

table; and it should confirm a respected, experienced scientist, Dr. Jane Henney, to lead our food safety efforts as Commissioner of FDA.

Food can never be made entirely safe. Therefore, every parent also has a responsibility: a responsibility to handle food carefully, especially during the summer. Meanwhile, we must do everything we can to protect the food Americans eat and to give our families the peace of mind they deserve. That's one important way, on this Fourth of July, we can resolve to keep our Nation strong as we move into the 21st century.

Happy Independence Day, Americans, and thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:18 a.m. on July 3 in the Grand Hyatt Hotel, Hong Kong SAR, China, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m., e.d.t., on July 4. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on July 3 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. In his address, the President referred to President Jiang Zemin of China, and Jane E. Henney, Food and Drug Administration Commissioner-designate.

Remarks on Medicare and the Legislative Agenda and an Exchange With Reporters

July 6, 1998

The President. Good morning. I'm delighted to be here with Secretary Shalala, Mr. Apfel, and Ron Pollack to make an announcement today. Let me first, by way of introduction, say, as all of you know, the First Lady and I just returned this weekend from our trip to China. It was a trip that advanced America's interests and values in a secure, stable, and increasingly open China by achieving solid progress in a number of areas and an honest, unprecedentedly open discussion with both Chinese leaders and the Chinese people.

We've come back to America at a critical time. We're exactly halfway through the Major League Baseball season, but we're already in the ninth inning of this congressional session. We have to use wisely the remaining 38 working days to make a season of progress.

With an economy the strongest in a generation and our social fabric strengthening, it is, as I have said repeatedly, extremely tempting for all of us to kick back and soak in the good times. But that would be wrong. There are still enormous challenges and opportunities facing the United States on the edge of the 21st century. We must make this a moment of opportunity, not missed opportunity.

First, we have to advance the economic strategy that has brought so much opportunity to so many Americans. In the coming weeks, I will insist that the House join me and the Senate in reserving the surplus until we save Social Security first. We should fulfill our obligation

to America's children, with smaller class sizes, modernized schools, higher standards, more Head Start opportunities, more reading help for third graders, more access to college.

We should strengthen the International Monetary Fund because our prosperity depends upon the stability of our trading partners in Asia and around the world. We should press forward with our reform of Government by passing IRS reform to guard against abuses and extend taxpayers' rights, and through bipartisan campaign finance reform.

And we must further strengthen families and communities across our country with a juvenile crime bill that uses prosecutors and probation officers to crack down on gangs, guns, and drugs, and bars violent juveniles from buying guns for life; with comprehensive tobacco legislation; and with the Patients' Bill of Rights that says critical medical decisions can only be made by doctors, not insurance company accountants.

There is much to do in these remaining 38 days. Congress has a choice to make in writing this chapter of our history. It can choose partisanship, or it can choose progress. Congress must decide.

I stand ready to work with lawmakers of good faith in both parties, as I have for 5½ years, to move our Nation forward. And I have a continuing obligation to act, to use the authority of the presidency and the persuasive power of the podium to advance America's interest at home and abroad. Nowhere is that need greater

than our mission to provide quality health care for every American, especially the elderly.

Last year's bipartisan balanced budget agreement gave seniors and people with disabilities new help to pay their Medicare premiums. This was the right thing to do. Yet a new study released today by Mr. Pollack's Families USA shows that over 3 million of the hardest-pressed Medicare beneficiaries still do not receive the help to which they are due.

I want to thank Ron Pollack for his continuing excellent work for accessible and quality care for all Americans, and for continuing to point out the problems in achieving that goal.

Today I am launching a national effort to educate every single Medicare recipient about this opportunity, using the mail, Medicare and Social Security notices, case workers, field offices, working with State governments, and using the Internet. Through this effort, hundreds of thousands of older and disabled low-income Americans will receive more affordable health care without any new congressional action. This is a duty we owe our parents and our fellow citizens, and we should honor it. It's the right thing to do.

I want to thank Secretary Shalala and Mr. Apfel for working out the details of this outreach. We look forward to signing up people and getting them on the Medicare rolls as quickly as possible.

This is a moment of opportunity. We have to use it decisively. We can do so, and if we do we will strengthen our Nation. Again I say, we have to choose progress over partisanship.

Thank you.

Fast-Track Trading Authority

Q. Speaker Gingrich said that he may bring up fast-track legislation again this fall. Are you planning an aggressive push for fast track this year?

The President. Well, I don't know that anything has changed in terms of the votes. I would like to see the Africa trade bill, which did pass the House, and the Caribbean Basin Initiative, which I understand has been modified in the Senate so it may pass, pass. You know I'm strongly for fast track, but if there is no reason to believe we can pass it, it would be a mistake

to keep the other initiatives from passing which would do a great deal of good for the United States and for the countries in our neighborhood and in Africa.

Health Maintenance Organizations

Q. Mr. President, in 12 States big HMO's have dropped Medicaid coverage altogether. In at least 12 States, major HMO's have dropped Medicaid—

The President. Yes, I read that story in the morning paper, and I was very concerned about it. And before I came out here, I talked to Secretary Shalala about it. She says that in some States, there is contrary evidence, so I have asked her to look at all 50 States, get all the facts, report back to me as soon as possible, and then we'll let you know what we find out as quickly as we can. It was a very disturbing story, but we want to get all the facts, and then we'll make them available to you.

Thank you.

Death of Roy Rogers

Q. Your thoughts on Roy Rogers?

The President. I would like to say something about Roy Rogers because he was, as you know, most prominent in my childhood. I think it was from the midforties to the midfifties when he was the number one Western star. And like most people my age, I grew up on Roy Rogers, Dale Evans, and Trigger, and Gabby Hayes. I really appreciate what he stood for, the movies he made, and the kind of values they embodied, and the good-natured spirit that he exhibited all the way up until his last interviews, not so very long ago.

And my thoughts are with his family and his many friends, but today there will be a lot of sad and grateful Americans, especially of my generation, because of his career.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Ronald F. Pollack, vice president and executive director, Families USA; Roy Rogers' wife, actress Dale Evans, and his horse, Trigger; and the late actor George (Gabby) Hayes.