help to protect. Senator Moynihan said—I want to reiterate, because I have heard Senator Kennedy mention the criticisms of this program—I want to say this a second time—the Congressional Budget Office—not the administration's budget office, the Congressional Budget Office—reports this plan will cost individuals even less and benefit even more people than we first estimated. It will give somewhere between three and four hundred thousand Americans new options for health care coverage at a vulnerable time in their lives.

Let me say one other thing. The bipartisan Kennedy-Kassebaum legislation we adopted last year—or in 1996—was also designed to help Americans keep their health care when they changed jobs or when someone in their family got sick—a bill like this one, designed to give people peace of mind. But we now see on news reports today—another good reason why it's better for us to do this in this way—because just today we see that some insurers are finding ways around that law, giving insurance agents incentives to delay or deny coverage to vulnerable Americans. These practices have to be stopped. I am directing Secretary Shalala and the Department of Health and Human Services to conduct a thorough review of the options for strengthening the protections of the Kennedy-Kassebaum law.

And tomorrow the Department will send a notice to every insurer in every State in our country affirming what we already know, that impeding anyone's access to health care in violation of this law is illegal. It's not just wrong; it's illegal. The law is vital to the health and stability of America's workers and their families. We intend to enforce it vigorously.

But let me say, you see the problems we have with that kind of approach. With this kind of approach, anybody who can afford the premium or whose children or relatives will help them to afford this premium, won't have to worry about whether they have health care coverage. We won't have to worry about some regulation or waiting for a report to come in to tell us whether this or that or the other person is complying. We will know that we're helping hundreds of thousands of people who have worked hard all their lives and played by the rules and been good citizens to have the decent, secure time in a vulnerable period of their lives. We can extend this opportunity in a responsible way.

Medicare is one of the crowning achievements of this century for the American people. With this legislation, and with the other challenges that we intend to face and overcome, we can make sure, as we become an older and older and older country—which is, I always say, a high-class problem—that Medicare will be one of the crowning achievements of the 21st century as well.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:35 a.m. in Room 1100 at the Longworth Office Building on Capitol Hill.

Remarks at a Saint Patrick's Day Reception

March 17, 1998

The President. Thank you very much. Every time Al Gore has a crowd like this, he always says, "Thank you for the standing ovation." [*Laughter*] Taoiseach, Miss Larkin, to all of our guests, all the ambassadors here, all the Members of Congress, distinguished guests from the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and all across the United States.

There are so many Americans here who love Ireland and long for peace, I hesitate to mention any, but I must mention two: First, I would like to thank our distinguished Ambassador, who has just announced her resignation a few months hence, Jean Kennedy Smith. Thank you, ma'am, for everything you have done. And I have to thank one other person who is in his present position because on one late, very sad night in 1994, my legendary powers of persuasion fell flat, and I was unable to persuade George Mitchell to run for reelection. He is still trying to determine whether, as a consequence, I bestowed upon him a blessing or a curse. [*Laughter*] It's why I always tell him it is, after all, in his hands. Thank you, Senator Mitchell, for what you are doing. We appreciate that.

In his inaugural address, President Kennedy proposed a new approach to the cold war when he said, "Let both sides explore

what problems unite us instead of belaboring those which divide us.'' He eloquently insisted civility is not a sign of weakness. If that was true for two great, distant, often alien superpowers like the United States and the Soviet Union, surely it is true for neighbors in Ireland.

Tonight we have here in this room representatives, leaders of all the parties to the peace talks. It is a great night. I was thinking in sort of my impish way that I almost wish I could give them a perfectly harmless—perfectly harmless—3-day cold, which would require them all to be quarantined in the Green Room. [*Laughter*] It's not a very big room, the Green Room—[*laughter*]—and we have a lot of parties to the talks. So in just 3 days of getting over a cold together, I think all these problems would be solved.

Well, the peace talks won't be that easy, but all of you, you have to seize this historic moment. Just think, in just a few weeks, you could lift this enormous burden from the shoulders of all the children of Ireland.

It has been said that St. Patrick's Day is the day when the entire world wishes it were Irish. Well, when lasting peace finally comes, the entire world will rejoice. When I heard the wonderful songs up here, and Frank's wonderful reading, and all the eloquence of Irish passion and pain and joy came flooding out of the performers, young and old, I was reminded of that great line from Yeats, ''In dreams begin responsibility.'' All the Irish are dreamers. In the next few weeks, if Irish responsibility measures up to Irish dreams, this next year's celebration here will be the greatest in the history of this great house.

God bless you.

[*At this point, the First Lady introduced Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland, the Taoiseach, who then made brief remarks.*]

The President. We're about to leave. I feel duty bound, because there are so many people from Massachusetts here today—[*laughter*]—to tell you that in Massachusetts this is a dual holiday. This is also the day when over 200 years ago the British left Massachusetts, so it's called Evacuation Day. [*Laughter*]

Now, that means that you must evacuate the White House. [*Laughter*] I have to say that so State Secretary Mowlam doesn't think I made an anti-British slur here. [*Laughter*] But you needn't leave until 11:59 p.m.—[*laughter*]—because it will still be Evacuation Day. [*Laughter*]

Enjoy. We love having you here. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:35 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Celia Larkin, who accompanied Prime Minister Ahern; George J. Mitchell, independent chairman of the multiparty talks in Northern Ireland; Pulitzer Prize-winning author Frank McCourt; and Marjorie Mowlam, United Kingdom Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Remarks at the Carpenters Joint Apprenticeship Training Center in Las Vegas, Nevada

March 18, 1998

The President. Thank you. It's a good thing we've got a 22d amendment, or I would run again. Thanks for saying that. Let me begin by saying that when Maggie Carlton was talking, I leaned over to John Sweeney and I said, ''John, I'd give anything if we could just get her speech on television tonight. That's the America we're trying to build for everybody.''

I know that your husband and your daughters were proud of you, but I think every working man and woman out here was proud of you for what you said and what you represented. Your family is living proof that if we reward people for their work, if we enable people to succeed at work and at home raising their children, if we give them the chance to be good citizens, then America is going to do very well indeed.

I want to thank the others up here on this platform with me. I want to thank John Sweeney for his brilliant, energetic leadership of the labor movement. He has been terrific. I want to thank Doug McCarron for his leadership of the carpenters and his ever-present willingness to let me know exactly what he thinks I should be doing on every issue. [*Laughter*] I want to thank Bob Georgine for many things, but I want to congratulate him most recently on helping to bring about the major labor agreement in