

able for verification of the content of this statement.

Radio Address by the President and Hillary Clinton on Medicare July 29, 1995

The President. Good morning. This morning I'm speaking to you from the Oval Office with the First Lady. And we're joined by families from all across our country, grandparents, parents, and children, including Hillary's mother and my stepfather. We want to talk with you this morning about the respect and dignity we owe to older Americans and the security we owe to their families.

This weekend we're celebrating the 30th anniversary of the passage of Medicare. Guaranteed health care for older and disabled Americans is now so much a part of our lives that it's easy to forget how growing old once meant growing poor in our country. In 1965, over one-third of older Americans were poor, and half of them were uninsured.

I remember because my mother was a nurse-anesthetist, and older people without insurance would sometimes come to our house, offering to mow our lawn or bringing a bushel of peaches to pay for her services. These Americans had worked hard their whole lives, they didn't have any health insurance, and they were in danger of losing their health.

Vice President Gore's father, Senator Al Gore, Sr., was in the Senate back in 1965 when he said that this was a disgrace in a country such as ours. Senator Gore helped to create Medicare to put an end to that disgrace. And since then, Medicare has lifted millions of seniors out of poverty and provided insurance for almost every older American.

Mrs. Clinton. We need to remember that Medicare is not just important for older men and women, it is a compact across generations. Medicare means that we don't have to choose between doing right by our parents and giving our children the opportunities they deserve.

A friend of ours told me a story about how, before Medicare, her mother would take a part of her paycheck each week and put it in an envelope to pay for an aging parent's health care bills. That meant the family had less money

for putting food on the table or sending their children to college or saving for their own retirement. That's the way it was for families before Medicare and the way it could be again for all families, especially those of us with both responsibilities for parents and children.

Parents ought to be able to save for their children's college and protect their parents' health, and Medicare means they can. It certainly has been there for our family and for the Vice President's.

You may know that the President and I have both lost parents in the last 2½ years. We've sat in those hospital waiting rooms. We've been in those intensive care units. And we've also experienced in the past week with the Vice President the joy of having his mother come out of the hospital. For all our worries, the one thing we didn't have to worry about was a mountain of health care bills. Medicare was there.

That is the story for millions of Americans, people like Arthur Flemming and Genevieve Johnson, who are here with us. Mr. Flemming helped start Medicare 30 years ago, and Mrs. Johnson was among the first people to benefit from it. Today, both are in their nineties and receive Medicare, and both have worked tirelessly to make sure Medicare will be there for their grandchildren, too. And I think it's because they know what life is like for most older Americans. The median income for women over 65 in our country is \$8,500 a year.

The President. To preserve Medicare for all of our grandchildren we do have to strengthen the Medicare trust fund, which holds the money we all pay in to cover hospital, nursing homes, and home health bills. I've been working to reform Medicare since I took office, and frankly, the trust fund is in better shape than it was when I did take office. But real reform is about making the situation better, not worse. Real reform means fixing the trust fund without putting beneficiaries in a fix.

July 29 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1995

I also believe we have to balance the budget. But I know we can do that and strengthen the trust fund without rolling back 30 years of progress against poverty and fear for older Americans. That's what my balanced budget will do. It will eliminate the deficit, secure the Medicare trust fund, and still protect older Americans from one penny in new Medicare costs. Times are tough enough without forcing families to pay more to keep the health care they have right now.

The congressional majority sees it differently. They are now willing to join me in shoring up the trust fund, but they want to do it in a way I don't agree with, that goes way too far, because they insist on such a huge tax cut that also make older couples pay \$5,600 more out of their pockets over the next few years. For people who don't have that kind of money, the message will be simple: Fend for yourselves. Many people just won't be able to do it.

As I said before, we often take for granted the security that comes from Medicare. But according to a new study by the Department of Health and Human Services, the congressional

majority would push 500,000—a half a million—older Americans into poverty by increasing the cost of health care. And these cuts would force their families to make choices between generations that no family should have to make.

We do need to protect Medicare from going bankrupt, but we don't have to bankrupt older Americans to do it. None of the cuts driving families into poverty would go into the trust fund. They would simply pay for a huge tax cut for people who don't really need it. That's unnecessary, and it's wrong. Medicare is too important to all families to become a piggy bank for tax cuts for just a few. It's especially important today because so many families are working harder and earning the same or less than they did 10 years ago.

For all Americans, Medicare must remain a source of certainty and security. For our parents, but also for our children, I pledge to do my part to keep Medicare strong.

Thanks for listening.

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

Question-and-Answer Session With Senior Citizens on Medicare July 29, 1995

The President. Yes, Sarah [Sarah McClendon, McClendon News].

Q. What's your strategy? What's going to be the Democrats' strategy? We can't live with this present condition like this. We can't do it. People are dying every day because they don't have preventive health care. And what's going to be the strategy of the Democrats to overcome this?

The President. Well, first of all, we're going to try to win as many of the fights as we can as they come up. You know, yesterday we won a really important victory in the House of Representatives where, really, the first time since the new majority took over, over 50 Republicans bolted and voted to protect the environment, a very important issue in States like Florida and other States around the country. The House had a bill before it that would literally strip the Federal Government of its power to protect the environment. So that—and 50 Republicans

joined with almost all the Democrats and said, no, we're not going to do that.

So I think that we've got a chance now, a real chance to build a sensible, common-sense, common ground majority. And that's what we're going to try to do. I don't know that these Medicare cuts can pass the Congress. And I'm certainly going to do what I can to defeat them. That's our first strategy.

The second thing, to follow up on what you said, is that we believe that if we're going to slow the rate of growth in Medicare spending dramatically, without imposing great new costs on seniors and making the system work, we ought to take a little of that money we're going to save and put it into preventive care, to try to help people take care of their parents or their grandparents outside of institutions, outside of nursing home care. I think it would save money over the long run. It wouldn't cost a