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would take its turn as the baseball capital of the world. But even more importantly, we should be proud of the example this team set, proving once again that people of very different ethnic backgrounds can play together and win together. Now, it may not be the precise same Marlin team that played the Indians last year that takes the field on opening day, but if the players keep the same spirit they'll be sure to be in the hunt again when the season comes to a close.

Congratulations. For all of us who grew up with baseball as a national pastime, you gave America a great gift last year that none of us will ever forget. Thank you.

[*At this point, Florida Marlins president Don Smiley, manager Jim Leyland, and third baseman Bobby Bonilla made brief remarks. Mr. Leyland noted that the President was the most important person he had ever played golf with, and Mr. Bonilla presented the President with a World Series jersey.*]

The President. Thank you. Since you mentioned our golf game, I want to make two brief points before we adjourn—[*laughter*]—we're going to take a picture. Number one is, I want you to get another ring so you can quit about the time I quit, and then we'll go on the senior tour together. [*Laughter*]

Secondly, if you really thought of that line about the budget, we have a position open in the speechwriting staff that you'd be welcome to anytime. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:42 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Donald Fehr, executive director, Major League Baseball Players Association; and shortstop Edgar Renteria.

Remarks on the Children's Health Care Initiative

February 18, 1998

Thank you. Didn't she do a good job? Give her a hand. [*Applause*] Thank you, Linda. Ned Zechman, thank you. Thank you, Secretary Shalala, for your wonderful work. And I thank the First Lady for what is now a more than 25-year crusade to bring quality health care to children. We're delighted to be joined by Mayor Barry and members of the DC City Council; Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton; and Congresswoman Diana DeGette, from Colorado; and many, many child advocates in this audience who have been working on these issues a long, long time.

Last month in the State of the Union Address, I asked the American people to work together to strengthen our Nation for a new century and especially to build the right kind of future for all our children, with world-class education and quality, affordable health care.

Let me begin by thanking the men and women who work in this hospital for their efforts to restore our most fragile children to health, to give many of them second chances at life. This is a place where medicine shines and miracles happen every day. But it should not take a miracle to ensure that children like Linda's children have the care and insurance they need to stay healthy and to be treated when they're sick.

I still have a hard time believing that this country, with the finest health care system in the world, cannot figure out how to give affordable, quality health insurance coverage to every single child in America.

Step by step, we are working hard to make sure all Americans get the health care they deserve. Two years ago we passed a law, and I signed a law, to make sure every American could keep his or her insurance when they change jobs or when someone in the family is ill. Last year, in the historic balanced budget agreement, we extended the life of the Medicare Trust Fund for more than a decade. We also made this unprecedented $24 billion commitment to provide health care to up to 5 million more children, and I want to say more about that, obviously.

In addition to implementing the provisions of the balanced budget law to cover children, this year we're also going to attempt to pass a health care consumer bill of rights, which is

all the more important since 160 million Americans are now in managed care plans. We want to extend Medicare to Americans age 55 to 65 who have lost their health insurance who can buy into the program. And of course we want to protect all our children from the dangers of tobacco, and we're hoping and praying for a comprehensive resolution of that issue.

But let's go back to the question of covering children. Congress appropriated the money, $24 billion over 5 years, with the goal of insuring 5 million of the 10 million children who don't today have health insurance. Now, 3 million—as the First Lady said, 3 million of the 10 million kids who don't have health insurance are eligible for the Medicaid program today. If we could get 100 percent of those children into the Medicaid program, we could actually insure more than 5 million children for the $24 billion. But if we don't get any new children into the Medicaid program, or very few, then we're going to have a very hard time meeting that 5 million goal.

So this issue of not only helping the children and their families but also the hospitals and the providers who have to be reimbursed for the care they give, with expanding the Medicare program to the children who are eligible, is profoundly important if we are to reach what I know is the goal of every person in this audience, which is to provide affordable health insurance coverage to our children.

Now, this children's health initiative, that was part of the balanced budget agreement, is part of the kind of the vision of Government that has driven our administration from its first days. I always believed that we had to get rid of the deficit and balance the budget, because otherwise the economy wouldn't work right, we couldn't get interest rates down, we couldn't have new investment for businesses to create new jobs, people couldn't afford to buy homes—we'd have all kinds of problems. But I also always believed that we had to do it in a way that left more money to invest in our future, particularly in education and health care and the environment and the things that will shape the quality of life. So that's what we're trying to do.

But I want to say again, just the fact that this money has been appropriated is not enough. We cannot let the appropriation of money just sit there. We can't just have laws on paper that say we're going to cover 5 million more people. Those of you who work in these programs understand that this is a complex and challenging task.

Most of these children are like Linda's children. Most of these kids that we're trying to cover are the children of working people who are working hard and doing their very best every day and paying their taxes and simply cannot afford a traditional health insurance plan. One of the ways that we have to deal with this is to expand Medicaid coverage to the 3 million who are already eligible under the law. One of the most shocking things to people who don't have this problem is to find out that huge numbers of these kids are prevented from getting medical care simply because their parents don't know they're eligible.

Therefore, all of us have an obligation to see to it that every child who can take advantage of this historic investment in health care does so, and does it now, beginning with the Medicaid program. The Federal Government must do its part. States and businesses and individuals must step up to the plate. And our message to parents and to teachers, to preachers and to coaches must be: What you do not know can hurt your children. You have to find out if your child is eligible for the Medicaid program.

Today I am launching an all-out effort to let every family know about health insurance, whether it's Medicaid or another State program that is currently or soon will be available, because there are now new children's health programs coming on line under the program passed in the balanced budget bill.

In a few moments, I will sign an Executive memorandum directing the eight Federal agencies who run our children's programs, such as WIC and food stamps, to cooperate in a comprehensive effort to make sure that every family gets the information they need to enroll their children, whether from an agency employee or from pamphlets, toll-free numbers, or simplified application forms. And I call on Congress to pass the new funds I am requesting in this balanced budget to help States publicize their new child health programs and their child centers and enroll the children in Medicaid automatically, even as they wait for final approval of their applications.

Next, and most important, every State must take responsibility for ensuring that every eligible child within its borders gets insured. Medicaid is one of the best ways to expand health insurance to more children, and it is a State-run program. I'm pleased to announce that Colorado and South Carolina will join Alabama as the first States to expand insurance coverage to more uninsured children under the bill we passed last year.

But you should know that over 40 more States are well on their way to expanding their own insurance programs. I applaud the Governors for their commitment and their innovative efforts to enroll more children. And I thank Ray Scheppach from the Governors' Association for being here today. We can't rest until every State has a program and a commitment to implement it.

Finally, the private sector has to help us get the job done. Many businesses and foundations have already joined in. Bell Atlantic will provide the leadership to establish a new 800 number that will direct families to State agencies in charge of Medicaid. Safeway has agreed to put the 800 number on their shopping bags. The National Association of Chain Drug Stores and the National Community Pharmacists Association will help us get the word out whenever parents pick up prescriptions. Pampers has agreed to include a letter in parent education packages that go to millions of new mothers in the hospital. I thank all of them for being exemplary corporate citizens.

And I'm pleased to announce the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Kaiser Family Foundation have committed more than $23 million to finding better ways to expand coverage and outreach efforts. America's Promise, the outgrowth of the Presidents' Summit on Service, made a healthy future for all children one of its five goals. And along with the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Hospital Association, the National Association of Education, all have launched their own efforts to target and enroll uninsured children. And I thank them.

This is an extraordinary partnership to make sure that every child gets the health coverage he or she needs to have a fair and healthy shot at life. But it is only the first step. We need every parent, every grandparent, doctor, nurse, health care provider, teacher, business leader, foundation, every community all across America to work until they find the ways to reach all our children who can be covered by Medicaid or by the new children's health insurance program.

Like all parents, Hillary and I know from experience that nothing can weigh more heavily on your mind than the health of your child. The slightest cough, the most minor accident can cause enormous worry. I can barely imagine what it would be like to also have to worry about finding the money to pay for your children's health care in the first place.

Too many parents live with these worries every day. Millions of our fellow Americans—people who are dedicated citizens, people who get up every day and go to work, people who pay the taxes they owe to the Government, people who do everything that is expected of them and still have to worry about the health care of their children for lack of insurance coverage. This is wrong. If we really want to make America strong for the 21st century, we will correct it. We have the tools; it is now up to us to use them.

Thank you very much, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:43 p.m. in the atrium at Children's Hospital. In his remarks, he referred to Linda Haverman, mother of two boys who had received health insurance through Medicaid, who introduced the President; Ned Zechman, president, Children's Hospital; Mayor Marion S. Barry, Jr., of the District of Columbia; and Raymond C. Scheppach, executive director, National Governors' Association.