

Week Ending Friday, October 6, 1995

The President's Radio Address

September 30, 1995

Good morning. I want to talk to you about the budget debate now unfolding in Washington and about how the wrong decisions can threaten the independence and the dignity of elderly Americans.

I strongly believe we must balance the budget to lift the burden of debt off our children and to strengthen our economy. But we must balance the budget in a way that is consistent with our values and our vision for America's future, giving our people the chance to make the most of their own lives, strengthening our families, protecting our children, honoring our parents, growing the middle class and shrinking the under class, preserving America as the world's strongest nation. Those are the values that must anchor our budget decisions.

For our parents and grandparents who sacrificed so much, no value is more important than independence. All Americans deserve to live out their lives in dignity, and nobody wants to be a burden to their children. So we should do everything in our power to offer elderly Americans the chance to live with respect and with independence, and the Government shouldn't make it worse.

But the Republicans in Congress have proposed a budget that will undermine the dignity and independence of our senior citizens. Here's how: Medicaid's the way our country helps families pay for nursing homes, home care, or other long-term care for elderly or disabled persons. Some people would have you think that Medicaid just helps poor children. Well, it does do that, and that is very important. Almost one in four American children are poor enough to need help from Medicaid.

But the truth is, two-thirds of Medicare—Medicaid—goes to help to pay for nursing homes and other care for senior citizens and the disabled. Nearly 7 of every 10 nursing

home residents gets some help from Medicaid. And no wonder, for nursing homes cost an average of \$38,000 a year, and not many of our families can afford that.

Now this Republican budget would break this promise to our families. It ends the national commitment that any senior citizen, regardless of how much money they have or don't have, will have access to quality doctors and good facilities.

This budget actually provides for \$180 billion in cuts. Now, we do need to slow the rate of medical inflation in the Medicaid program. But these cuts are way, way too much. They are far, far more than the health care system can handle. Over the next few years, this plan and its cuts would deny nursing home care to 300,000 seniors who are eligible for it today. And it will also cut off home care services to 300,000 more. That's bad enough. But listen to what's buried in the fine print; it's even worse.

Under the plan put forward by the House of Representatives, because they know there's not enough money in it to maintain the health care system, any State government can force people whose husbands or wives have to go into nursing homes to give up their car, their furniture, even their home before their spouse can qualify for any medical support. Everything they've worked for their whole lives, gone.

Think about it. Who wants a Medicaid police with vast power to seize your assets and put you out of your home and make sure you have nothing left to pass on to your children? I don't think it should be a precondition that if a husband has to go into a nursing home, his wife has to go into the poorhouse.

Once, this kind of abuse was the norm. In the mid-1980's, one elderly couple in Texas was forced to live in nursing homes 700 miles apart. Another woman in New York had to actually sue her husband for support while he lay helpless in a nursing home.

The Government had tried to force her onto food stamps, but she refused. The Government was literally out of control. Then, a bipartisan law signed by President Reagan protected spouses.

The Republican budget plan will also devastate the quality of medical care for seniors who need it. Little more than a decade ago, if you went to a nursing home, what could you see? Some patients tied to their beds, others in a drug-induced stupor, under-trained nurses and fumbling technicians. All told, back then 40 percent of nursing home residents were either overrestrained or over-medicated.

Reforms signed by President Reagan changed all that. But now, the Republican plan would eliminate all national standards for nursing home care. It would turn back the clock to the days when children worried about whether their parents in nursing homes had to actually be afraid of danger and degradation.

Congress should strip these outrageous provisions from the budget bill. They're inconsistent with our core values. They're not what America is all about, and they are certainly not necessary to balance the budget. Congress is trying to cut Medicaid too much, and Congress is also trying to cut Medicare too much. It is not necessary to balance the budget or to save the Medicare Trust Fund.

Now, the truth is that we do need—we do need to slow the rate of inflation in Medicare and to extend the life of the Medicaid Trust Fund. But the congressional cuts of over \$270 billion are less than half—and less than half of those cuts are going to the Trust Fund.

Late yesterday, the House Republicans finally told us what these big numbers mean. Their massive Medicare cuts, by far the biggest in history, now are clear in terms of their impact on individual senior citizens.

Remember now: More than half their cuts don't go to secure Medicare; they're using the money for other purposes. How are they going to raise the money? They wanted double premiums, double deductibles, lower quality, give less choice, and have no Medicare at all for Americans under 67.

I have proposed a balanced budget plan that reflects our fundamental values. It elimi-

nates the deficit without destroying education or undermining our environment or violating our commitments to working families, poor children, or seniors. It gives the American people a tax cut targeted to education and childrearing, and it secures Medicare and its Trust Fund, and it restrains inflation on Medicaid without imposing new costs on seniors, threatening their independence or destroying their dignity.

Let's be clear, of course—of course, we need to balance the budget. But we need to do it in a way that strengthens our families, enhances opportunity for Americans, and honors our obligations to our parents.

I am determined to see that people of good faith work together to find common ground in meeting this challenge.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 6 p.m. on September 29 in Room 453 of the Old Executive Office Building for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on September 30.

Remarks in Observance of National Domestic Violence Awareness Month *October 2, 1995*

Thank you very much, Sergeant Wynn, for your remarks and for dedicating your life to this important work. Thank you, Bonnie Campbell, for doing a great job as head of the Violence Against Women Program in the Justice Department. Thank you, Attorney General Reno, for believing in this and for driving it. Thank you, Secretary Shalala, for reminding us this is a human tragedy.

Thank you, Jerry Rossi. You stood up here and you tried to convince us that you were really worried about the bottom line, and everybody who saw you knew that what you were really worried about was all those people out there, right and wrong. And every American who can see you would be proud of you and would wish that every person in business in this country would have those values and that kind of passion. Thank you so much.

And thank you, Tana Sherman, for being brave enough to tell us your story. Before we came over here, Tana and the five people who are on the back row with Bonnie Camp-