

JULY 30, 1965

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSETEXT OF THE REMARKS OF THE
PRESIDENT AT THE SIGNING OF
THE MEDICARE BILL, INDEPENDENCE,
MISSOURI

The people of the United States love and voted for Harry Truman, not because he gave them hell -- but because he gave them hope.

I know all America shares my joy that he is present now when the hope he offered becomes a reality for millions of our fellow citizens.

I am proud that this has come to pass in my Administration. But it was Harry Truman of Missouri who planted the seeds of compassion and duty which today flower into care for the sick, and serenity for the fearful.

Many men can make proposals. Many can draft laws. But few have the piercing and humane eye which can see beyond the words to the people they touch. Few can see past the speeches and the political battles to the doctor tending the infirm, the hospital receiving those in anguish, or feel in their heart painful wrath at the injustice which denies the miracle of healing to the old and poor. And fewer still have the courage to stake reputation, position, and the effort of a lifetime upon such a cause when there are few that share it.

But it is just such men who illuminate the life and history of a nation. And so, President Truman, it is in tribute not to you, but to America that we have come here today. For a country can be known by the quality of the men it honors. By praising you, by carrying forward your dreams, we reaffirm the greatness of America.

It was a generation ago that you said: "Millions of our citizens do not now have a full measure of opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health. Millions do not now have protection or security against the economic effects of sickness. The time has arrived for action to help them attain that opportunity and that protection."

Today we take such action.

The need for this action is plain; so clear indeed that we marvel not simply at the passage of this bill, but that it took so many years.

There are more than 18 million Americans over the age of 65. Most of them have low incomes. And most of them are threatened by illness and medical expenses they cannot afford.

Through this new law every citizen will be able, in his productive years, to insure himself against the ravages of illness in old age.

This insurance will help pay for care in hospitals, in skilled nursing homes, or in the home. Under a separate plan it will help meet the fees of doctors.

Now here is how the plan will affect you.

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During your working years, you will contribute, through the social security program, a small amount each payday for hospital insurance protection. For example, the average worker in 1966 will contribute about \$1.50 per month. The employer will contribute a similar amount. This will provide the funds to pay up to 90 days of hospital care for each illness, plus diagnostic care, and up to 100 home health visits after you are 65. Beginning in 1967, you will also be covered for up to 100 days of care in a skilled nursing home after a period of hospital care.

Under a separate plan, when you are 65, you may be covered for medical and surgical fees whether you are in or out of the hospital. You will pay \$3 per month after you are 65 and your government will contribute an equal amount.

The benefits under the law are as varied and broad as modern medicine itself. And if it has a few defects -- such as the method of payment of certain specialists, or the exclusion of podiatrists -- those, I am confident, can be quickly remedied.

No longer will older Americans be denied the healing miracle of modern medicine. No longer will illness crush and destroy the savings they have so carefully put away over a lifetime so they might enjoy dignity in their later years. No longer will young families see their own incomes, and their own hopes, eaten away simply because they are carrying out their deep moral obligations.

And no longer will this nation refuse the hand of justice to those who have given a lifetime of service and wisdom and labor to our progress.

And this bill is even broader than that. It will increase social security benefits for our older Americans. And it will improve a wide range of health and medical services for Americans of all ages.

In 1935 when Franklin Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act he said it was "a cornerstone in a structure which is being built but is by no means complete."

Perhaps no single act in this entire administration did more to win him an illustrious place in our history than the laying of that cornerstone. And those who share this day will also be remembered for making the most important addition to that structure in three decades.

History shapes men, but it is a necessary faith of leadership that men can help shape history. There are many who led us to this historic day. Not out

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of courtesy or deference, but from gratitude and the remembrance which is our country's debt, let us call the roll.

Congressman Celler helped introduce hospital insurance in 1952. Aime Forand introduced it in the House. Senator Anderson fought for medicare in the Senate, and Congressman King carried the battle in the House. The legislative genius of Congressman Mills and Senator Long transformed desire into victory. And those devoted public servants, Senator Ribicoff, Secretary Celebrezze and Under Secretary Cohen gave not just endless days and patience -- but their hearts -- to this bill.

Let us also remember those who sadly cannot share this time of triumph. For it is their triumph too. It is the victory of great Members of Congress like John Dingell, Sr., and Robert Wagner, and James Murray.

And there is also John Kennedy, who fought in the Senate, took his case to all the people, never yielded in pursuit, but was not spared to see the final concourse of the forces he helped to loose.

But it all started with the man from Independence, Missouri. And so, as it is fitting we should, we have come to his home to complete what he began.

President Truman, as any President must, made many decisions of great moment; although he made them with a courage and clarity few have shared. The immense and intricate questions of freedom and survival were caught up in the web of judgment. And this is in the tradition of leadership.

But there is another tradition which we share. It calls upon us never to be indifferent toward despair. It commands us never to turn away from helplessness. It directs us never to ignore and spurn those who suffer untended in a land bursting with abundance.

This is not just our tradition -- or the tradition of the Democratic Party -- or that of this nation. It is as old as the day it was first commanded: "Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land."

Just think, Mr. President, because of this document -- and the long years of struggle which created it -- in this town, and a thousand others, there are men and women in pain who will now find ease. There are those, alone in suffering, who will now hear the sound of approaching help. There are those fearing the terrible darkness of despairing poverty -- despite long years of labor and expectation -- who will now look up to see the light of hope and realization.

There can be no satisfaction, nor any act of leadership, greater than this.

And perhaps you alone, President Truman, can fully know how grateful I am for this day.

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