

Remarks to the American Academy of Pediatrics October 12, 1999

Thank you very much, President Alpert—[laughter]—President-elect Cook. Seems like just yesterday I had that title for a while. [Laughter] To the executive board and the members of the American Academy of Pediatrics, thank you for welcoming me here. I am told that I'm the first President ever to address your convention, but I know that Hillary spoke to you in 1993, and I was thinking of, given the difference in our respective political prospects for the future, we should have reversed the order. [Laughter] But we just got back this morning from Camp David, where we celebrated our 24th anniversary, and she asked me to give you her regards, so I do so today.

I'm delighted to be here. I think pediatricians have a special place in the hearts of every person who has ever been privileged to either be treated by one or have his or her children treated by one. Just a few weeks ago, the man who was my doctor in Hot Springs, Arkansas, when I was a little boy, Dr. Joe Rosenzweig, came to see me with his wife and his grandchildren. I regularly stay in touch with Dr. Betty Lowe, who once headed this distinguished group and took care of Chelsea when she was a little girl. And so I feel a great personal bond to the work that you do.

And you should feel a great personal bond to the work that I do. I mean, Washington is the only place outside of a pediatrician's office where you can hear so much screaming and crying on a daily basis. [Laughter] And we all—all the politicians here have a lot in common with doctors. We all want to prescribe medicine, and no one wants to take it. [Laughter] But screaming and crying are part of the process of getting better, in medicine and in politics.

Let me echo some of the things that Dr. Alpert has said. I am profoundly grateful for the things that we have done together and the leadership that you have taken to make America better. The gains that our administration has made for children have come with your organization fighting by our side: passing the family and medical leave law, which now over 15 million people have taken advantage of; immunizing more than 90 percent of our children against major childhood diseases for the first time in

our history; passing the Brady bill and other measures to stem gun violence; making aggressive initiatives in the area of school safety, including zero tolerance for guns in schools; and the V-chip, the TV rating systems, and now similar systems for the Internet and for video games that we're working on; increasing child support enforcement and collection; dramatically expanding opportunities for adoption and for moving foster care kids into permanent adoptive homes—I thank you for all those things—the First Lady's prescription for reading program, and many, many other issues I could mention.

One I want to talk about more later today in my remarks is your role in creating the \$24 billion Children's Health Insurance Program, which is designed to address that problem of more than 10 million uninsured children.

Because of all these efforts, America is a better place for children; they're healthier and safer than they were 7 years ago. Infant mortality is down. Drug abuse is down. Teen pregnancy is down. Juvenile crime is down. America, itself, is stronger, more prosperous, more confident.

Today, we enjoy the longest peacetime expansion in our history, the lowest unemployment rate in 29 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years, the lowest poverty rate in 20 years, the lowest crime rate in 26 years, the first back-to-back budget surpluses in 42 years. Thank you for your contribution to all of these things.

But like your work with children, our work here is always about tomorrow. So the question we face is, what are we going to do with this phenomenal burst of good fortune that we have had by dint of effort and the grace of God? What are we going to do with it?

I have been arguing very strenuously now for some time that we have turned the country around and we are heading in the right direction. And now we have, as a people, the chance—literally, the chance of a lifetime, that a nation gets maybe once every 30, 40, 50 years, to deal with its long-term challenges, to seize its long-term opportunities, to forge the future that our children and our grandchildren will have. And that is what I earnestly hope we will do. I believe that we have to use this moment to meet the great challenges we know,

without a doubt, 21st century America will face. What are they?

First, the aging of America. The number of people over 65 will double by the year 2030. I hope I'll still be one of them. There will be two people working for every one person drawing Social Security.

Second, the health and education of the largest and most diverse group of children in our Nation's history.

Third, sustaining our economic prosperity over the long term and expanding its reach to people and places that have not been touched by this marvelous economic recovery.

Fourth, making America the safest big country in the world. Yes, the crime rate's at a 26-year-low, but no one believes it's low enough. The accidental death rates by guns of children is 9 times higher than that of the next 25 big industrial countries combined. So, yes, we have a 26-year-low in crime rates, but if we're the strongest economy in the world and we have a free society, why don't we say we're going to not stop until America is the safest big country in the entire world?

The fifth big challenge we have, which will bear directly on your efforts and those that succeed you in the years ahead is dealing with the environmental challenges we face, especially the challenge of climate change and global warming. I feel very, very strongly about that. One of the problems I have in dealing with it is that the applause is still scattered when I talk about it. [*Laughter*]

And sixth, building one America out of all the diverse threads of our citizenship and doing it in a world that we help to make ever more interdependent, peaceful, and prosperous.

The answers to those questions, whether we will do that, will be affected by the decisions we make here in Washington in the coming days and weeks. Ever since I gave my State of the Union Address, I have been working with Congress, or trying to, on a budget that will move us ahead in meeting all these challenges, that will leave this country in good shape for the new millennium, while maintaining our budget discipline that has been responsible for so much of the good things that have happened in this country in the last 6½ years.

To meet the challenge of the aging of America, I have proposed to extend the life of Social Security to 2050, to get it out beyond the life of the baby boom generation, to lift the earnings

limit, to give more help to older women who are disproportionately poor. I have also proposed to extend the life of Medicare to 2027—that's the longest existence of the Medicare Trust Fund in a long time—to add a voluntary prescription drug benefit, to allow uninsured Americans between the ages of 55 and 65 to buy into the Medicare program, and to provide a long-term care tax credit for families that are dealing with that challenge.

To meet the challenge of our children's education, I have proposed to continue with our program of putting 100,000 more teachers in the classroom, to lower class sizes in the early grades, to build or modernize 6,000 schools, to complete our efforts to hook all of our classrooms up to the Internet by the year 2000, and to raise standards and accountability.

I know Secretary Riley spoke here earlier, and perhaps he dealt with this at greater length, but we propose as we give out our Federal money and reauthorize that law every 5 years—this is the year we do it—to say every State must have high standards, every State must have accountability, accountability for teachers, for schools, for students. We shouldn't have social promotion, but we shouldn't blame kids for the failure of the system. So we proposed to triple the number of our children served by after-school and summer school programs. We proposed to give funds to schools that are failing, to turn them around or require them to be shut down. We proposed to expand the number of charter schools within our public school system so we'll get up to 3,000 by the end of next year.

These are very important things that I hope all Americans will support. Unless we can educate all our children—and increasingly they come from families whose first language is not English—we will not have the country we want in 30 years.

To meet the challenge of expanding and continuing our economic prosperity and bringing it to people who haven't felt it yet, I have asked the Congress to adopt a new markets initiative to give Americans with funds to invest the same incentives to invest in poor areas in America we now give them to invest in poor areas in Latin America or Asia or Africa.

I have proposed to increase the immensely successful community empowerment program that the Vice President has run for us over the

last 6½ years, to increase enterprise zones, empowerment communities, to increase our community development banks that make loans to people and places where capital is not available. And to keep this expansion going perhaps for another generation, through ups and downs in the global economy, I have asked the Congress to do this within a framework that would enable us to continue to pay down our national debt which we quadrupled in the 12 years before I took office, so that in 15 years, America could be debt-free for the first time since 1835 when Andrew Jackson was the President of the United States.

Let me say to all of you—this is a pretty progressive group, and you always want Government to invest in money. Why should progressives want America to be out of debt? I want to make this argument just very briefly. All of us who are over 40, at least, who went to college and took an economics class were told that every country needs a certain amount of debt, that it's healthy. And that was true when every country controlled its own economic destiny independent of every other. And it was true when people were borrowing money to invest in things like roads and bridges and parks and universities and long-term capital investments.

But over the last 20 years, governments, the United States being the worst offender, got to borrowing money just to pay the bills every week. And in a global economy where money can move across national borders instantaneously, if a government is debt-free, it means the people in that country, whether they're businesses trying to start or expand or families trying to pay for homes, cars, college loans and credit card bills, can all borrow money more cheaply. It means that if rich countries like America get out of debt and other countries get in trouble, like our Asian partners did over the last couple of years, they can get money to get help more quickly, rebound more quickly, and buy our products more rapidly.

So I feel very strongly that this is an important idea that I hope the American people will insist upon. And I hope that they will say to the Congress, "Don't let tax cuts or spending increases get in the way of getting us out of debt. If you want to spend the money, raise it. Do whatever's necessary, but get America out of debt over the next 15 years so that we can continue to grow for the next 50 years. It's very, very important to our future."

Now, here's what's going on here. I know you see all this food fight in Washington and you wonder, what is really going on? Here's what's going on. We passed a balanced budget bill in 1997. It had very tough spending caps. The spending caps were too tough. If you work in a teaching hospital, or at other hospitals that have been handicapped by the Medicare cut-backs, you know they're too tough. I'll say more about that in a minute. But what we said was, "We're going to balance this budget, and then we're going to keep it balanced by staying within these caps, which means we have to spend money according to a certain plan over the next 5 years; or, if we want to spend more money, we have to raise more money, either by cutting some other spending, closing some tax loopholes, raising some fees, or raising some tax." So that's why we're having this fight.

Then it turns out we have a bigger surplus than we thought we would, thanks to the prosperity and the hard work and the productivity of the American people. Then the Congress said, "We want to separate the Social Security fund from the other funds." That's something they never could have done before, because the only surplus we've had for the last 17 years was in Social Security. All the others—the deficit—every year, you saw those deficit numbers, it was always a lot bigger than that. It's just we were paying more in Social Security taxes than we were paying out in Social Security payments. And the difference, under the Government's unified accounting system, lowered the deficit.

So they said, "Let's separate them. Now that we have a non-Social Security surplus, let's separate them. And we really want to do this." So I said, "Fine by me; I'll do that," because under my plan, we would keep the Social Security taxes separate, then use the interest savings we get on paying down the debt and put it back into Social Security and run Social Security out to 2050, beyond the life of almost all but the most fortunate baby boomers, and get us through this big population problem we've got.

But when—the Congress looked at the books, and the majority party, the Republican Party—which normally says they're more conservative than we are on spending; it depends on what it is—found out that they couldn't spend all the money they wanted to spend with just the non-Social Security surplus. And they didn't want to raise the cigarette tax or raise fees on

people that have to help us clean up the toxic waste dumps, or close any of the corporate loopholes that I tried to close. And so that's why you see all these problems up here.

They're having a very difficult time, even with this big surplus, because they promised they wouldn't touch the Social Security part of the surplus, crafting a budget that both protects that surplus, invests in important things like education and health care, does what both parties wanted to do in transportation, meets their defense targets, and stays within the spending cap. So that's why you hear about all these gimmicks and why they wanted to start giving poor people their tax returns under the earned-income tax credit every month, instead of in a lump sum, like the rest of us get ours, and why they wanted to put a 13th month into the year and all that.

All that sort of handwringing—it must strike you as crazy, since you know we've got a surplus. The reason is, they committed—both parties did, back at the first of the year—to take the Social Security surplus and put it over here and only spend the non-Social Security surplus. It never existed before, the non-Social Security surplus. And it's going to get bigger and bigger. And this problem won't be here next year or the year after next, but right now it's real small; and what they want to spend is real big, and they don't want to raise the money to raise the difference. That's what's going on.

How many of you knew that before I explained it? [*Laughter*] About 10 hands. That's what's going on. If we were under the old accounting system, this would be like falling off a log. It would have no, sort of, larger economic impact in the short run, but it could be a very bad habit to get into over the long run.

So if we can stop now, we ought to stop now. But in order to stop now, with no gimmicks, we have to work together. If we don't, you wind up with the problems that the House of Representatives is confronting now. Just let me give you some examples.

Already in health care, they want to cut \$85 million from my request for childhood immunizations. That's 170,000 kids who won't get the vaccines they need to ward off major childhood diseases like measles and mumps. There's no money in this proposal, which was strongly pushed by the First Lady, to support graduate medical education at children's hospitals, where many of our pediatricians receive their training

and over half of the specialists in many areas receive their training.

It doesn't offer even a modest downpayment on my \$1 billion effort to support our Nation's health care safety net of public hospitals and clinics, which—you remember back in '94, when we got whacked around on health care, and everybody accused Hillary and me of wanting to have the Government take over the health care system, which was not true. They said that if our proposal passed, it wouldn't work. We said, if something didn't pass, the number of uninsured would go up. And sure enough, we were right, and you see the numbers, now.

Well, one of the things we can do in the short run is to dramatically beef up the public health care network. In my home State, for example, over 85 percent of all the immunizations are now done in the public health clinic, the county health clinic. Even upper-class people get their kids immunized in the health clinic. Solves all those liability problems and other things, and it's just something we did when I was there. But we need to do this. But it can't be done with this bind they're in.

And let me tell you this: If something is not done, they're going to go back and cut everything 3 percent across the board. If they exempt defense, they'll have to cut everything 6 percent across the board. And that is a huge amount of money.

So I'd like to respectfully suggest that Congress go back and look at the budget I sent them 7 months ago. It makes all the investments that they want to make and the investments that I believe in. It stays within the spending caps by providing offsets, including a 55-cents-a-pack excise tax on tobacco.

Now, I believe—I think it's good fiscal policy, and you know it's good health policy. You know more than 400,000 Americans die every year from smoking-related diseases; almost 90 percent of our people start smoking as teenagers, and one of the most effective ways to get the attention of teenagers is to raise the price.

So Congress now faces this, for them, Biblical choice: cut investments in areas like health care and education and the environment; spend from the Social Security Trust Fund at least one more year; or maintain our fiscal discipline and save children's lives by raising the price of smoking, closing some corporate loopholes, and doing a few other things to raise some money here.

I know what I believe the right choice is. I think most Americans would agree with me. I will work with Congress to put politics aside and do the right thing. Congress is clearly capable of working with me. We did it in 1996, with the welfare reform bill, which has cut welfare rolls almost in half and, after I vetoed two earlier attempts, provided billions of dollars in child care and kept the guarantee of Medicaid and food stamps for poor families and work. We did it in the 1997 Balanced Budget Act. And last week, the House of Representatives did it again when they finally passed a strong, enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights, thanks to you and others.

We are one step closer to seeing all Americans, including those in HMO's, have the right to the nearest emergency room care, the right to a specialist, the right to know you can't be forced to switch doctors in the middle of a treatment, the right to hold a health care plan accountable if it causes grave harm. But let me remind you, this is not the law of the land yet. This is a bill which has passed the House of Representatives. A much, much weaker bill passed the Senate.

So if you look at the vote in the House—thanks to the solid support of the Members of our party and some very, very brave people in the Republican Party who stuck their necks out, took a lot of heat from their leadership and from the health insurance companies, led by Congressman Norwood and others, we got a big victory in the House. It wasn't close. It was a big victory, won it by over 100 votes.

Now, the Senate should listen to that and see the will of the American people and give us a bill that is not loaded down with special-interest poison pills. That was their original strategy. We'll pass this bill really strong, but we'll have so much other stuff on it that the President will not be able to sign it, or if he does, he'll be sick for 4 days. *[Laughter]*

And so I say to you, thank you for your efforts. I want to ask you to do two things. Number one, write every one of those Members of Congress that voted right on that bill and recognize that, especially for the Republicans, it was a tough vote, and give them a pat on the back. And number two, don't stop until it comes to my desk in the right form. We are a long way from home, but we have a good chance to win.

Now, I want to say there are some other opportunities for victory. Congress can put

progress ahead of partisanship by making it possible for the millions of Americans with disabilities who want to work but are afraid to because they would lose their Medicare or Medicaid, to do that, to go to work and keep their Government health care coverage.

The Senate has already passed, by a 99 to zero vote, the work incentives improvement act, to ensure that Americans with disabilities can gain the dignity of a job without fear of losing their health insurance. A bipartisan majority in the House has co-sponsored the same measure. I will sign it.

There is a modest cost associated with this bill for the Government. I have offered them offsets for that. And so far, they don't want to take that, either. But it would be a pity, when virtually everybody in the Congress knows this is the right thing to do, to nickel-and-dime this to death. We're talking about thousands and thousands and thousands of people's lives.

I don't know if you know anybody like this. I've had the privilege of meeting a substantial number of people who are disabled, who got to go into the work force because somebody made provisions for health insurance or because they were in an income category where they could keep their Medicaid for a while. And I've met even more who would go in a New York minute if they knew they could keep their Medicaid or their Medicare. And I've met a lot of employers who would hire them but who know they cannot afford their health insurance. So I implore you, do what you can to help us pass this. This is a bill that everybody's for, and the process is still fooling around with it because of a modest cost that can easily be offset. That is very important.

The third thing I ask for your help on doesn't require any more legislation, and it's consistent with a commitment you have already made, and that is to get children enrolled in the Children's Health Insurance Program.

Since the CHIP program went into effect, it has provided health coverage to over a million children whose families can't afford health coverage and who make too much to be eligible for Medicaid. I am grateful to you for helping us to create it and for helping us put it into effect. But as your president said, somewhere between 10 and 11 million children in America still lack health insurance. That's way over 15 percent. The majority could be covered under either CHIP or Medicaid.

We've still got 2 or 3 million kids out there who are Medicaid-eligible who aren't covered. If we can get word out to their families and sign them up—we know that children who lack health insurance have higher rates of treatable conditions like asthma, ear infections, vision problems. We know when a child can't see a blackboard clearly or hear the teacher precisely or pay attention to anything other than his or her own pained breathing, the kids aren't going to be able to learn.

CHIP and Medicaid can change all that for millions of people. And when we passed the CHIP program, we thought it would insure 5 million people, if we could also get the Medicaid insurance rates up, and solve at least half the problem. Now, 2 years later, we've only insured a million. But it was only this year, to be fair, that all 50 States had their programs in place. So we're now at the takeoff point, and we will be judged—you and I and all of us—on how well we do from here on out.

This year—or last year, I established an inner-agency task force to come up with some innovative strategies to get the word out to parents about CHIP and Medicaid. Today I'm releasing their first annual report, which details a lot of promising outreach efforts. Just for example, the Department of Agriculture, which administers the school lunch program, has added information on CHIP and Medicaid to applications it sends to every school district in America. Millions of parents who fill out their school lunch forms now will have a chance to learn about these health programs.

Other promising innovations are also in the works. Thousands of AmeriCorps and Vista volunteers who deal directly with low-income families every day will soon have information in their training manuals on how to enroll children in CHIP and Medicaid. Tens of millions of elderly Americans who may have grandchildren eligible for CHIP and Medicaid will soon be able to read about these programs in the annual letters they receive from Social Security and Medicare.

But as the Vice President has been saying for months and months and months, if we're going to bring health care coverage to more children, we have to start with where the children are, in the schools. That's why today I am issuing an Executive order to the Secretaries of Education, Agriculture, and Health and Human Services, directing them to find the most innovative school-based strategies now

being pursued at the State and local level, to report back to me in 6 months on how we can replicate them in every community in the country.

I'm also sending a letter to States, clarifying that they can use the CHIP fund for school-based outreach efforts. And we're going to dedicate over \$9 million in new research grants to find out what outreach methods in schools or elsewhere work best. I believe these things will go a long way toward bringing health coverage to our children. But we need help from the churches, from the YMCA's and the YWCA's, from all the community organizations. And we need help from all the physicians and the public health units throughout our country.

It is simply inexcusable that we're sitting here, and have been, with the money for 2 years to provide health insurance to 5 million kids, and 80 percent of them are still uninsured. And it is conceivable that we could do better than 5 million children with the money appropriated if we had effective enough outreach.

And to those of you who see a lot of people whose parents' first language is not English, I know we have trouble there. But I would implore you, do what you can, when you go back home, with your local groups and your local medical societies and your local health clinics and your local schools, to get them to do this. There is no stigma associated with this. Most people will walk through a wall to get their kids decent health care coverage if they know it is available.

This is simply a question—the average person who's not covered by this doesn't know CHIP from block. [*Laughter*] Or Medicaid from Lego, or whatever. You know, we've got to deal with people that—you know, most normal people worry about their lives, not Government acronyms. And we're dealing with—a lot of these folks don't know anything about this. And you can help to make sure, in your community, that the schools and the community groups and the religious organizations and everybody, is doing their outreach on this. It is profoundly important.

Now, let me just say this last point. If every child eligible for CHIP and Medicaid were enrolled, there would still be millions who lacked coverage. You know it, and I do, too. You know that I and Hillary and the Vice President, we have always believed it is wrong for any American, much less any child, not to have affordable,

quality health care. I know that the American Academy of Pediatrics believes that. I will keep working to change that as long as I am President. I will keep looking for ways to end this unconscionable and growing gap of uninsured care.

Our hospitals will continue to have problems—and again, I would say, this has nothing to do—and you can help us with this—this has nothing to do with the Government taking over health care. The Government's not taking over health care in the CHIP program or Medicare or Medicaid.

If we'd let these people—next to the kids, the fastest growing group of uninsured people are 55 to 65 years old, who retire and can't get employment-based health insurance anymore. We ought to let them buy into Medicare. You know, I get into all these fights with the insurance companies, and I hate to fight with them all the time. But the truth is America has a system of financing health care that dictates high levels of uninsured, which dictates enormous burdens on the health care system of the country and burdens on everybody that buys insurance.

And they can deny otherwise as long as they want to, but all you have to do is look around at other examples, and you know it's simply not true. There is no other conceivable explanation. It is the system by which we finance our care which has got us in the fix we're in now.

And so we are trying to do this, and we are trying to do the bill for the disabled, and there

are lots of other things we can do. But if you look at everything we do that's going to make a difference, it's because we have changed the financing. And those are facts, and you can get them out there.

For the last 6½ years, I have had the great honor to serve as President of this country. I have about a year and 4 months left, maybe a little more. I've worked hard to turn this country around and then to keep the American people always thinking about tomorrow, about the challenges and the opportunities of the new century and the new millennium.

Well, now we have turned America around. And the great test is whether we are going to take this moment and shape our tomorrows. That's what you do every day, every time you take some preventive measure, every time you do something to help a child. There may be some screaming and crying, but you know they're all going to be better off tomorrow.

I just would like to see all of us here in Washington take the same attitude toward the future of all our children's tomorrows that you take toward each child's tomorrow. If we do, America's best days lie in the new millennium.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:37 a.m. at the Washington Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Dr. Joel J. Alpert, president, and Dr. Donald E. Cook, president-elect, American Academy of Pediatrics.

Memorandum on School-Based Health Insurance Outreach for Children

October 12, 1999

Memorandum for the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Secretary of Education, the Secretary of Agriculture

Subject: School-Based Health Insurance Outreach for Children

The lack of health insurance for millions of Americans remains one of the great challenges facing this Nation. To help address this issue, I worked with the bipartisan Congress to create the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), the single largest expansion of chil-

dren's health insurance in 30 years. The 1997 Balanced Budget Act allocated \$24 billion over 5 years to extend health care coverage to millions of uninsured children in working families. CHIP builds on the Medicaid program, which currently provides health coverage to most poor children, and together, these programs could cover most uninsured children.

Yet too few uninsured children eligible for CHIP or Medicaid participate. Barriers to enrollment include parents' lack of knowledge