

Ukraine; and Janet Norwood, mother of Sgt. Byron Norwood, USMC, who was killed in Iraq on November 13, 2004, and Iraqi citizen and political activist Safia Taleb al-Suhail,

both of whom were guests of the First Lady at the President's State of the Union Address on February 2.

Statement on Senate Passage of Class-Action Lawsuit Reform Legislation February 10, 2005

Our country depends on a fair legal system that protects people who have been harmed without encouraging junk lawsuits that undermine confidence in our courts while hurting our economy, costing jobs, and threatening small businesses. The class-action bill is a strong step forward in our

efforts to reform the litigation system and keep America the best place in the world to do business. I applaud the strong bipartisan majority in the Senate for passing this bill, and I call on the House to act promptly so that I can sign it into law.

Remarks at a Swearing-In Ceremony for Michael O. Leavitt as Secretary of Health and Human Services February 11, 2005

The President. Good morning. I'm proud to visit this fine Department and to congratulate my friend Michael Leavitt on becoming America's 20th Secretary of Health and Human Services. Congratulations.

Secretary Leavitt. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. I know this is a particularly special day for Mike—after all, it's his 54th birthday. [Laughter] And it's always a special day for him when his family members are here. He loves his family. He's got a great wife named Jackie; Westin is here representing his brothers and sisters; his dad's first name is Dixie—kind of sounds like he should be from Texas. [Laughter] Appreciate the other members of the Leavitt family who are here.

I want to thank Senator Bob Bennett from the great State of Utah for joining us, and Congressman Ralph Regula for being here. I appreciate you both coming. I want to thank other members of my Cabi-

net and administration who have joined us. I particularly want to thank the men and women of Health and Human Services for your hard work and remind you that you're serving during a critical time for America's health and well-being.

Thanks to Secretary Tommy Thompson's superb leadership, HHS has helped our medical community prepare for a new era in public health. You've made groundbreaking progress toward new cures for disability and disease. You've led a bold initiative to win the global fight against HIV/AIDS. The good work of this Department is making America healthier and more hopeful, and I thank each of you for your commitment and your compassion.

As Secretary Leavitt begins his service, HHS is embarking on a set of new challenges and historic opportunities. One of your most important responsibilities will be implementing the Medicare Modernization Act, which I signed some 14 months ago.

This law is a landmark achievement in American health care, and millions of older Americans are already benefiting from its reforms.

Because we acted, Medicare now covers preventive medicine, including screenings for heart disease and diabetes, and a “Welcome to Medicare” physical. Instead of waiting to get sick or facing costly treatments, seniors can now identify problems early and manage them before they grow worse. By reducing major surgeries and longtime hospital stays, preventive medicine will save money, and more importantly, it will extend the lives of our seniors.

Because we acted, Medicare will also cover prescription drugs. Under the old system, Medicare would pay \$28,000 for ulcer surgery but not the \$500 a year for the prescription drugs that eliminated the cause of most ulcers. That system didn’t make any sense. It made no sense for our seniors. It made no sense for American taxpayers.

Because prescription drugs are expensive, many seniors face the terrible choice between buying groceries and buying medicine. We left those days behind with the Medicare Modernization Act. Low-income seniors can get up to \$600 to buy medicine this year. Next January, every senior in Medicare will have the option of a prescription drug benefit. And so that all seniors can get the care they need, low-income seniors will get extra assistance and will pay a reduced premium or no premiums at all on prescription drugs.

Because we acted, seniors in Medicare will have more control over their health care. Seniors will be able to choose a health plan that meets their needs, and health plans will compete for their business, which will lower costs throughout the program. The system probably sounds familiar to some here—[laughter]—after all, it’s what we offer Federal employees. If choosing your health plan is good enough for the Federal employees, it’s good enough for America’s seniors as well.

Putting these reforms into action will be challenging. But with the leadership of Secretary Leavitt and Administrator McClellan, I know you’re up to the task. We all know the alternative to reform, a Medicare system that offers outdated benefits and imposes needless costs. For decades, we promised America’s seniors that we can do better, and we finally did. Now we must keep our word. I signed Medicare reform proudly, and any attempt to limit the choices of our seniors and to take away their prescription drug coverage under Medicare will meet my veto.

Secretary Leavitt will also lead important reforms in the Medicaid program. He will work closely with the Governors to make Medicaid more fair and more flexible. And together, we will take new steps to ensure that Medicaid fully serves our most vulnerable citizens, especially our children. Both Medicare and the State Children’s Health Insurance Program—it’s what’s called SCHIP—offer preventive care to low-income families at little or no cost. Yet millions of eligible American children are not signed up. So I proposed a billion dollar effort called “Cover the Kids” to help States and community groups and faith-based charities enroll more children in Medicaid and SCHIP. We must not allow a lack of attention or a lack of information to stand between these children and the health care they need.

To reinforce America’s health safety net, we are also increasing support for community health centers. These compassionate facilities meet a critical need by providing primary care to the poor and the uninsured. They also take the pressure off of our emergency rooms and our hospitals. When I took office, I pledged to open or expand 1,200 community health centers by 2006. Thanks to the hard work of this Department, we’ve opened or expanded 619 centers so far, and we’re on track to meet our objective by the end of next year. Now Secretary Leavitt and I are working toward a new goal: We will ensure that every poor

county in America has a community health center.

As we deliver quality health care to those in need, we must also help more adults find private health insurance at their jobs. More than half of all the uninsured Americans are small-business employees and their families. To help these people get good coverage, I have asked Congress to allow small businesses to pool together to buy insurance at the same discounts that big companies get. I've proposed tax credits for small businesses and low-income workers that would allow more people to open tax-free health savings accounts. To reduce health care costs and prevent medical errors, we're working to expand the use of information technology in health care. And to make health care more affordable for every doctor, patient, and entrepreneur, Congress needs to pass medical liability reform this year.

At HHS you bring the hope of better health to millions of your fellow citizens, and you do much more. HHS promotes adoption and abstinence and preschool education and leads our efforts to stop drug abuse and domestic violence. Secretary Thompson has called this "America's Department of Compassion," and I know Secretary Leavitt sees it the same way.

Many of your greatest allies in the armies of compassion are found in faith-based and community groups. With Secretary Leavitt's leadership, we'll continue to support the hopeful works of these caring citizens. We'll also work with Congress to reauthorize welfare reforms that require work and strengthen marriage and promote responsible fatherhood. We'll continue the life-saving work of combating HIV/AIDS at home and abroad.

As you fulfill all these duties, HHS is also meeting the needs of a nation at war. Researchers at NIH and the Centers for Disease Control are on the frontlines of defending America against the threat of bioterror. FDA inspectors are expanding efforts to secure the food supply and ensure the safety of medicine. We've completed the doubling of funding for medical research at NIH. Yet spending is not our only measure of success. When we commit taxpayer dollars, we will insist on results in return. And in every scientific pursuit, we will uphold the values of freedom, equality, and human dignity. We must never sanction the creation of life only to destroy it.

With this new responsibility, HHS Secretary Leavitt continues a distinguished career of public service. I've known him as a Governor. We're members of the ex-Governor's club. [*Laughter*] I've known him as the Administrator of the EPA. I've witnessed his integrity and creativity and compassion. He has a proven ability to move beyond the partisan debate, to work with leaders at all levels of government, and to improve the lives of the people he serves. That is what I've asked Mike to do as America's Secretary of Health and Human Services. With your help, I know he will succeed.

Congratulations.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 a.m. in the Great Hall at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary Leavitt.

Remarks at the Performance of “Lincoln Seen and Heard”
February 11, 2005

Thank you for that wonderful performance. Laura and I welcome you all to the White House.

I appreciate the members of my Cabinet who are here and former members of the Cabinet who are here. I thank Senator Bill Frist for joining us as well as Congressman Mel Watt. Thank you both for coming.

I appreciate Michael Steele, the Lieutenant Governor of the great State of Maryland, for joining us. I want to thank Bruce Cole, the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. I appreciate Brian Lamb joining us today, the president and CEO of C-SPAN.

I thank the U.S. Lincoln Bicentennial Commission members and the Advisory Committee for joining us today. I appreciate all the Lincoln scholars and authors who are here.

I particularly appreciate Sam Waterston and Lynn and Graham for joining us as well as Harold Holzer and Edith and Meg. Thank you all for coming.

Sam and Harold have had a good many reviews since they first took “Lincoln Seen and Heard” on the road. Perhaps the most enthusiastic review I heard came from two unimpeachable sources, Mother and Dad—[laughter]—who told how much they enjoyed the performance when they saw it in Houston. Tonight we’ve had the special honor of listening to Lincoln’s words being read in the very house where so many of them were written.

Harold Holzer has written, coauthored, or edited 23 books on Lincoln and the Civil War. He Cochairs the U.S. Lincoln Bicentennial Commission and in his spare time—[laughter]—works for one of Laura’s favorite museums, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. He’s an avid New York Yankee fan who had a miserable year last year. [Laughter] He has won many awards

for his work, and his latest book is, “Lincoln at Cooper Union.”

This evening I can let you all in on a secret. Tomorrow it will be announced that Allen Guelzo, who is with us tonight, and Harold Holzer are this year’s first and second place winners of the prestigious Lincoln Prize.

Congratulations.

Those of you who know Sam Waterston as “Jack McCoy” should know that America’s most famous assistant district attorney has portrayed Abraham Lincoln on stage, on television, and so I’m told, even in ballet. [Laughter] He didn’t dance. [Laughter] But he did narrate a special version of Aaron Copland’s “Lincoln Portrait” while ballet dancers performed around him. [Laughter] Sam has said, “If I have to be typecast, I’d like to be typecast as Abraham Lincoln.” I like a guy who aims high. [Laughter]

In his readings tonight, Sam noted that it was on this very day back in 1861 that Abraham Lincoln said goodbye to his home in Springfield, Illinois, never to return. Over the next 4 years, from this house, Lincoln would endure a bitter civil war that included terrible defeats as well as ringing victories; he’d sign the Emancipation Proclamation right upstairs; and he would live to see his hopes for peace and unity rewarded, before his life was taken at Ford’s Theatre on Good Friday, 1865.

The Civil War was decided on the battlefield; the larger fight for America’s soul was waged with Lincoln’s words. In his own day, Lincoln set himself squarely against a culture that held that some human beings were not intended by their Maker for freedom. And as President, he acted in the conviction that holding the Union together was the only way to hold America true to the founding promise of freedom and equality for all. And that is why, in my