

Statement on Selection of the Director of the Vaccine Research Center at the National Institutes of Health

March 11, 1999

I am very pleased to join Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, National Institutes of Health Director Harold Varmus, and my AIDS policy office director, Sandra Thurman, in welcoming Dr. Gary Nabel as the first Director of the new Vaccine Research Center at the NIH. Dr. Nabel's long and distinguished career as a research scientist will be an incredible asset in our efforts to find preventative vaccines.

The first order of business for Dr. Nabel will be the effort to develop a vaccine for HIV. This is a top priority of our AIDS research efforts. Here in the United States, over 40,000 people are newly infected with HIV every year. Across the world, the rate is nearly 6 million people per year. These are lives in jeopardy. Though we have made remarkable progress in treating HIV and AIDS, there is still no cure. So our best hope of bringing an end to the

AIDS pandemic is to find a safe and effective vaccine.

I have issued a challenge to the scientific community to find an AIDS vaccine within the decade. We are making important strides towards that critical goal and the leadership of Dr. Nabel will help us progress even more. Dr. Varmus and his team of expert researchers at the NIH, working in collaboration with scientists from across the globe, have produced remarkable results in reducing AIDS mortality here and in many other developed nations. Their improved understanding of how HIV works will be invaluable in the effort to find a vaccine to prevent infection in the first place.

The human tragedy of AIDS throughout the world must move all of us to action. The search for a vaccine for HIV must continue to be a global priority because millions of precious lives hang in the balance.

Statement on Senate Action on the Kennedy-Murray Amendment to Proposed Education Flexibility Partnership Legislation

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I have long supported the ed-flex concept, and I was pleased when the congressional leadership decided to take up this bill as one of its first matters of business. Today, however, the Senate used this bill to undermine one of our most important educational achievements—an initiative to hire 100,000 well-prepared teachers to reduce class size in the early grades to a national average of 18. The Senate not only voted down an amendment to ensure long-term

funding for this initiative but passed an amendment that would allow local school districts to completely opt out of class size reduction. I will work hard for the elimination of this amendment in conference. We should be working together to make continued progress on obvious national needs such as reducing class size—not attempting to tear down the bipartisan work we did last year to address this problem.