

July 27 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1994

The President. Well, the honor was mine. I was very inspired by the students and their dreams. I also want to say how very proud I am of the strong support we have been receiving from the deaf and disabled communities on health care reform.

Go ahead.

Dr. Anderson. Great. Yes, we very much care about improving health care services, and we are so glad that you have taken the lead in advocating for health care reform.

Hopefully, you will also be able to remind health care providers of how important it is that they be sensitive to the needs of people with disabilities for health care services and for access to reasonable accommodations. I am very inspired by your hard work and will do all I can to support your efforts.

The President. Well, of course, I will be sensitive to those things. And I think you well understand that the only way we can extend those benefits and opportunities to the disabled community is to cover all Americans. If we do that, we will be able to contain costs and empower disabled Americans to work and to live to the fullest of their abilities.

Let me say, also, before we close this conversation, how pleased I am that the ADA is working and giving us things like this telephone relay system. It's a great tribute to the work that millions of disabled Americans have done.

I want to make a special note of the work that your wife, Karen, has done and the help

she gave to our campaign in 1992 and our efforts to reach out for all Americans.

Go ahead.

Dr. Anderson. Great. My wife is here with me, and she's grinning from ear to ear. She enjoyed the opportunity to serve you and work in your campaign.

I also want to say, yes, the ADA is working very well. And it will work even better in the years to come. Our conversation this morning is a living example of how well ADA is working.

Go ahead.

The President. I want to thank you again for all you have done to make the ADA work for people in their everyday lives.

It's been a real pleasure to talk with you today. One of my aides told me that your son, Jamal, and I have a picture together that you would like me to autograph. I'd be glad to do that, and I look forward to seeing you again soon.

Signing off.

Dr. Anderson. Great. Many, many thanks for this opportunity. Thank you, again, and you have a great day, too.

Bye-bye.

The President. Goodbye.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:26 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House. The telephone conversation used a new relay service technology which allows deaf persons to communicate by telephone.

Remarks on the Fourth Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act July 27, 1994

The President. Thank you very much. It is wonderful to see this sea of Americans here at the White House today. Senator Harkin and I were back there talking, and he was beaming because he had so much to do with the ADA. And I was listening to the First Lady and to Tipper and to the Vice President give their fine speeches, and they were all so good, I was wishing I could just sit there and not have to say anything—[laughter]—enjoy the day and welcome you here.

I thank especially the Members of Congress who are here: Congressman Hoyer, Congress-

man Fish, Congressman Major Owens, and Congressman Goodling. Thank you for being here, sirs. Two who are not here because they're on the Hill working, I want to mention, Senator Kennedy and Congressman Jack Brooks who worked so hard on this. I thank former Congressman Tony Coelho who's done a magnificent job as Chair of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disability. I thank all the people who are here on this stage. And I want to say something today about the spirit of bipartisanship. I will say more later, but I would remind you that it would be wrong for

the day to go by without pointing out that this bill was signed into law by my Republican predecessor, President Bush, and I thank him for doing that.

I'd also like to introduce three young people from Gallaudet University who are here who are part of one of our administration's most important initiatives and an illustration of why we have to keep working to open the doors of opportunity to all Americans. They are Jennifer Nasukiewicz, Amy Hopkins, and Madelaine Frederickson. I would ask them to stand. [*Applause*] They are completing their training to be participants in the first class of our national service program, AmeriCorps. Beginning this September, they will be part of 20,000 young Americans who will be working to help to reclaim our sense of national community. They'll be working to help reclaim the natural beauty of the Chesapeake Bay. And together, they'll be working to revolutionize our sense of what we can do together. And in return, they'll get a little bit of help to continue their education.

You know, as the Vice President said, when we went across this country and sought the opportunity to serve here, our slogan was, "Putting People First." What that meant to me was pretty simple as we hurtle toward the next century. As we come to the end of the cold war, we owe it to our people to do some basic things: first of all, to try to create a world of greater peace and prosperity; that's what we've been about here the last 2 days with the King of Jordan and the Prime Minister of Israel; second, to restore the American economy; third, to rebuild our American community with stronger community, stronger families; fourth, to empower all Americans to live to the fullest of their God-given abilities and to expect them to assume the responsibility to do so.

We are at a moment in history when our values, what we believe is morally right, and our interests, what is clearly good for us in a tangible material way, are one. We do not have a person to waste, and that is why we are here today to rededicate ourselves to an America where every man, woman, and child can reach the fullest of their God-given potential.

Like every civil rights law in our history, the Americans with Disabilities Act is just that, it's about potential. It is not a handout. It stands for what's best in our heritage, empowering Americans to build better lives for themselves. In that tradition, I pledge as your President

to see that this Act is fully implemented and aggressively enforced in our schools, our workplaces, in government, and in public places for the benefit of all persons with disabilities, the blind and visually impaired, the deaf and hard of hearing, persons with mental retardation, persons with mental illness, persons who are mobility-impaired, all people who have problems that can be overcome. That's what this act is about.

We must move from exclusion to inclusion, from dependence to independence, from paternalism to empowerment. Your future and the future of those whom you represent is at the heart of my vision for America. In every aspect, consider this: If our goals here at home are to restore our economy, to rebuild our American communities, and to empower individuals, how can we achieve them unless you are part of all of them? Look at the progress which has been made and look at where we have to go.

In the last 18 months, we have passed a bill cutting the deficit by record amounts, reducing the Federal Government to its smallest point since John Kennedy was President, having 3 years of deficit reduction for the first time since Harry Truman was President. And it's produced 3.8 million jobs and a 1.5 percent drop in the unemployment rate. But we've got a long way to go. We've got a long way to go because millions of Americans with disabilities could be working and contributing if this society opened it to them.

We are working up here to strengthen our American community. Congressman Brooks today is back in the Congress working on the crime bill, which will put more police officers on our streets and ban assault weapons and toughen sentences, but also give our children something to say yes to. There are billions of dollars there to invest in programs to get kids out of trouble before they are too far gone. It will rebuild our American community. But how can we be a community if millions of you are isolated from our common life and our common purposes? We can never be an American community.

The Secretary of Education is working to implement the most important empowerment agenda of all. Along with the Department of Health and Human Services and others, we are trying to implement a lifetime education system starting with Head Start for all children who need it and going through lifetime learning for people when they change jobs in the workplace.

But how can this work unless you are part of the empowerment agenda of America? We will never be fully empowered.

So, I say to you, if our job is to put people first, to rebuild the economy, to strengthen our communities, to empower our people, we cannot do that job unless you walk every step or ride every step or get there however you can. We need you, and without you we cannot do it.

In this global economy, as the Secretary of Labor never tires of telling me, the only thing we have that nobody can take away from us is the mind and the heart and spirit of our people. That's good news. It means the mind of our people and the spirit of our people can be used sometimes without lifting large weights or doing great physical labor. It means we can open the possibility of employment to more people. But it also means if we really want to win for all Americans, we must believe and act on the premise that we do not have a person to waste.

When I was first elected Governor—it seems like 100 years ago now—but back in the late seventies before the Americans with Disabilities Act came along, of the 50 or so people that worked in my office, three were blind. I got to the point where I didn't notice because they were just great employees. It struck me as crazy for them not to be part of a work force they could contribute to. Today I have had the honor of appointing 44 outstanding people with disabilities to important jobs in our Government, including Judy Heumann who's here with me today, the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education. She had to fight for her first job as a teacher. She's fought for disability rights for her entire life. Now she's fighting for the future of every child in America. I say that to make this point: We have not appointed a single, solitary person because of their disability. They have all been appointed because of their ability to serve the American people.

Why is this health care issue so important to this agenda? There are many reasons. We're the only country in the world that's going backwards in health care coverage with an advanced economy. A few years ago, 88 percent of our people were covered; now we're down to 83 percent. In the last 5 years alone, over 5 million Americans have lost their health insurance coverage. That is very troubling. We're spending too much money to get too little, throwing billions of dollars away on paperwork and bureauc-

racy every year so that we don't have the money we need. Look at this Cabinet behind me—to fight drugs, to take care of veterans' health care needs, to build a transportation network for the 21st century, to spend on education and training programs, to spend on the needs of the poor and to fight crime. That's just the Cabinet members behind me. Why? Because we are holding all spending flat while health care spending explodes—not for new health care, more money for the same health care.

But most of all, it is a human problem. The other day in western Pennsylvania, I was introduced by two women: one, a mother of five children who had become ill and she and her husband lost their health insurance and all their children; the other, a 62-year-old woman who had been a dairy farmer all of her life; 7-day-a-week work—no slacking in that business—and she finally had lost her health insurance at the time in her life when she needed it most. And if you look out at this sea of people and all those whom you represent, the fact that the health insurance system of America discriminates against millions of people because of their disabilities or because they have had serious illnesses or because they are too old when they switch jobs or when their employer gets in trouble, and the fact that it is wildly discriminatory against small business, which is creating most of the new jobs in this country but paying 30 or 40 percent more for health insurance than those of us in Government or working for big businesses do—all these things are keeping us from putting every person's talents to use; and especially, especially, the disabled Americans who could be in the work force if their employers could afford to provide them health insurance.

The people who fought for the Americans with Disabilities Act understood that. They originally had health care reform in the Act, and it had to be dropped, because they knew that this bill would be delayed for years if it had to deal with the difficult and complicated and politically explosive issue of health care reform. But I tell you, my fellow Americans, now is the time to act and to go forward and to finish the work that was done in the beginning 6 years ago.

Audience members. Now! Now! Now!

The President. Now is the time.

Audience members. Now! Now! Now!

The President. There are those who say, “Well, we can just reform the insurance laws and say everybody’s entitled to insurance and everybody’s entitled to take it from job to job and subsidize the poor more.” Let me tell you, if we do that, we will cut Medicare for the elderly. We’ll do a little more for the poor in the short run; we’ll do nothing to help people be part of the working middle class because what will happen is insurance premiums will go up, coverage will go down, small businesses on the margin will stop covering, and people who wish to be part of the working middle class will have fewer, not more, opportunities to work and live to the fullest of their capacities.

We do not want to create a system where the only way you can have health care is if you are poor and go on welfare, if you go to jail, if you go to work for a big employer or the Government, or you are wealthy. We want a system that covers everybody so you can be what you want to be.

Let me tell you that for over a year—and in my case, as a citizen of this country and when I was a Governor for now more than 4 years—we have pursued every avenue; we have examined all evidence; we have solicited every suggestion for how to provide this kind of opportunity and security for all Americans. I have seen no one yet who has come up with a better idea than shared responsibility between employers and employees for private health insurance in our private health care system. It already works for most families; that’s the way most families are covered. And in the State of Hawaii, it works for all families. In Hawaii, for 20 years, there’s been a requirement for shared responsibility for private insurance between employers and employees.

And whenever I bring this up, people say, “Well, yes, Mr. President, but in Hawaii, everybody goes there because they want a vacation. It’s sunny and people are healthier there. Everything is more expensive there, so what difference does it make if health insurance is more expensive? Everything costs more.”

Look at the facts. First of all, 20 percent of the people in the health system in Hawaii are poor native islanders. Secondly, health insurance is the only thing in Hawaii that is not more expensive than anyplace else in America. It’s 30 percent cheaper for small businesses than the average cost of health insurance in America because everybody pays and no one avoids their

responsibility. And the people are healthier because they have primary and preventive care like the First Lady was talking about.

As has been pointed out, somewhat embarrassingly to them, there are many American companies now in the forefront of the fight against universal coverage who provide coverage to all their employees when they open businesses in other countries, and they do just fine. And they can do just fine here, too.

What is different about this moment in history? Well, I’ll tell you what’s different: For the first time ever, you have the American Medical Association—

Audience member. You’re here.

The President. Thank you. Thank you. Somebody was whispering, “What’s different at this moment in history is the President’s crazy enough to take on this fight.” [Laughter]

No, what is different? This time the American Medical Association, the American Association of Family Practice, the pediatricians, the American Nurses Association, the medical schools of the United States, the American Association of Retired People, the AFL–CIO and an association literally, literally, of hundreds of thousands of small businesses and many of the biggest businesses in the country, as well as a majority of the American people, all have agreed that the best way to do this is to have employers and employees share the responsibility for buying private insurance.

Now, how are we going to do it? Let me say that I desperately want a bipartisan bill. I have reached out to members of the other party; this bill passed with a bipartisan majority. At one point, two dozen Republican Senators supported Senator Chafee’s bill for universal coverage. But every time I have reached out, they have moved further away. I feel like I keep reaching out. I wish we were in a car, and they would eventually run up against the door and have to come back to my way—[laughter]—because I keep reaching out.

Let me say that 22 years ago—22 years ago—a Republican President, Richard Nixon, and one of the incumbent Republican Senators from Oregon, Robert Packwood, offered a bill to require employers and employees to share the responsibility for private health insurance. If it was a good idea 22 years ago, it is a better idea today when things have gotten more difficult in terms of cost and coverage, and we ought to do it.

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Now, let me say—you heard the Vice President with that quote from the Republican consultants say, “Let’s send them home empty-handed.” We’ve done that a lot, you know. We’ve done that a lot. It took 5 years to pass the ADA. When I showed up in town here, it had taken 7 years until we could finally pass the Brady bill last year—7 years—7 years; 7 years until we could finally pass the family and medical leave law last year—very important to you; 7 years until we could finally get the worldwide trade agreement that will add a half a million jobs in America between now and the end of the decade. A lot of times, if you want bipartisan consensus on a tough issue, it takes forever. But I tell you, we dare not wait longer. For 60 years, Presidents of both parties have known we should cover all Americans. We now see health care costs going up, and the only Government spending going up is in health care while we are desperately trying to bring this deficit down and invest in our future. And we know that in only 5 years, 5 million Americans have lost their coverage.

We are at an historic moment. For the first time ever, there are bills on the floor of both Houses of the Congress that will give Americans health care. We must say we don’t care about politics. There are Democrats and Republicans and independents in this audience. There are people here today who voted for all three people who ran for President last time. I do not give

a rip what your politics are, but I do want you to have health care so you can contribute to America’s future.

Audience members. Health care now! Health care now! Health care now!

The President. That’s right. Let me say this, I love these chants, but this is what often happens in our society: We’re all here preaching to the saved. And I ask you, I ask you to go to the Congress with a simple message, and to go back home to your communities with a simple message. Let us discard politics. Let us put people first. And let our focus be simply this: what will work.

I have no pride of authorship. Nothing would please me more than if somebody else’s name, 100 names, 400 names, 500 names in both Houses of Congress would be on a health care bill, but we dare not do something which holds out false hopes. Let’s do what works. Let’s complete the work of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Let’s say to the whole world, this is one country that knows we don’t have a person to waste, and we’re going into the next century with all of our people, arm-in-arm.

God bless you. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:08 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. The proclamation of July 26 on the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks Honoring the NCAA Women’s Basketball Champion University of North Carolina Tar Heels

July 27, 1994

I apologize for being a little late. I’ve been on the phone with Members of the Congress, which I had to do. Senator Helms, Congressman Valentine, Congressman Lancaster, Congressman Price; I think Congressman McMillan’s out there somewhere. Alex. It’s good to see all of you, ladies and gentlemen. It’s a great honor for me to have this basketball team here, if only to see them all looking normal after I watched that incredible end to the championship game. The University of North Carolina women’s basketball team not only won its first national title this year but had the best record

in the country and the school record, 33 wins. Coach Sylvia Hatchell broke the 400-career-victories mark and was named National Coach of the Year. But my guess is that—actually, I wanted to ask her this, whether when the team spray-painted her hair Carolina blue, it made it worthwhile, or she began to wonder. [*Laughter*]

I want to say, of course, a special word of congratulations to Charlotte Smith for that three-point shot. I can tell you I’ve been in a lot of tough fights myself around here, and there have been a lot of times when I’ve looked