

There are a few of you here in this room that are almost as old as I am, and anybody who is—certainly anybody who is 40 or over who went to college and took any number of economics courses, was taught by people that we ought to have a healthy amount of debt; every country needed a certain amount of debt because you were always borrowing to invest in the future.

Then, in the 12 years before I took office, we borrowed just to put food on the table as a government, which was a disaster. We may need to do that again someday. But right now, in this global economy, we'd be better off getting out of debt.

The last point I want to make is this is something you should all ponder—no it's not, it's the next to the last point I want to make is—*[laughter]*—not everybody has participated in this economic growth. Yes, we've got the lowest poverty rate in 20 years, the lowest African-American poverty rate ever recorded, the lowest Hispanic poverty rate in 20 years, and I'm proud of all that. But there is a huge number of working people and their children in poverty and skirting on the edges. They have not participated in this recovery, and we just have to face that. Even though unemployment is the lowest it's been in 29 years. And a lot of them are physically isolated in inner cities and the Delta of the Mississippi River and Appalachia and Indian reservations. Technology can have a lot to do with how we overcome that. But we have got to find a way to bring enterprise to poor people, because the distribution of intelligence in this country is fairly even. We have to figure out a way to make the distribution of usable opportunity even enough to get a core of enterprise in these poor areas here and around the world.

This really is the last point. One of the most ironic experiences I have had as President is

that I have been privileged to work with you and others to build a truly modern economy for America, an economy for the 21st century. But so much of my personal leadership in foreign and domestic policy has been required to deal with the emotional and practical and national security demands caused by the eruption of primitive hatreds, from Bosnia to the Middle East to Northern Ireland to African tribal warfare to the Oklahoma City bombing to this whole spate of the ethnic and racial and religious and antigay violence we've had in America in the last 2 years.

It's quite interesting, isn't it? I mean, here you are out here; all you think about is the new millennium. You just gave me a book about the these hard questions to ask about the next thousand years. Isn't it ironic that the thing that's holding us back most in fulfilling our shared potential is our inability to form a community around our common humanity because of our vulnerability to mankind's most ancient fears: the fear of the other? And so I think we need to deal with that.

I'm very proud that I believe my party is on the right side of all those issues, and I thank you for being here to help us tonight.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:35 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to dinner hosts Eric and Wendy Schmidt; Joseph J. Andrew, national chair, Beth Dozoretz, national finance chair, and former Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado, former general chair, Democratic National Committee; Mr. Romer's wife, Bea; attorney John Doerr and his wife, Ann; Sandford Robertson, founder and chair, Banc Robertson Stephens; and Scott Cook, founder and director, Intuit, Inc.

The President's Radio Address

October 2, 1999

Good morning. Although my voice has been a little hoarse, I want to speak with you this morning about your voice, about how you can make the difference this week to help secure

the vital health care protections you've long deserved.

Like many of you, I've been appalled by the tragic stories of men and women fighting for their lives, and at the same time forced to fight

insurance companies focused only on the bottom line. I've met the husbands and wives of those who have died when insurance companies overruled a doctor's urgent warnings. I met a former HMO employee who broke down in tears when describing how callous delays wound up costing a 12-year-old cancer patient his leg. If we work together, we've got the power to put patients first once again.

Just this week Governor Gray Davis signed into law an ambitious health care reform package, giving 20 million residents of California a strong and enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights. Now it's time to do the same for every American, because it doesn't matter whether you're from California or Connecticut or anywhere in between; families all across our Nation need greater patient protections at this time of great change in medical care.

My administration has worked hard to do its part. Through executive action, we've granted all of the patient protections we can give under law to more than 85 million Americans who get their health care through Federal plans.

Today I'm pleased to announce that this month we'll propose rules to extend patient protections to each and every child covered under the Children's Health Insurance Program. These children are from some of our hardest pressed working families. That's why I feel so strongly about giving them not only access to health care but also the guarantee of quality care.

Yet, some in Congress still seem intent on moving in the opposite direction. Republican leaders recently have attached language to a budget bill to deprive 120 million employees of the right to a timely internal appeal of any coverage decision that denies them care they were promised. Blocking this basic right is simply unacceptable. It puts special interests first and patients last.

But this week the House of Representatives has a chance to effectively erase this action as they sit down to vote at long last on whether to give all Americans in health plans all the protections of the Patients' Bill of Rights. This vote is critical. For all of the steps this adminis-

tration and many States have taken to extend patient rights, we don't have the authority to protect every family unless Congress acts.

So I encourage you to urge your Representatives to vote for the comprehensive bipartisan Patients' Bill of Rights, sponsored by Congressmen Charlie Norwood and John Dingell. This legislation will give every American the right to emergency room care and the right to see a specialist; the right to know you can't be forced to switch doctors in the middle of a cancer treatment or pregnancy; the right to hold your health care plan accountable if it causes you or a loved one great harm.

The bill had already been endorsed by more than 300 health care and consumer groups all across America. I'm convinced the votes are there to pass this Patients' Bill of Rights this week. But we need your help to make it clear to the Republican leaders that we can't tolerate any attempt to kill this bill with legislative poison pills.

Together, let's tell them to give this legislation the straight up or down vote it deserves. Let's not allow anything to jeopardize the remarkable bipartisan consensus we have worked so hard to build. If you make your voice heard and Republican leaders permit every Member to vote on the strong bipartisan bill that stands today, this week can bring the most important health protections in years. Partisan posturing and delay will only make matters worse. To me it's the same choice patients face every day: active, preventive medicine now or expensive, last-minute interventions later. The American people are counting on the Congress, and especially the Republican leaders, to make the responsible choice.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 12:50 p.m. on October 1 in the Eiffel Tower Restaurant at the Paris Hotel in Las Vegas, NV, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on October 2. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 1 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.