult to learn certain things in English within certain time periods. In other words, it's a complicated issue. But there is a broad perception that the bilingual services have become, if you will, institutionalized in a way that carry kids with them longer than they should be and may make them too dependent on it.

So why don't we analyze the facts and find out what they are, and then try to work back to that, instead of immediately joining the issue; but do it quickly enough so that the people of California have some chance of having an honest debate. It isn't just history that people are deprived of; very often they are deprived of what the facts are on the issues they're debating. So all they can do is go on what they think their basic values are and their basic instincts.

And we get so caught up—and, believe me, I share the frustration that Dr. Franklin said about what the voters don't know. It's very hard to pierce through the public consciousness and to do a sustained public education campaign in the absence of some great conflict.

I'll never forget, 10 days before our congressional debacle in 1994, a man I didn't know very well who was a pollster just spontaneously sent me this survey he did—or at least I wasn't working with him at the time—and I was shocked. He said, "Here are 10 things that, if all the voters knew them, would change the outcome of this congressional election, which is about to be terrible for you, if they just knew"—maybe there were eight things on the list. But anyway, there were more than five things that we had done that absolutely nobody knew about. So this is a generic problem in a society as big and complex as ours, being bombarded from all edges.

But I just ask you to think about that. Suppose we did that with health care. Suppose we did that with education. For example, on the education issue, some people say, well, maybe this 10 percent solution that Texas adopted would work on the affirmative action. Well, the answer is it might well work in most States for admission to college, but it wouldn't do anything on the graduate school front. So what's your answer on graduate school?

There are a lot of these things that I'd just like to see—I'd like to see more, instead of just throwing barricades over the wall at one another, if we could start with what the problem is and work back, I really believe we can make an enormous amount of progress in this country, because most Americans who get caught in the middle on these referendums, [p.57] where their values are pulling them one way and you're trying to—and the rhetoric is pulling them one way, and you're trying to cram information in as quick as you can before election time comes and all that kind of stuff. Most Americans really don't like the fact that we have disparate outcomes, and most Americans think anybody that's working hard and needs a hand up ought to get it, to have a fair chance.

So I think, to go back to what you said about talking to the Speaker on this issue, I think I'm going to try to follow this tack in dealing with our friends who disagree with us on so much. Let's see if we can't start with that and work back and see how much agreement we can make. I think we may do better than people think.

Thank you. This was great.

Note: The President spoke at 5:45 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. The outreach meeting was part of "One America: The President's Initiative on Race."

Source: United States. Executive Office of the President, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, Week Ending Friday, January 16, 1998 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1998), 34:50-57

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Public Papers of the Presidents, June 10, 1993

Public Papers of the Presidents

June 10, 1993

CITE: 29 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 1059**LENGTH:** 859 words**HEADLINE:** Remarks on Signing the National Institutes of Health Revitalization Act of 1993**BODY:**

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, I want to welcome all those of you who are here today for the signing of S. 1, the National Institutes of Health Revitalization Act of 1993, and to especially recognize the bipartisan coalition which made this bill possible, led by the Senators and the Members of the House of Representatives who are here. I also want to thank the representatives of the groups who are here, including the Women's Health Network, the Juvenile **Diabetes** Foundation, the American Association of Medical Colleges, the Allen Guttmacher Institute, the Alzheimer's Association, the Human Rights Campaign Fund, the Breast Cancer Coalition and the National Health Council, and perhaps others. If I've left anyone out, forgive me.

This legislation highlights the importance of programs administered by the National Institutes of Health, programs vital to our science and biomedical research base. The research carried out at NIH has already led to a healthier and far more productive America. However, there are many challenges still ahead. And this legislation provides the hope that someday we can prevent or cure diseases such as **diabetes**, cancer, coronary heart disease, AIDS, and Alzheimer's.

I'm particularly supportive of those provisions of S. 1 aimed at improving the health of women and minorities. It's important that we ensure that resources are devoted to increasing our knowledge about conditions which uniquely affect these populations. It's equally important that we expand opportunities and support for the inclusion of women and minorities in research activities.

In the 12 years since AIDS was first reported in the United States, much progress has been made through NIH-supported research. Gains have been made in making available treatment for AIDS and AIDS-related conditions. And clinical trials are underway to test possible vaccines for prevention or treatment of HIV infection.

Someday we're going to have a treatment for all those beepers that go off. [Laughter] They have to go to a vote. That's why we're hurrying this up.

We still face, however, an immense undertaking to address the needs of the nearly 300 of our fellow citizens who become infected with HIV each and every day. We must improve the effectiveness of our prevention activity, increase access to early treatment for already infected individual, and strengthen our research programs. I am pleased to say that S. 1 provides a framework for the increased coordination and direction of AIDS research.

Finally, S. 1 reinforces my action of January 22d to lift the moratorium on Federal funding of

transplantation research involving human subjects using fetal tissue from induced abortions. This research has promising application for the treatment of life-threatening conditions including Parkinson's disease, spinal cord injuries, Huntington's, and **diabetes**. At the same time, S. 1 puts in place important safeguards to ensure against possible abuses by providing a clear separation between research and abortion.

In signing the legislation, I underscore our commitment to address the immeasurable cost to our society and the suffering of our citizens from illness and disability. By strengthening and enhancing biomedical and behavioral research, this National Institutes of Health Revitalization Act is an important step in fulfilling our commitment to promote the health and well-being of all Americans.

And again, let me say a profound thanks on behalf of our Nation to the Senators and Members of Congress who are here and to those not here who provided important leadership in this effort.

[At this point, the President signed the bill.]

Q. Mr. President, what about the provision barring immigration by HIV-positive individuals in this bill?

The President. That's the will of the Congress. That's part of the law. I don't think in any way it undermines the overall importance of this law. We have to learn to deal with AIDS better for all of our people and for those who are here within our borders who are not citizens, we've got all we can do to do that. And I think we could benefit people all around if we can make progress in dealing with AIDS.

I think everybody who played a part in the developing of this legislation thinks that it's on balance still a dramatic step forward.

Let me just say on the fetal tissue issue alone, I can't tell you how many people I met all over this country in 1992 from both political parties who came to my campaign and supported me simply because I wanted to put a scientific basis back in our decisions on fetal tissue. I mean, people with parents with Parkinson's, with children with **diabetes**. One person who became a very close friend of mine and is now in our administration as the Director of the Small Business Administration in part came to my campaign because he had a child with **diabetes**.

This is a very, very important bill. And I thank all of you for what you did.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:37 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. S. 1, approved June 10, was assigned Public Law No. 103-43.

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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 28, 2000

PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE PRESIDENT

The East Room

1:45 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon. This has been a good week for the American people: first, the landmark breakthrough in human genomic research, which promises to eradicate once incurable diseases and revolutionize health care for a very long time to come; second, the release of the Midsession Review, which told us that the health of our economy continues its remarkable expansion.

Our budget surplus this year will be the largest in history -- \$211 billion. Over the next 10 years, after we lock away Medicare and Social Security surpluses, the remaining surplus is expected to be almost \$1.5 trillion. This progress exceeds even our own predictions just four months ago, another milestone in what is now the longest economic expansion in our history.

This is a tribute to the hard work of the American people and our commitment to fiscal discipline, expanded trade and investments in our people and our future. Now is not the time to abandon the path that has brought us here. We must use this moment of prosperity to make important investments in our most pressing priorities.

Chief among them is the need to provide affordable, reliable prescription drug coverage to our seniors. There is no question that this is a critical need. Just yesterday, a study released showed that prescription drugs shot up over 10 percent last year alone. That is too heavy a burden for our older seniors to pay and for our people with disabilities to pay.

There are some who say we can't provide affordable, accessible prescription drug coverage for all our seniors. I believe that's wrong. With millions of them without coverage, the absence of prescription drug coverage is a fatal flaw in our present health care system. Think about it: Because of breakthroughs like the Human Genome Project, in our lifetime there may be new life-saving drug treatments for many dreaded diseases. But they won't mean anything if our seniors and people with disabilities can't afford them. That's what this debate is really all about.

Today, the House is set to vote on a prescription drug plan that amounts to an empty promise for too many of our seniors. It's a private insurance plan that many seniors and people with disabilities simply won't be able to afford. Insurers, themselves, say the Republican plan won't work. The bottom line is, their plan is designed to benefit the companies who make the prescription drugs, not the older Americans who need to take them. It puts special interest above the public interest.

Let me make it specific and clear: This plan would not guarantee affordable prescription drugs to single senior citizens with incomes above \$12,600 a year, or to senior couples with incomes above \$16,600 a

year. And we have all heard countless, countless stories of those with crushing medical burdens, that if they could get these prescription drugs, would have their lives lengthened and the quality of their lives improved.

An article in today's paper reveals that a group calling itself Citizens for Better Medicare is running -- I give it points forchutzpa -- Citizens for Better Medicare is running millions of dollars in ads to kill our prescription drug proposal. You'd think a group with this name would be in favor of affordable Medicare prescription drug coverage for all seniors and people with disabilities. But this is one of those mysterious interest groups whose financial backers are cloaked in secrecy.

Now, just last night, the House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to force groups like this to open their books and disclose their fundraising sources to the American people. I applaud the House for this vote, and all those, Democrats and Republicans, who voted for it. With the vote on Medicare in the House, I call on Citizens for Better Medicare to respect the will of the Congress and reveal the sources of their support today. We should let the American people judge who is truly interested in better Medicare.

It is clear that this lobbying effort is part of a larger campaign to block real progress. In fact, the Republican leadership in Congress won't even allow our prescription plan to come up for a vote in the House -- I suspect because they're afraid it would pass.

I have offered a Medicare prescription drug benefit that is voluntary and affordable. My plan puts the interest of seniors first. Whether you're on a fixed income, live in a big city or a rural area, the plan is dependable, and it is affordable. This is particularly important for rural Americans. More than half of our oldest seniors in rural communities go the entire year without any prescription drug coverage at all.

Earlier this week, in an effort to break the logjam, I offered a compromise proposal to give seniors the relief they desperately need. I said we could pass a prescription drug benefit while providing real tax relief to married couples, something the majority in Congress say they want to do. And we could do both now within the framework of fiscal responsibility.

As the Vice President has proposed, the first thing we should do is to take the Medicare tax receipts we get off budget, so they are saved for Medicare alone and, meanwhile, used to pay down the debt. That will do more to protect and strengthen Medicare; it will help extend the life of the Medicare trust fund to 2023; it will put us in a position to pay down the debt completely by 2012, a year ahead of schedule. It will enable us still to set aside \$500 billion to reserve for America's future, to be used after a full debate and after this year's elections to meet the country's key priorities.

Now, with less than 35 days left in the legislative year, time is running out for Congress to meet its obligations to the American people. They have to make the tough choices to get something done or continue to be dragged down by the weight of special interests.

So, again, I ask Congress, let's not waste these precious weeks. It's time to get down to business, to pass a strong patients' bill of rights; to raise the minimum wage by \$1 over two years; to pass the common-sense gun legislation; to hold tobacco companies, not taxpayers, accountable for the health care costs of tobacco; to pass hate crimes legislation; to finish the jobs of giving American businesses and

farmers access to a huge new market by passing permanent normal trade relations with China; to open new markets to American investors here at home; to bring prosperity to people in places who have been left behind; and, most important of all, to continue to improve our schools, to demand more of them and invest more in them, including more teachers for smaller class sizes, after-school programs for all our kids who need them, and repairing or modernizing thousands of our schools that are today literally falling apart or so over-crowded they can't contain all the kids.

We can still do a lot of this if we work together in the days ahead. That's what the American people want us to do, even in an election year.

There's been some encouraging developments in this Congress. We lifted the earnings limit on Social Security; we passed the Africa Caribbean Basin trade bill. Apparently, the bill to aid Colombia is making good progress. And I think the China legislation will pass if we can get it up to a vote in a timely fashion. So the Congress can do a lot of things and I hope they will, and I'm looking forward to work with them.

Terry?

Q Mr. President, after seven months, the Elian Gonzalez case is coming to a conclusion, removing a thorn from U.S.-Cuban relations. And House Republican leaders have struck a deal to ease decades-old sanctions against Cuba. Would you accept that legislation? Is it time to normalize relations with Fidel Castro's government? What would that take?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me deal with the questions separately; first, on the question of the legislation proposed by Mr. Nethercutt. If I believe that the legislation essentially allows for the sales of American food and medicine to Cuba or to other countries, but has some protection for us for extraordinary circumstances that foreign policy might require, like Senator Lugar's bill does in the Senate, then I would be inclined to sign the bill and to support it. I've always wanted to sell more food and medicine, not only to Cuba, but to other countries, as well.

I have some concerns about it, and I just have to analyze the bill as it passed and whatever legislation finally makes its way to my desk, because, as I understand it, they put some new restrictions on travel to Cuba, which might undermine our people-to-people contacts, which had been more and more extensive over the last several months and which I believe to be very important. And since no federal programs can be used to help finance these food sales, as they can be to other countries, we need an analysis of whether there actually will be more sales under the legislation.

So I guess what I want to know and I just haven't had time to get the analysis from our folks, is whether this will be a net plus in terms of our strategy, which is to reach out to the Cuban people without supporting the Cuban government.

Now, the second question you ask is whether it's time to move toward normalization. Let me just do a little history here. In 1992, when I was running for president, the Congress passed the Cuba Democracy Act and President Bush signed it, and I strongly supported the bill. The bill seemed to strengthen economic sanctions on Cuba, but actually provided a specific, step-by-step way for us to move toward normalizing relations. And we were in the process of doing that. We did it in '93, '94, '95. We were moving toward sort of -- we would do something, they

would do something. It was working, I thought, quite well. And I thought the law was actually quite good.

And then, the Cuban Air Force shot the planes down and killed American citizens, illegally and deliberately. And so, since -- after that, the Helms-Burton bill passed, and it codified the embargo. So the real answer to your question is, I don't believe that we can change that law until there is a bipartisan majority which believes that there has been some effort on the part of the Cuban government to reach out to us, as well.

I like the old law, I thought it was working well. The killing of those innocent people in those two airplanes changed all that. And now we're in a position where until there is a bipartisan majority of Congress persuaded that there has been a fundamental change, we can't do more than what I've been doing, which is to try to aggressively expand people-to-people contacts.

That brings us back to the Nethercutt bill. If I think on balance, it allows the President -- not just me, my successor as well -- to pursue our foreign policy interest, and will, on balance, further that policy, then I would support it. But I want to analyze it for the reasons that I said.

Go ahead, Steve.

Q There are reports that Israel and the Palestinians will be coming to Washington next week for talks. Do you think enough progress is being made to arrange a Middle East summit, or are you discouraged? And secondly, should Israel stop the sale of radar systems to China?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me answer the second question first. That's a much clearer one. We're very concerned about that sale, and I've talked to Prime Minister Barak about it extensively. And as you know, there's a lot of concern in the Congress, so we're still working on that.

Now, in terms of their coming here for talks, there has been no date set. I do not believe that they can resolve the final, most difficult issues without having the leaders get together in some isolated setting and make the last tough decisions -- or decide not to make them, as the case may be.

Of all the issues involved with regard to all the parties in the Middle East peace talks, the final status issues between the Israelis and the Palestinians are the most difficult. I do not, however, believe they're going to get any easier with the passage of time. I think that some foreign policy problems, the answer is to kick the can down the road and wait for them to get better, and hope time takes care of them. Some have to be decided sooner or later, and sooner is better than later. My own instinct is that the cluster of problems here would be better off being resolved sooner rather than later.

I've had Mr. Ross out in the Middle East, and then Secretary Albright went, and she's going to give me a report, and when she does, then I'll make a judgment about whether the time is right to ask them to come here. But I have not made that decision yet.

Go ahead, Paul.

Q A death penalty question, sir. Do you believe that Governor Bush made the wrong decision by allowing Mr. Graham to go to his death last week? And secondly, do you believe it's time for the American people to stop and reassess where we stand on implementation of the death penalty in this country?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, on the Texas case, I didn't read the file, all I know about it is what I've read about it in the press. But let me say generally what I think. I think that those of us who support the death penalty have an extra heavy responsibility to assure both that the result is accurate and that the process was fair and constitutional. And that means, to me, at least in modern terms, the broadest possible use of DNA evidence and the strongest possible effort to guarantee adequate assistance of counsel. That's a big issue. And I think those were two of the reasons that motivated Governor Ryan in Illinois to do what he did, and have driven a lot of other things in this debate. So that's where I think it is.

Now, I don't know that the American people have changed their position that it's still an appropriate penalty under certain severe circumstances, and I haven't. But I am concerned also, at the federal level, with the -- I don't believe that adequate assistance of counsel is an issue in the federal cases. And as far as I know, there are no cases in which the question of DNA is an issue. There may be, I don't know if there are some.

The issues at the federal level relate more to the disturbing racial composition of those who have been convicted and the apparent fact that almost all the convictions are coming out of just a handful of states, which raises the question of whether, even though there is a uniform law across the country, what your prosecution is may turn solely on where you committed the crime. I've got a review underway of both those issues at this time.

Yes, Bill?

Q Mr. President, as you know, for the third time, a Justice Department investigation has recommended that the Vice President's activities in fundraising during the last campaign cycle be looked into. Previously, on two occasions, the Attorney General has declined to do this. Would it be better for the Attorney General, for your administration, and for the Vice President's candidacy if he invited such an investigation?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first let me say, my understanding is -- I know this is true in the previous cases, and I think it's true here -- is that there are some people in the Justice Department that think there should be and some who think there shouldn't be. And the Attorney General, who has shown no reluctance to ask for a special counsel when she thought one was called for, didn't think one was called for in this case, and she reaffirmed that yesterday.

I think the fact that the Vice President released the transcript of his interview was a very good thing, because some Republican senators had made some assertions about it that just weren't so, they weren't true. And now that the whole thing has been put out in the public, it seems to me that the best thing to do is for the American people to make their own judgments about it. But I don't see any reason that the Attorney General shouldn't make a decision in this case, as she has in every other one.

Q Another question about your Vice President. A year ago when people looked at his poll numbers compared to the Texas Governor's, his supporters would say, oh, the election is a long way off. Six months ago, people were saying the election's a long way off with those same poll numbers, and today, his supporters are still saying that. And I wonder, do you think it's time to suggest that this might be a trend, that there is a reason why the Vice President is trailing the Texas Governor in the polls? And secondly, you have said that the Vice President will not be held accountable, that the American people will not hold him accountable for the scandals of this administration. Do

you still believe that's the case, or is this, in fact, part of it?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, I said -- no, let me say exactly what I said -- I said that the people would not hold him responsible for anything I did that they didn't agree with, or that was wrong, and that's clearly true. That's still true. There is no evidence of that in the surveys.

Secondly, let me remind you that a lot of these other so-called "scandals" were bogus. Mike Espy was acquitted; the Cisneros thing was a tempest in a teapot, totally overdone; and you all know that the Whitewater thing was bogus from day one, it had nothing to do with the official conduct of the administration, anyway.

Now, so the word "scandal," has been thrown around here like a clanging teapot for seven years. And I keep waiting for somebody to say -- I noticed there was one columnist in The Washington Post that had the uncommon decency to say, will no one ever stand up here and say that a whole bunch of this stuff was just garbage and that we had totally innocent people prosecuted because they wouldn't lie, we had totally innocent people's lives wrecked because they wouldn't go along with this alleged scandal machine? So let's be careful, let's be specific.

Now, I've already told you, my view is that the Vice President, on the only thing as far as I know that he's been in any way implicated in is this campaign finance thing. He put out the whole transcript of his interview, made himself available for questions, and I thought made a very compelling case and certainly demonstrated that a lot of the accusations against him with regard to that are not so.

There was also a very interesting article -- I think in the National Law Journal -- which basically went through all of the things and concluded that there was no basis for a lot of these criticisms of him, under these circumstances. And I think another magazine here -- maybe the New Republic, The Washington Monthly -- one of those other magazines had an analysis of it. So I think that we should be very careful in throwing that around.

Now, let me come back to the polls. First of all, I must say, I haven't seen any or done any lately, so I don't know. But I'm perplexed that I can't remember a time when we had two major polls coming out within a couple of days of each other that had 13 points difference. One said there was a 13-point difference in the race; the other one said it was tied -- and they came out, they were done within two or three days of each other. I don't think either one of those pollsters rigged the results, so my instinct is that people are still trying to figure out what they think about this race.

And all I can tell you is, I know three things -- and I've said this over and over again, I know three things -- one is, no person in the history of the republic has ever had the positive impact on this country as Vice President that Al Gore has had. That is a historical fact. We've had a lot of Presidents who were Vice Presidents who were great Presidents -- Jefferson, Teddy Roosevelt, Harry Truman were great Presidents, but not because of their service as Vice President. Nobody has ever done as much for America as Vice President as Al Gore has. Therefore, in my lifetime, he's the best qualified person to serve.

The second thing is I believe that he's right on the issues. I think his economic policy is right. I think it's far more likely to keep the prosperity of this country going. I think it's far more likely to include people that would otherwise be left out.

And the third thing is, I think it's important that somebody be

elected that understands the future. We just announced this Genome Project yesterday. What are we going to do to make sure there's no genetic discrimination? A lot of people will want genetic discrimination in employment, in promotion, in extension of health insurance. What are we going to do to make sure it doesn't exist? What are we going to do to make sure, in the computer revolution, that there's no violation of people's privacy rights with their health and financial records? A lot of people will want to get that private health and financial information.

So I think that what will happen is, we'll come to the conventions, we'll have these debates, and somehow -- I've been amazed by an amazing volatility since the end -- you know, at the end of the primary campaign, most of the polls had him up a point or two. So there's been a lot of volatility in these polls, and my best judgment is that people are still trying to figure out what they're going to do. And sooner or later they will. I don't think they have, and I think they know those three things about Al Gore, and it's still more likely than not that he will win.

Q Mr. President, you've spoken to the congressional constraints that are attached to your ability to deal with Cuba, and yet, a hallmark of your foreign policy, sir, has been a commitment to engagement, the idea that American trade and investment, ideas and practices can be powerful engines of change -- China, Russia, Vietnam, now even North Korea. Do you think, sir, that it's in the American interest not to have those tools available in dealing with Cuba? Do you think there's any prospect at all that the current policy will actually work? And after 40 years and now nine presidents, do you think the time has come to reassess?

THE PRESIDENT: I think the next -- I like -- I'll go back. I like the system that exists under the Cuban Democracy Act. I think Congress has a role to play here, but I like the Cuban Democracy Act. I think it's not wise to take away from the President all the tools of diplomacy with regard to one country that he might have, or she might have, some day with another country. So I like that.

But I will say again, there was a reason for that. All these other countries you mentioned, none of them -- none of them -- by order of the leader of the country, killed, murdered two airplanes' worth of people. I think there were four people involved -- these people were killed, illegally. It violated the Chicago Convention. Even if you believe that those planes were in Cuban airspace -- which we believe they were not -- they could not legally be shot down.

That changed everything. The deliberate decision to murder those people changed everything. And it made me wonder whether Mr. Castro was hoping we never would normalize relations, so then he could use us as an excuse for the failures of his regime. But we are where we are here.

What have I done? I was aggressively moving to implement the Cuban Democracy Act before that happened. Since then, we have done everything we could -- and I noticed there was one article about it last week which pointed out how Secretary Albright had dramatically increased the people-to-people contacts and the travel to Cuba. We are doing what we can.

Obviously, I think that anything we can do to engage the Cuban people, to get them involved in the process of change, to get them to look outside the world, to get them to look beyond the present system they have is a positive thing to do. And that's why I answered in response to that very first question, to evaluate the legislation in the House on the food and medicine sales, I've got to really have an

analysis of it to say, will the restrictions and personal contact, which the legislation imposes -- which I think are a mistake -- be outweighed by the increased sales of food and medicine, in terms of the ultimate benefit to the Cuban people. And I will look at it and see.

Yes, George.

Q Mr. President, does the closeness of today's abortion vote in the Supreme Court suggest to you that abortion rights are at risk in the next court? Or does it suggest that the fact that partial birth abortion can survive even a conservative court say that they aren't as threatened as some believe?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first, I think the court decision is clearly the only decision it could reach consistent with Roe v. Wade. So I think what you know there is that that's the vote for Roe v. Wade. You can't have a rule like the rule of Roe and then ignore it. So that's why -- if you remember, on this late-term abortion issue, a couple of years ago I pleaded with the Congress to adopt a broad limitation on late-term abortions, consistent with Roe v. Wade, but to make an exception for the life and health of the mother, as the Supreme Court decision required. They declined to do that, and so we've had a political impasse here, and then you've seen what's happened in all these states.

So the decision is, I think, consistent with Roe v. Wade. And as you pointed out, it was narrowly upheld. I think that's about what the vote for Roe is. And I think that in the next four years, there will be somewhere between two and four appointments to the Supreme Court, and depending on who those appointees are, I think the rule will either be maintained or overturned. And I think that it's very much in the balance, depending on what appointments are made in the next four years. That's what I believe.

Yes, go ahead, Larry.

Q Mr. President, Governor Bush has been critical of you and the energy policy of the administration, saying that you've failed to adequately convince OPEC to increase oil production. He also claims that if he became President, he'd be able to use personal diplomacy to persuade allies, like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to -- I believe he said, turn on the spigot. Do you find that kind of claim realistic? And do you have any reaction to his criticism of you?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, I have spent an enormous amount of time on this in the last several months, and there have been two decisions by OPEC to increase production -- not as much as we would like.

If you look at the allocation of the production increases against the real capacity of those countries, most countries don't have the capacity to produce much more than their latest allocation, except for the Saudis. And it's clear that they were trying to maintain some sort of harmony within the OPEC family.

Let's go back. I think that these big increases in gasoline prices in America are the result -- as I said I think several weeks ago -- first and foremost, of the unfortunate decision of OPEC several months ago to cut back production at the very time the world economy was growing. They left production out there when the world economy sunk, which is one reason we had very inexpensive gas prices for a good period of time. And these two developments grated up against each other. So that's the first thing.

Then the second thing is, we had here, as you know, in America -- so we had a tight supply situation. Then we had some broken pipelines, which interrupted supplies, which caused a temporary spike. And then in the Midwest we did have, apparently some, but I think quite a modest impact on prices because of the intersection of the clean air rules with trying to mix the fuels in a different way -- particularly ethanol.

And I think what we have to do now is to keep doing what we can to get production up, to let this FTC investigation proceed -- I think the gas prices have dropped eight cents a gallon in the Midwest, and in the blended fuels area, 12.5 cents a gallon just since the investigation was announced. But the main thing I would say to you is, we need a long-term energy strategy to maximize conservation and maximize the development of alternative sources of energy, and also, maximize domestic sources of energy.

Now, let me just mention two or three things -- I've mentioned this before. The House, by the way, has reauthorized the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. And I compliment them on that; that's a good thing. We also need a home heating oil reserve for the Northeast. We need to do that, that's very important.

We ought to pass my proposal to provide tax credits to people who manufacture or buy energy-efficient homes, cars and consumer products. That ought to be done. We ought to pass my appropriations to help develop alternative sources of energy and energy conservation technologies.

Since I've been President, or since '95, anyway, the Congress has approved approximately 12 percent of my requests. And the House voted to zero our participation in the Partnership for New Generation Vehicles. This kind of research is just as important as the human genome research in terms of the role of the government in this. A lot of this basic research needs to be done by the government. We can be driving cars that get 80 miles to the gallon through fuel cells, through electric cars, through natural gas fuel, a lot of other options, within a matter of three or four years if we'll just get after it and treat this like it's important. So I think that's very important.

Let me just mention one other thing. I think it's very important to pass a comprehensive electricity restructuring proposal, because they also, the electricity companies also -- electric companies -- use traditional fuels, and if we can reduce their reliance on it, obviously it will lower the price for other purposes. I think there's \$20 billion a year in savings to the American people through electricity restructuring, which is also quite important.

Yesterday, the Vice President issued a number of other proposals, including what he said he felt should be done with some of the surplus, which dealt with energy efficiency in factories and power plants. And all the analyses there show that there are massive, massive savings there, again, which would not only cut their bills, but by freeing up supply would lower the overall price of the fuel that we need.

So that's the system we need. We need to -- it's all out there. It's not like we don't know that these technologies are there. It's not like we don't know we have options for conservation.

Some of you were with me, I think it was three years ago now, when I went out to San Bernardino, California, to a stop on the rail line outside Los Angeles, to a lower-income housing project where they promised 40-percent lower utility bills, using elemental solar reflectors that looked like just little shingles on roofs, better windows, better insulation. And I can tell you, after three years, the

average utility bills are 65 percent lower than they would be for that kind of floor space for those families in other places in California.

So it's out there. All we have to do is to make up our mind that we're going to accelerate this. That's what I think we should be doing.

Q Mr. President, does that mean that Governor Bush is oversimplifying things when he points to places like --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I think that it's a -- we all rate our powers of persuasion differently, you know, and our powers of persuasion sometimes work when people's interests are involved, and sometimes don't. But it's not just a question of how much oil is being pumped. And, obviously, I have done what I could in the way I felt was most effective to increase production. I will continue to do that. But I think it's a simple answer to a complex problem and -- although I saw that story that one of you put out about his 1992 letter in which he was arguing for high energy prices. So I'm glad that he's changed his position anyway. It's amazing how a few years will do that to you. So I like that.

Yes, John.

Q Mr. President, supporters of Vice President Gores have been fairly blunt in raising questions about whether Governor Bush has the knowledge and depth to be President. On the other hand, many scholars have noted that Ronald Reagan managed to be effective by concentrating on a few big ideas and leaving the details to others. In your experience here, how important is command of facts and plain old brain power to being President? Are there other qualities that are more important? (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: That's a dead-bang loser, isn't it? (Laughter) No matter what I say, I'm in a big hole.

Well, first of all, I don't think it's so much a question of intelligence, generically. I think it's more a question of curiosity and willingness to learn what you think is important, and learn -- I guess -- I think that no President can say, well, it should be enough for the voters if I get the best advisors in my party and they come up with a position and I take it.

So what the voters will have to analyze here is, how important is the fact that Al Gore spent 20 years working on arms control issues, for example, and dealing with all these things. How much of an effort -- see, I ran as a governor, although I had been a governor a lot longer -- but how important is what you know, what you've learned in the job you've got.

And I think this is a question that's more readily addressed, really, to the candidates than to me. I'm a different person. Everybody's different here. So I always felt that I needed to know as much as I could, not so I could make decisions without experts and without advisors, but so I'd be in the best position to evaluate the advice I was getting.

But it's very important for a president not to try to micro-manage the presidency. So what you try to do is to find a balance between -- because it's a deciding job, it's a deciding job. And a lot of our presidents I think have had some problems not because they knew too much, but almost because they worked so hard that they were so tired they maybe couldn't make really good decisions when they were tired.

But I think what you know counts, because I think the more you know, the better position you're in not only to draw your own conclusions, but to take advice. And so, I think what -- the best is a balance, obviously. It's like everything else in life, the best is a balance. The best is a president that's had broad experience and that knows a lot and that is curious. I think curiosity is profoundly important, but also a president who understands what the big important things are, and then can listen to the right people. You've got to have a blend of both if you want to make the best decisions. That's my view.

Mark.

Q Mr. President, what do you think of the Justice's ruling this morning that allows the Boy Scouts to bar gays as leaders? And if you disagree with it, can you justify your role as Honorary President of the Boy Scouts, which discriminates against gays and atheists?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, the court's ruling, I noticed with interest -- I haven't read it yet, but I did get a pretty good report on it -- I noted with interest that they seem to go out of their way to draw the ruling quite narrowly and to limit it strictly to the question of whether the Boy Scouts could pick the people who were going to be Scout leaders.

I, generally -- I have to tell you, I'm generally against discrimination against gays, and I think that the country has moved a long way. And I'm proud of the things that we've been able to do and I'm disappointed we haven't been able to do more in some areas, but I think we're moving in the right direction. And I think that's all I should say. The Boy Scouts still are -- they're a great group, they do a lot of good. And I would hope that this is just one step along the way of a movement toward greater inclusion for our society, because I think that's the direction we ought to be going in.

Go ahead, Jim.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. As you know, the Supreme Court declined to intervene today either to stop Elian Gonzalez from leaving the country or to overrule other courts, all of which have deferred to your administration. As you look back on this --

THE PRESIDENT: That's pretty rare, isn't it. (Laughter.)

Q As you look back on this, sir, do you have any sense, any regrets at all about the way your administration handled this matter? And in light of what you've said about Cuba here today, sir, do you have any second thoughts about Elian returning to Cuba?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, if he and his father decided they wanted to stay here, it would be fine with me. But I think that the most important thing is that his father was adjudged by a people who made an honest effort to determine that he was a good father, a loving father, committed to the son's welfare.

And we upheld here what I think is a quite important principle, as well as what is clearly the law of the United States. Do I wish it had unfolded in a less dramatic, less traumatic way for all concerned? Of course, I do. I have replayed this in my mind many times. I don't know that we had many different options than we pursued, given how the thing developed. But I think the fundamental principle is the right one and I'm glad we did.

I was just in Germany, having a discussion with Chancellor Schroeder about some family reunification issues where we have serious differences with the Germans, who are our great allies, on this. And as

I looked and reviewed some of these cases that I've tried to bring to the attention of the German officials, it made me even more convinced that we had upheld the proper principle here.

Yes, John.

Q Mr President, we hear increasingly from senior officials here and at the Pentagon that when it comes to national missile defense, your inclined essentially to split the difference, authorize the contracting, but leave the decision about whether to break from the ABM Treaty to the next President. Is that a fair reflection of your thinking?

THE PRESIDENT: The most important thing I can say to you about that today is that I have not made a final decision and that most of this speculation that is coming in the press is coming from people who have not talked to me about it.

Let me try to at least set up the thing, because I'm working hard on it now. Remember when we put out -- when Congress passed a law about this a couple years ago, you remember, and we had to sort of come up with some timetables, I said two things that I want to repeat today.

First of all, insofar as there might be technology available which would protect us and other people around the world from missile attacks with warheads of weapons of mass destruction, obviously, anybody would have a moral obligation to explore that technology and its potential. I believe that.

Secondly, whether I would make a decision to go forward with deployment would depend upon four things: one, the nature of the threat; two, the feasibility of the technology; three, the cost and, therefore, the relative cost of doing this as compared with something else to protect the national security; and, four, the overall impact on our national security, which includes our nuclear allies and our European alliance, our relationships with Russia, our relationships with China, what the boomerang effect might be about whatever China might do in South Asia, with the Indians and then the Pakistanis, and so on.

So what I have tried to do since then is to say as little as possible, except to explore what would have to be done in our relationships with the Europeans, our allies and with the Russians, in the first instance, to keep our options open -- could we get an agreed upon modification to the ABM Treaty.

Even the Russians -- keep in mind, don't minimize -- everybody talked about how we didn't reach an agreement, Mr. Putin and I, when I was in Russia. And that's absolutely true, we didn't. But we did get a document out of there which I think is quite important, because the Russians acknowledged that there are new and different security threats on the horizon. That is, that it's quite possible that in the next few years, countries not part of the arms control regimes of the last three decades could develop both long-range missile delivery capability and weapons of mass destruction which they could put on warheads, and that none of this would be covered by, essentially, the mutual deterrence structure of the ABM Treaty and all the things we've done since then.

So they recognize, too, that we, in the new century, in the coming decades, are going to have to make adjustments. Now, what they don't say is they don't want America unilaterally building a missile defense that they think someday can undermine their deterrent capacity. That's kind of where they are now, and we're still talking about all that.

But, John, the truly accurate thing is that I have not yet formulated a position which I am prepared to go to the American people with, but I will do so some time over the next several weeks based on

those four criteria and what I think is the right thing to do.

Q Mr. President, last Monday the IRA allowed inspectors to come in and see caches of their weapons. Would you like to see the other terrorist organizations on the Protestant sides allow inspectors to look at their weapons? And are there any words that you could say to the people of Northern Ireland who are facing the marching season, other than Colonel Crowley's oft "peace is good" position -- any personal -- (laughter) -- any words from the heart that you could ask as they approach this very tense time?

THE PRESIDENT: You know, one of the hardest things I've had to learn in life is that not every cliché is wrong. (Laughter.) Peace is good. Well, first, I think it would be a good thing for all the paramilitary groups that have secret arms caches obviously to follow the lead of those who are doing what's been done. I think this is a great deal. I think this is a very, very hopeful development.

And it ought to inform the marching season. That is, if people are going to do their marches, ought to do it mindful of the context in which they're doing it, and the diminished tension and the enhanced hope for long-term peace, and the institutions working again, and all of that.

This is America, we can't say -- anybody can march, anybody can talk, anybody can say whatever they want to say. But everybody ought to -- what I would hope is that there will be a new sense of responsibility and a new sense of possibility in Northern Ireland because of these developments.

You know, there's been lots of work done now over the last several years on this, we've come a long way since the first talk of then Prime Minister Major and then Prime Minister Reynolds, and I think that the work, particularly the things that have been done, the commitments that have been made and the actions that have been taken in the last few months, they ought to be cherished by the people of Northern Ireland, and we ought to have a marching season that unfolds, I would hope to the maximum extent possible, in recognition of all we have seen.

Yes, ma'am.

Q Mr. President, I'd like to know how you feel Al Gore is doing at being his own man. The reason I ask that question is so many of his policies seem to be extensions of your policies, and even last week in the handling of the renewed call for a special prosecutor, the press was full of reports of how his response was very "Clintonesque." So how do you think he's doing at establishing a sense of his own identity?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, I think he's done that very well. Let me remind you, when I asked him to become Vice President, there were some people who criticized me, who said what a dumb thing I did because we were the same age, we came from -- although he never lets me say that; he's a year younger than I am, and looks much younger now because he has no grey hair -- but anyway, that we came from the same part of the country and we basically came from the same wing of the Democratic Party. But I thought I was getting good balance because he knew things I didn't know -- about arms control, energy, environment, the way Washington worked.

So it shouldn't surprise you that having worked here for eight years, as we all have, that a lot of the new things he proposes would grow naturally out of what has been done, rather than being a departure from it. But I must say -- I read quite carefully those proposals he made yesterday, and while he did incorporate a lot of what I have

proposed on energy efficiency, he went way beyond anything I'd ever proposed, too. I was kind of sorry I'd never thought of one or two of the things that were in there.

So I think he's doing fine on that. I think that -- if you just go back to the times when this has happened before to good effect and -- if you go back to when President Nixon ran in 1960, or when Hubert Humphrey ran in '68, or when President Bush ran in '88 -- it's a gradual process. But then one day, it reaches, in the words of that now-famous book that everybody is reading, it reaches a tipping point and people kind of get it, and they say, oh, there it is, there this person is. And I think that's happening with him. And I think after the conventions, it will be crystal clear. And the main players on the stage of American political life will be the two candidates for president.

Mara.

Q Mr. President, the proposals that Vice President Gore laid out yesterday on energy, and the proposals that you discussed today are all long-range solutions to the nation's dependence on oil. In terms of the problems that drivers in the Midwest are experiencing right now, during the summer driving season, with high gas prices, what would be so bad about suspending gas taxes temporarily just to give those drivers a break?

THE PRESIDENT: First of all -- well, the federal gas tax is not that big. Most of the gas taxes come from -- are at the state level. But if it were done -- and Congress debated this before -- if it were done, they would just have to decide what they were willing to pay in terms of either the deferral or the cancellation of federal highway projects. And that's -- it's a tradeoff, and they would have to make that judgment.

It would -- even there, it would take sometime, and there was some question, as I remember, when it was raised before, whether all those price savings would be passed along to the consumers. So I think if the Congress was going to do that, they would want to have some assurance that that would be done.

But let me say, this is not such a long-term deal. First of all, the most important thing is to let the industry know we're running a serious investigation here -- and I would remind you, gas prices have dropped eight cents in the Midwest, a gallon, since we announced it, at the pump; more, much more, at the wholesale level; and the blended gas has dropped more than eight cents a gallon. So let's not minimize that.

The second thing we need to do is to make absolutely sure that everything that can possibly be done to make sure the pipelines are flowing properly and the refineries are working, that's done. You know, we had a small problem, you may remember, where I used the Strategic Petroleum Reserve recently because of a breakdown in supply available to a refinery in the South. So if I can find any other kind of backlogs like that where there is something I can do to get the flow going, I will do that as well.

But the most important thing I can tell you is, I think that this, as we get more production on line, this present price crisis will begin to abate. But we will have fundamentally higher prices, now that the rest of the world's economy has recovered, and now that virtually all of the OPEC members but Saudi Arabia are operating virtually at full capacity -- until we make up our minds that we're going to drive higher-mileage vehicles and do other things that use less oil.

And we are not talking about a long, long, long-term thing. You're

talking about -- a lot of these cars could be on the road and available for sale within two years -- a lot of them. And it's just a question of whether we think it's a national priority, because -- we've treated the human genome like a priority every year because we all want to live forever. And that's good. I'm not minimizing that, I'm not being flippant about that -- we do. That's a good thing, not a bad thing. But we only get interested in this when the price of gasoline goes through the roof.

And this was inevitable. We were actually quite -- I expected it was going to hit sooner, but the Asian financial crisis dropped it down. Now, they went up more than they should have and more than any of us anticipated, including me. And I think part of that is perhaps not justifiable, and that's what we're seeing -- why we're seeing some price adjustments in the Middle West today.

But the only real answer for this is for us to develop alternative sources to oil and more efficient ways of using the energy we have. And we can do it in a hurry if we just put our minds to it.

Q If I could just follow up on that. The federal gas tax is 18 cents, which is not insignificant. Half of that was instituted originally for deficit reduction. Now that we don't have deficits and, in fact, we have record surpluses, what would be wrong with temporarily rolling back, say, 9 cents, or maybe even just the 4.3 cents that you instituted as part of your 1993 budget deal?

THE PRESIDENT: Inherently, there's nothing wrong with it. But you would want to know two things: first of all, the Congress should be satisfied that whatever the financial consequences are to the highway construction and repair program are consequences they're willing to pay, and they think their constituents are willing to pay, number one. And, secondly, they'd need some assurances that actually the people would benefit from it at the pump.

Q Sir, you know we're obligated to ask you about your post-presidential plans just in case you've made a decision since the last time we asked you. (Laughter.) I recall that many years ago, you were asked about, when you were still Governor of Arkansas, you were asked about your future political plans. And, interestingly, you didn't mention the presidency, but you did say that you had always wanted to be in the United States Senate. Is that on the table for you? Have you made any other decision that we need to know about?

THE PRESIDENT: No. But let me remind you what the context -- you go back and read that interview, I think you'll see -- what I said was when I was a young man, I always wanted to be a senator and I never thought about being a governor. But when I became a governor, I found that I liked being an executive better than I liked being a legislator. And I still feel that way. I think -- maybe I'll run for the school board some day. That's about the only thing I can imagine doing. I don't have any other plans. I just want to be a good citizen.

Go ahead, in the back.

MR. LOCKHART: Last question.

Q Republicans in Congress are seeking to pass the spending bills early this year, in an effort to get out of Washington and go campaign in the fall. And, yet, there are significant differences between what they want to spend and what you have proposed. I'm wondering, what do you see as the major points of disagreement at this time, and do you think that we're in for the same type of prolonged budget stalemate that have been featured in the past?

THE PRESIDENT: That's entirely up to them whether we're in for the budget stalemate. But if you just -- look at the education budget. I mean, how many times do we have to go down this road? You know, it's still not supportive of the 100,000 teachers and the smaller classes; it still not supportive of the dramatic expansion in after-school programs, which is critical to school performance; still has nothing in there for school construction; still is inadequate in terms of my plan that people ought to either identify these failing schools and either turn them around or shut them down -- and lots of other problems with the school program.

If you look at the crime proposals -- this is unbelievable. When they wouldn't adopt the common-sense gun safety legislation, all I heard was this constant barrage about how, if only the administration would enforce the gun laws on the books, everything would be wonderful, we wouldn't have any problems in America.

So what I said -- look, why don't we do both? We have increased gun prosecutions under my administration, but we can do more. So please, give me some more money for people to investigate gun crimes, for people to prosecute gun crimes, to develop safe gun technology -- this whole -- it was nothing but a straight enforcement measure; exactly what they said they wanted, and no money for it.

Still no support for the 50,000 new police officers in the higher crime areas. And still the constant threat of these environmental riders, and underfunding of the Land's Legacy Initiative, and a number of other things.

So we still have some serious differences. Now, we've been doing this every year since 1995; we just sort of slightly change the script every year. And I'm more than happy to do it again, because, frankly, in the end, we normally wind up with an agreement that's pretty good for the American people.

But the timing in which we do it -- it depends more on them than me. I'm not going to give up my commitment to education as our most important domestic priority, and what we're doing to build the future of our children. And I think -- we've got the crime rate down now to a 25-year low; we can't stop the policy that works. And I hear -- I gave them a big proposal that is exactly what they say they want and believe in, and they don't want to fund that.

So we'll just have to see what happens. I'm kind of hopeful about it, though. It's just late June, here. This drama has several more acts before it's over.

Go ahead. We'll take one more. Go ahead, sir.

Q Mr. President, if I could return you to missile defense for a moment. The missile defense plan was based in large part on the threat from North Korea. You've now seen a first warming of relations between North and South. South Korea is not enthused about the missile defense plan. I'm wondering whether you now view it as urgent as you did -- the threat as urgent as you did a few months ago. I'm also wondering whether you would be willing to meet with Kim Chong-il of North Korea?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first let me say, I got a report both from President Kim on the phone and from his representatives in person about the Summit of the Koreas. And I thought it was a very, very important development, and a great tribute to President Kim's vision and courage and persistence. And I also think it justified the American policy, which is that we would never allow ourselves to be put in the middle

between the two Koreas, that we wanted them to meet and work together.

So we, I think, contributed to it; the Chinese and others did as well. I think this is good for everybody, and I'm encouraged by it. I'm also encouraged by the moratorium that the North Koreans have on testing. But they still have a missile program, and so it's still something that the United States has to be mindful of and to prepare to deal with and to keep up with. And, of course, I hope it will go away as a problem. I hope it for the people of North Korea, too.

All these countries that have a lot of people in great need that are spending vast sums of money on defense, it's one of the great tragedies of the world today. So, would I like it to go away? Of course I would. Do I think it's gone away because of this meeting? I don't. Do I think it might? It might, and I hope it will, but we don't know that yet.

Thank you.

END 2:45 P.M. EDT

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 26, 2000

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
ON MIDSESSION REVIEW OF THE BUDGET

The Rose Garden

12:40 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon. This is a great day for America. First we had the announcement of the sequencing of the human genome; now I have just received a report from my Chief of Staff and other members of my economic team on our latest budget projections, and it's more good news.

In 1993, when I became President, the federal budget deficit was \$290 billion. It was projected to rise to \$455 billion this year. The American people wanted a better future, and we offered a new economic course of fiscal discipline, expanded trade, and greater investment in our people and our future.

The result has been the longest economic expansion in history, a fiscal turnaround that is stronger, frankly, than any of us had imagined. In fact, in each year since 1993, both economic growth and federal revenues have surpassed our forecast. And this year is no exception.

Today, as required by law, I am releasing the midsession review of the budget that shows that our overall budget surplus this year will be \$211 billion, more than a \$700 billion improvement over where we projected to be in 1993. And we're forecasting a surplus for the next 10 years that is over a trillion dollars larger than was forecast just four months ago.

The American people should be very proud of this news. It's the result of their hard work and their support for fiscal discipline. It's proof that we can create a better future for ourselves when we put our minds to it, and it provides a tremendous new opportunity to build an even brighter future if we sustain our prosperity by maintaining our fiscal discipline.

These new surpluses put us in a position to achieve something that would have seemed unimaginable in 1993. As this chart shows, we can now pay down the debt completely by 2012, a year earlier than we projected just four months ago. This is my last drawing as President. (Laughter.)

Now, why should we do this? Because by paying down the debt we can keep interest rates lower and free up more capital for private sector investment, creating more jobs and economic growth for years and years to come. We can eliminate the burden of paying interest on the debt, which today takes up 12 cents of every federal tax dollar. And we can use part of this savings, as I have suggested, to extend the solvency of Social Security to 2057, and of Medicare to 2030.

Now, think about what this means. A six-year-old today -- we

may have some out here -- is living in an America that is \$3.5 trillion in debt. If we follow the course I'm laying out, we can eliminate that debt by the time the child enters college. The economy will be stronger, his parents' incomes will be greater, the interest rates on college loans will be lower. And 12 years from now people of my generation will be entering retirement knowing that Social Security and Medicare will be there for them.

Quite simply, an economic plan that invests in our people and pays down the debt is the wisest choice we can make to honor our values and ensure a better future for our children.

To that end, I propose that we follow Vice President Gore's recommendation and lock away that portion of the surplus that comes from the Medicare taxes people pay. Medicare payroll taxes should not be used to finance tax cuts or other spending. They should be saved for Medicare, and Medicare alone. There is already broad bipartisan support for saving the Social Security surplus for debt reduction. It's time to do the same for Medicare by taking Medicare off budget. By protecting both the Social Security and Medicare surpluses, we can lock in \$2.7 trillion of debt reduction in just the next 10 years, enabling us to get the debt entirely gone by 2012.

Before we make any other major budget decisions this year I ask Congress to come together across party lines to protect the Medicare surplus. Now, a lot of people are saying that because this is an election year Congress won't get much done. It does not have to be that way. Today I called House Speaker Hastert and Senator Lott with a proposal to break the logjam and do what we all say we want to do.

We all say we want to provide prescription drug coverage to the millions of senior and disabled Americans on Medicare who currently lack it. I have presented my plan; the Republicans have presented theirs. We all say we want to end the marriage penalty. I presented my plan; the Republicans have presented theirs. I believe their marriage penalty, standing on its own, and not part of an overall commitment to fiscal discipline, and also tilting, I believe, too much toward upper-income Americans, is too big and not targeted toward those who need it most.

But if we can all agree to take Medicare off budget and not use Medicare money for tax cuts or for other spending, then I've told the Republican leaders I would like to make a simple offer. If Congress will pass a plan that gives real, voluntary Medicare prescription drug coverage, available and affordable to all seniors and consistent with the principles of my plan, costing roughly \$250 billion over 10 years, then I will sign a marriage penalty relief law, which also costs roughly \$250 billion over 10 years. This is a proposal for true compromise. It asks each party to accept some of the positions of the other party in the name of progress.

By adopting the Vice President's plan to save the Medicare surplus, we will achieve the most significant strengthening of Medicare since the proposal was created in 1965, and deliver the largest tax relief to families in decades. These are goals that both parties and all Americans agree on. It would be wrong to let politics keep us from seizing the opportunity to achieve them. We can take these actions and still have, according to our new budget projections, substantial resources left over for future budget priorities.

Now, I want to remind the people, however, that this is just a budget projection. It would not be prudent to commit every penny of a future surplus that is just a projection and, therefore, subject to change. Fiscal discipline helped to create these surpluses; fiscal

discipline is what we should continue as we determine how best to use it.

In my Midsession Review, therefore, I propose to set aside a \$500-billion reserve for America's future -- a fund that could eventually be used for any number of key priorities from retirement savings to tax cuts, to investments in education, research, health care, and environmental protection, to further debt reduction.

We should set aside this reserve fund. At this late date in the fiscal year, with elections looming, it would be unrealistic and imprudent for those of us in Washington to decide what to do with this money. That's something that should be debated in the coming months, and decided on by the American people this fall. Our obligation is to move forward on those issues that have been fully debated, where there is bipartisan agreement for action.

So this summer lets set aside the Medicare surpluses and pay down the debt. Let's pass a voluntary prescription drug benefit for seniors and disabled Americans on Medicare, and marriage penalty tax relief for American families. When that's done, I hope we will also raise the minimum wage; pass a strong enforceable patient's bill of rights; pass a juvenile justice bill that closes the gun show loophole; hate crimes legislation and the New Markets legislation; and make key investments in education, health care and the environment.

Then in the election, let's have a vigorous debate about how the remainder of these new surpluses can best be used to advance our nation. It's the right debate to have and I think we can all agree that it's a debate we are very fortunate to be able to have.

How we use these surpluses in this moment of prosperity will determine America's future for decades to come. Nothing will more surely determine it than making the right choices, if we do the right things to keep our prosperity going, to extend its benefits to people in places not yet fully part of it, to help Americans balance the demands of work and family, to seize the remarkable potential and meet the challenges of globalization and the revolutions of science and information technology.

This is a good day for America. We ought to preserve it for the future and make the most of the moment. Thank you very much.

Q What did the Speaker and Mr. Lott have to say to you in response?

THE PRESIDENT: I think they were interested in it, and obviously, I've also talked to the Democratic leaders, Senator Daschle and Representative Gephardt. And I told them that I would send the review up today and that, obviously, everybody needs time for their staffs to look at it to see what the options are. But I think this is a very good-faith offer where I want to meet them halfway, I want them to meet me halfway. We can clearly afford this, and we ought to do it.

Q Mr. President, if in the course of four months these figures have changed a trillion dollars, how realistic is it to believe that these are sound figures that are going to last?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first, I think that they are reliable in the same sense -- I would just remind you, I've been here for seven and a half years and I have never yet overstated the numbers. So we've got a pretty good record on this. Now, this is what the numbers show. But as I said to you, I believe it would be a big mistake to commit this entire surplus to spending or to tax cuts.

That's one of the reasons I like the Vice President's suggestion so much. If you start by taking the Medicare taxes out, then you know you're going to have further debt reduction and you've got a big incentive for fiscal discipline right there.

The projections could be wrong; they could be right. That's why we shouldn't spend it all now. And moreover, we're having a debate in which the two candidates have very different notions about what should be done with this moment of prosperity, and the American people ought to have some say in this. But I think that it's my duty to tell you what I think the numbers are now, and my duty also to raise a little caution and say, let's don't go off and spend it.

If I asked you what your projected income is over the next 10 years and you told me, and I said, okay, now I want you to spend it all right now, I doubt if you'd do it. So I don't think the American people should do it. But neither should we be blind to the fact that we have an enormous opportunity here to build the future of our dreams for our children, and that should inform what we do in this year's budget and it should inform what we do, I believe, in making an agreement to get the right kind of Medicare prescription drug coverage in return for tax relief for American families.

Q Sir, even with this optimistic news, gas prices across the board continue to increase, threaten inflation, threaten to derail all of these projections. What can you do immediately to stop the spiraling cost of gasoline?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think, for whatever reason, in places where it's highest they seem to be dropping some. So I think that we need to keep up the pressure to make sure that there is no non-economic basis for these price increases. And that's what the Federal Trade Commission inquiry is all about. Then I think it is very, very important for us to accelerate our efforts to get high-mileage cars on the road and to develop alternative fuel sources.

And let me say, I've been trying for years to get more money into federal research on this. The United States government has been very active in our administration, in the Partnership for the New Generation of Vehicles that the Vice President's headed, in trying to develop alternative fuels from agriculture and other sources. The Senate did pass a bill last week on a bipartisan basis which should help us in the development of more biofuels. But we're not far away from being able to develop very high-mileage vehicles and dramatically different fuel options for the American people.

But I would say this -- I have not had the same level of support on a bipartisan basis for this kind of federal research and investment that we've had, for example, for the Human Genome Project. But the principle is exactly the same -- when you're breaking new ground, a lot of the basic research should be paid for by the American people as a whole, and then the industry should do its part. Just like we're doing with the Human Genome Project, we need to do more here.

And I think that you will see -- what we really need, and I think what the American people want to know is that we've got a plan that will move them away from being subject to these kind of radical swings. And we do have a plan. And we know that we can get cars on the road soon that can get 60, 80 maybe more miles to the gallon. We know we can get cars on the road soon using alternative fuels from fuel cells to biofuels, to natural gas that will cut the cost of transportation. That's what we need to be doing.

Q Forgive me, sir, but the question was what can you do immediately. Will you consider relaxing --

THE PRESIDENT: What we are doing immediately, what we're doing immediately is continuing this investigation. If the prices are being set for non-economic reasons, then we ought to do what we can to pressure them down. Now, if the Congress wants to consider some sort of relief on the federal gas tax it would be modest compared to the price increase, and they would have to be willing to defer substantial federal highway projects. That's something they have to come to terms with.

But I think that it's clear, over the next two years you're going to have all these cars that will then be coming out that will basically make this problem go away as we know it, and we need to do everything we can to accelerate it.

Q -- (inaudible) --

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know the answer to that. They'll tell you that. But it's \$211 billion for this year.

Yes, sir.

Q -- Republicans look at the \$500-billion fund as a goody bag for Vice President Gore to use throughout the campaign to make promises in programs. First of all, do you agree with that assessment? And second of all, is that the proper use for a surplus fund?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think -- let me say this -- that's a \$500-billion fund; I'll tell you what I would do with it. Later on I may make some suggestions what I would do with it. But Vice President Gore will say what he thinks should be done. Governor Bush will say what he thinks should be done. The Republican leaders and candidates will say what they think should be done. The Democratic leaders and their candidate will say what they think should be done.

In other words, my position is that the Congress and I should not commit all this money. We should let the American people decide what to do by the judgments they make in the election and by the debates that they hear. I don't believe that -- we're so close to the election -- we have such an enormously crowded agenda of things that we can do that have been fully debated, I think the responsible thing to do is to let the American people hear from those who are running for office who will be responsible for these decisions if they are elected say what they should be doing.

So Vice President Gore has no more opportunity as a result of this proposal of mine than Governor Bush does. All candidates running for office can say this is what they think about the \$500 billion. They can also say that they disagree with some of the things we're recommending now, if they choose.

Q Mr. President, your time is ticking away and we understand you're still working on your book on race. When are you anticipating having this book out and what can we expect to be in it?

THE PRESIDENT: You just have to wait to see it.

Q Is Taylor Branch working with you on it?

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q Mr. President, this week, probably by Wednesday, the legal case of Elian Gonzales will probably come to an end. Do you feel

the relations between your government and the government of Fidel Castro have gotten a little better because of this case -- relations between Washington and Havana?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know. That's the honest answer. I don't know.

Let me just say one other thing about the race book. You asked me a question about Taylor Branch. I did -- I have consulted with him on it, I've shown him some drafts, but he is not working with me on it. But I don't want to imply that I've never asked him to look at it. I did.

Q When do you think the book is coming out, though?

Q -- (inaudible) --

THE PRESIDENT: The Japanese Ambassador was here today for the human genome announcement and we had a brief conversation about it, and he said that he expected Prime Minister Mori to continue as Prime Minister and to host us at the G-8 Summit. And I expect that's what will happen.

Thank you very much.

END 1:05 P.M. EDT

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 22, 2000

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
UPON DEPARTURE

The South Portico

10:00 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. Before I leave, I would like to make a couple of comments about two questions now before Congress; first, whether to provide a voluntary prescription drug benefit to Medicare beneficiaries; and second, whether to hold tobacco companies, not taxpayers, accountable for the costs of tobacco.

Both issues require a bipartisan response. Both are important to the health of our people. Both require Congress -- for the public interest, not the special interest.

That's especially true when it comes to our seniors and their need for affordable, dependable prescription drug coverage. I have proposed that all our seniors have that option through Medicare, wherever they live, however sick they may be.

Now, Republicans in Congress say they, too, want a prescription drug benefit. They've even had pollsters, according to your reports, to teach them all kinds of new words to convince the American people they are in favor of it. But the latest plan doesn't measure up to the rhetoric.

Last night, in a completely party line vote, the House Ways and Means Committee approved a private insurance benefit that many seniors and many people with disabilities simply will not be able to afford. It's a benefit for the companies who make the drugs, not the seniors who need them most. Moreover, their bill would do nothing for the hospitals, home health care agencies and other providers who clearly need extra help to provide quality care under the Medicare program.

I hope when the full House considers this issue, it will reject this false promise and vote instead for a proposal that provides a real and meaningful Medicare prescription drug benefit on a voluntary basis, but one that is affordable and available to all seniors who need it.

If the House acts to protect the public health, it would be following the fine example it set earlier this week when it permitted the Department of Veterans' Affairs to help to fund the Justice Department's litigation against the tobacco companies. This modest investment of VA funds can help our veterans and other taxpayers recover billions of dollars in health care costs, a substantial sum that will improve health care for veterans and for all Americans.

This shows what we can accomplish when we put the public interest ahead of special interests, the public interest ahead of partisan disputes. But it's only a first step. Today, the House can move further ahead if it votes to allow the Justice Department to receive these and other funds.

Tuesday's victory for veterans and taxpayers will prove to be hollow if, today, the House reverses itself. The tobacco companies and their powerful allies in Congress are working overtime to pass special protections to shield them from financial responsibility for the harm they've caused.

So, again, I ask Congress: Just let the American people have their day in court. The legal responsibility of the tobacco companies should be decided by judicial process, not by the political process. The health of our people is a precious resource.

Those of us in public life should be doing everything we can to work together, whether we're working to provide affordable prescription drug coverage, or to demand accountability for the health care costs of tobacco. In the days and months ahead, I will continue to work with members of both parties to achieve these goals. Thank you very much.

Q Sir, on gasoline prices, the Vice President was very direct and forthright yesterday, sir, in his accusations that there is collusion among the oil companies to inflate prices. Do you share those sentiments, and what are your thoughts on this becoming a preeminent issue in the presidential campaign?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, let's look at the problem here. This is a big problem, because there are a lot of Americans that have to drive to make a living. They have to drive distances just to make a living.

Then, you've got all these truckers out there that have to pay big fuel costs to make a living. And something that there hasn't been a lot of talk about, but if this thing can't be moderated, it's also going to have, I think, quite a burdensome impact on the airline companies, on the cost of air travel. So this is going to rifle throughout our economy.

I have said repeatedly, and I will say again: I think that it is in the best interest of the people of the United States, but also the oil-producing companies, to have oil prices somewhere in the neighborhood of \$20 to \$25 a barrel. That gives them the revenues they need, it keeps the incentives in our economy to continue to become more energy-efficient, and it doesn't bankrupt people that have to have fuel in substantial quantities. So this is a big problem.

Now, I have a lot of concerns about the speed with which this run-up occurred. I expected some upward pressure on prices because our economy is doing well and because the Asian economy is coming back, the European economy is coming back, so there would be a bigger global demand for oil and there would be some upward pressure.

But it doesn't explain, by a long stretch, the dramatic increase in prices. Neither does the requirement for special additives to reduce air pollution even come close to explaining the increase in the Chicago-Milwaukee area. We're talking about two or three cents a gallon for the environmental requirements, and that won't come close to explaining prices that are 50 cents a gallon higher than they are in other places.

So the proper thing to do, I think, is to have a vigorous inquiry by the Federal Trade Commission; they're going to do this. If you've noticed, there's some indication that the best evidence to support the statement the Vice President made is that two days after the call went out for the Federal Trade Commission to investigate this, there was a 16-cent-a-gallon drop in the price of the oil at the refinery level. Now, that hasn't manifested itself at the pump yet, because it takes