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Just today we had the new leader of the Republic of Srpska, the new premier, in Washington. And here's a man leading the Serbs saying, ''We have to find a way to reconcile the different ethnic groups. We have to come to grips with the war crimes. We have to do all these things.'' Unheard of—no one could have imagined it just a year ago. We are on the right side of history, and we have to keep fighting for these things.

And the last point I want to make is this: I have tried to change the Democratic Party, to modernize it. I have tried to create what you might call a new Democratic Party. And I have caused a little bit of controversy along the way in doing that. But I have to tell you that the longer I go on in this job and the more time I spend reading American history, as well as trying to think about the future, the more I realize that there are two or three basic functions that a political party has to fulfill at every point in our history.

If you go back through the whole of American history, I believe you will conclude, as I have, that there are three great challenges that confront the American people at every moment of real change. And the party which serves the American people best is the party which embraces those challenges and pushes them hardest.

Now, if you go back to the beginning, you look at that, you look at the Civil War, you look at the industrial revolution, you look at all the crises of the 20th century, you will see that at every point in time we have been asked for ourselves—and increasingly in the 20th century for people around the world—to do three things: to widen the circle of opportunity, to deepen the meaning of freedom, and to strengthen the Union.

The Republican Party, in fairness, was born out of a desire to save the Union. And Abraham Lincoln gave his life to save the Union and to make the Constitution mean something when it came to freedom for black Americans. And they were the party of the Union and of widening the circle of opportunity and of deepening the meaning of freedom all the way from Abraham Lincoln through Theodore Roosevelt. And our party had a pretty weak record in that period, I'm ashamed to say, and not so good in the years just before.

But if you look at the beginning and if you look at our record from Woodrow Wilson forward, I think you would have to conclude, we weren't always right on everything, but on balance our party has the stronger record when it comes to widening the circle of opportunity, deepening the meaning of freedom, and standing up for a stronger Union.

And that, in a fundamental way, is what my administration has been all about—looking toward the 21st century. I'm proud to be a Democrat. I'm proud of your support. And I thank you for your help tonight.

God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:57 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to dinner hosts David and Sylvia Steiner; Thomas P. Giblin, chairman, New Jersey State Democratic Committee; Mayor James E. McGreevey of Woodbridge, NJ; Steve Grossman, national chair, and Lenn Barrack, national finance chair, Democratic National Committee; and Prime Minister Milorad Dodik, Republic of Srpska, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

## Remarks at the Holiday Senior Park Center in Wheaton, Maryland

*February 20, 1998*

Thank you very much, Mr. Vice President. I want to thank all of you for being here today and particularly those of you who have been active in health care. I thank Secretary Shalala and Deputy Secretary Higgins and Secretary Herman, who worked very hard on this; and Hershel Gober, the Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs; and Janice Lachance and Nancy-Ann Min DeParle, all the people who are here from the administration. General Hill, thank you for being here.

I'd like to thank County Council President Leggett and all the local officials who are here. A special word of thanks to Chris Jennings in the White House. You know, the staff people who work on these things never get enough credit. This is great—the Vice President and I get up here, and we give these speeches, and you think how wise we are. [*Laughter*] And the truth is, there is always somebody making us look smarter than we are. [*Laughter*] And I'm very grateful to all the people who worked on this, who passionately care about you and people like you

all over this country who never get the acknowledgements they deserve.

I thank Beth Layton and all the people here at Holiday Park for the work you're doing. I've been feeling very sentimental here. Twenty-one years ago, I'm almost sure it was 21 years ago this month, when I was a very young public official in my very first office of service, I had the State's first conference on senior citizens affairs. I never will forget it. I had it in the same place where I had my high school prom. [*Laughter*] And now I have my AARP card. [*Laughter*] I'm amazed at how farsighted I was back then to be concerned about this.

I thank Marty Wish for his remarkable statement and for reminding us why we're working so hard. The first person I heard tell that story about ''As Good As It Gets'' was the Vice President. And every time anybody sees that movie, they always cheer. I understand it's going to be disqualified for an Academy Award because it's too close to real life. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank Representative Morella and Representative Stark for being here and for their efforts to make health care quality a bipartisan American issue, not a partisan political issue. And I thank you both for being here. Thank you very much.

We were going to have one other person here today, a woman named Dian Bower from California, whose son has a very serious illness that's being treated in a veterans military—excuse me, a military managed care program. And she's very well satisfied with it but passionately committed to the concept of a Patient's Bill of Rights. But because of the very difficult weather our fellow Americans in California have been experiencing—I'm sure you've been keeping up with it—she was unable to come. But I would like to thank her for efforts to be here.

I'm pleased to accept this report from the Vice President. I just have to say one word about him. I asked the Vice President to undertake a very—what appeared to be a completely thankless job. When we took office, we had a deficit of $290 billion, and I said, ''Look, we have to find a way to reduced the Federal payroll by a minimum of $100,000, and we have to do it without throwing anybody in the streets, and we have to do it without losing the confidence of Federal employees or breaking their morale. They have to feel good about this.'' In other words, I was asking him to take two and two and make three or five or something other than four. And he worked with the Federal employees groups. Five years later, with the strong support and work and partnership of the Federal employees organization, the Federal payroll is $300,00 smaller than it was the day I took office. And—and—we have had good early retirement programs for the Federal employee. We have worked with them in a constructive way. The Government is working better, and it has freed up money to invest in putting another 100,000 police on the street, in improving education and advancing the environment and doing all these things.

But as part of our philosophy of government, we want a Government that is both smaller and more active, that gives people the tools to make the most of their own lives and acts as a catalyst for new ideas. And that's what we're doing here today. And this is perhaps the best example of all the wonderful work the Vice President has done in 5 years of reinventing Government, of how you can have a Government that's smaller and still does more to meet the real needs of the American people. So I want to thank him for that.

What this report does is point out that we are quite close to making sure that our Federal health plans actually comply with the Patient's Bill of Rights that I have proposed. And today after I speak I am going to sign a directive over here on this desk which directs all our Federal agencies to finish the job by taking the necessary steps outlined in the Vice President's report to me.

Now, I want you to understand clearly what this will mean—just this action will mean to the lives of the American people. With the authority of the Federal Government, we will ensure that a third of all Americans—a third of all Americans—are protected by a Patient's Bill of Rights. Now, that's every person on Medicare, every person on Medicaid, including children and people with disabilities, all of our Federal employees and their families that are covered, all of our military personnel, and members

of the biggest health care system in America, all of our veterans and all their families.

A third of the American people will have now a Patient's Bill of Rights that says this: You have the right to know all your medical options, not just the cheapest; you have a right to choose a specialist for the care you need; you have the right to emergency room care wherever and whenever you need it; you have the right to keep your medical records confidential—very important; you have the right to bring a formal grievance or appeal of a health care decision with which you disagree.

And we are proving we can make these rights real now for nearly 90 million Americans. That's how many people we're talking about. And we can do this without increasing the deficit, without burdening the system or consumers. With this step we are setting a standard for the Nation.

But we must not stop here. And that's why I am so glad to see Congresswoman Morella and Congressman Stark here, because now the Congress must pass national legislation to protect all Americans with a Patient's Bill of Rights. We are doing all we can do here with the stroke of the President's pen, but it should be an example that the rest of America should follow.

I know there will be voices of opposition in the Congress and in the health care industry. But every American deserves the protection of a Patient's Bill of Rights. Those of you who are retired Federal employees who are still under a plan, you will be covered today. I bet you feel just as strongly as you did before I came here to sign this that everybody whose not in a plan you're in deserves the same protection. And we need to be clear and unambiguous about that.

I look forward to working together with Members of Congress in both parties who have shown the determination to do something about this. This Patient's Bill of Rights is in keeping with our profoundest obligations to our parents, to our children, to the neediest, to the most vulnerable among us, in keeping with our oldest ideals enshrined in the Bill of Rights, and it is an essential part of our effort and our obligation to strengthen our Nation for the 21st century.

We want the benefits of managed care. We all like it when health care inflation is not going up at 3 and 4 and 5 times the rate of inflation. It gives all of you who are on fixed incomes more disposable income for other things that are terribly important to you. But we must never, ever, ever sacrifice the fundamental quality of care and the security that gives people, knowing that they live in a country that not only has the best health care system in the world in theory, it's the best in the world, in fact, in their lives.

Now, Vice President talked about some of the things we have been doing in the last several years. A couple of years ago, Congress passed a law I strongly supported that says you can't lose your health insurance if you change jobs because someone in your family has been sick. The balanced budget amendment that I signed into law last year extends the Medicare Trust Fund until 2010. And we now have a Medicare commission meeting and working on how to preserve and protect Medicare well into the 21st century.

The balanced budget law also contains an unprecedented $24 billion over the next 5 years to add up to 5 million more children to the ranks of the insured. And we're working with the States to do that. And Secretary Shalala is doing a great job in working with the States to make sure that we pick up more of these kids that don't have any health insurance. And just last week, I directed Federal agencies with programs with children to do more to enroll children as quickly as possible.

This Patient's Bill of Rights is the next important step to make sure every American family has the quality health care all families need to thrive. It's especially important as our health care system continues to change.

Now, 35 years ago, President Kennedy proposed a consumer bill of rights to protect Americans from unsafe products. He said, "We share an obligation to protect the common interests in every decision we make." Those rights are still protecting us today, those consumer rights, every time we rent a car or use a credit card or buy a toy for a child. The rights we are helping here to establish with the Patient's Bill of Rights will protect our children and our grandchildren 35 years from now and beyond.

This is a good day for America, and I am proud to sign the executive memorandum to ensure the patient's bill of rights to nearly 90 million of our fellow citizens.

Thank you very much.

NOTE. The President spoke at 11 a.m. in the gymnasium. In his remarks, he referred to Isiah Leggett, president, Montgomery County Council; Elizabeth Layton, vice chair, Holiday Park Senior Center Advisory Council; and Martin Wish, former chair, Montgomery County Commission on Aging.

## Memorandum on Federal Agency Compliance With the Patient Bill of Rights

*February 20, 1998*

*Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Director of the Office of Personnel Management*

*Subject:* Federal Agency Compliance with the Patient Bill of Rights

Last November, I directed you to review the health care programs you administer and/or oversee and report to me on the level and adequacy of the patient protections they provide. Specifically, I asked you to advise me on the extent to which those programs are in compliance with the Health Care Consumer Bill of Rights (the "Patient Bill of Rights") recommended by the Advisory Commission on Consumer Protection and Quality in the Health Care Industry ("the Quality Commission").

Yesterday, you formally conveyed your reports to me through Vice President Gore. He advises me that each of your agencies is well on its way toward full compliance with the patient protections recommended by the Quality Commission. By doing so, your agencies will serve as strong models for health plans in the private sector.

Under your leadership, we are showing that it is possible and desirable to ensure that patients have the tools they need to navigate through an increasingly complex health care delivery system. We are showing that common sense solutions for all too common problems in our health systems are the right prescription not only for beneficiaries of Federally administered programs, but for our private sector colleagues as well. Your efforts illustrate that patient protections can be accomplished without excessive costs or regulations.

While the news is encouraging, your reports also indicate that we have not completed the job. Although Federal health programs are taking a leading role in providing protections to patients, your report indicates we have the regulatory and administrative authority to come into substantial compliance with the Patient Bill of Rights, and I believe that this should be one of my Administration's highest priorities.

Therefore, I hereby direct you to take the following actions consistent with the missions of your agencies to come into compliance with the Patient Bill of Rights.

The Secretary of Health and Human Services shall:

- take all appropriate administrative actions to ensure that the Medicare and Medicaid programs come into substantial compliance with the Patient Bill of Rights, including access to specialists and improved participation in treatment decisions, by no later than December 1999; and
- notify all State Medicaid directors that emergency room care protections should be consistent with the Patient Bill of Rights.

The Director of the Office of Personnel Management shall:

- ensure that all 350 Federal Employees Health Benefits Plan (FEHBP) participating carriers come into contractual compliance with the Patient Bill of Rights, particularly with regard to access to specialists, continuity of care, and access to emergency room services by no later than December 31, 1999; and
- with respect to participating carriers, propose regulations to prohibit, within 90 days, practices that restrict physician-patient communications about medically necessary treatment options.