

Week Ending Friday, February 27, 1998

**Letter to Members of the Senate on
Campaign Finance Reform
Legislation**

February 20, 1998

Dear _____:

Next week, the Senate is scheduled to debate campaign finance legislation. You will have an important opportunity to cast a vote for real reform of our electoral process. Today, I am writing to urge you to support legislation that will make our democracy work better for all Americans.

The campaign finance laws were last rewritten twenty-three years ago. Those laws have served us well, but they have been overwhelmed by a flood of money and the rising cost of campaigns. Politicians have talked about reform for years. Now it is time to act. The McCain-Feingold bill puts an end to the soft money system, expands disclosure requirements, increases penalties for election law violations, and strengthens the rules for so-called independent campaign expenditures. Make no mistake: a vote against McCain-Feingold is a vote for soft money, for unlimited backdoor campaign expenditures, for the status quo.

For these reasons, I have supported and will continue to support the McCain-Feingold Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act and I urge the Senate to pass it. I also urge the Senate to reject any attempts to attach an amendment that would make this bill unpalatable to one party or another. Such an attempt is nothing less than an effort to defeat campaign finance reform.

A critical mass has been reached for campaign finance reform. Citizen groups, spurred by business executives and civic leaders, have gathered one million signatures on a petition to Congress calling for reform. Presidents Ford, Carter, and Bush have been joined by dozens of former lawmakers in calling for reform.

Today the responsibility rests in the hands of the Senate. If you want to strengthen our democracy, vote for the McCain-Feingold Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act.

Sincerely,

Bill Clinton

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to all Members of the Senate. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 21.

The President's Radio Address

February 21, 1998

Good morning. February is Black History Month, the time when we celebrate the rich heritage of the African-American community and rededicate ourselves to the value of equal opportunity for all Americans that is at the heart of the American ideal. Today I want to talk about an important step we're taking to make sure all Americans, no matter what their background, have a better opportunity to live healthier lives.

In the last 6 years, we've worked hard to make quality health care more accessible and affordable and to place more emphasis on prevention. And this approach is working. Since 1993, our Nation's health has greatly improved. Infant mortality has reached an all-time low, childhood immunization levels are at an all-time high, and AIDS death rates are falling for the first time in the history of the epidemic. Americans are living longer and are in better health than ever before.

This is good news we should all celebrate. But we must not be blind to the alarming fact that too many Americans do not share in the fruits of our progress, and nowhere are the divisions of race and ethnicity more sharply drawn than in the health of our people.

Consider: Infant mortality rates are twice as high for African-Americans as for white Americans; African-American men suffer from heart disease at nearly twice the rate

of whites; African-Americans are more likely to die from breast cancer and prostate cancer. Overall, cancer fatalities are disproportionately high among both Latinos and blacks. Vietnamese women are 5 times as likely to have cervical cancer; Chinese-Americans, 4 to 5 times as likely to have liver cancer. Hepatitis B is much more prominent among Asian-Americans than the rest of the populations. Native Americans suffer higher rates of infant mortality and heart disease. And for diabetes, Hispanic rates are twice the national average, and Native American rates, 3 times the national average.

Research shows that, overall, all these groups are less likely to be immunized against disease, less likely to be routinely tested for cancer, less likely to get regular check-ups. We do not know all the reasons for these disturbing gaps. Perhaps inadequate education, disproportionate poverty, discrimination in the delivery of health services, cultural differences are all contributing factors. But we do know this: No matter what the reason, racial and ethnic disparities in health are unacceptable in a country that values equality and equal opportunity for all. And that is why we must act now with a comprehensive initiative that focuses on health care and prevention for racial and ethnic minorities.

This is our national goal: By the year 2010, we must eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in infant mortality, diabetes, cancer screening and management, heart disease, AIDS, and immunization.

My balanced budget plan devotes an unprecedented \$400 million to spur promising prevention and outreach programs to help us meet this challenge. I'm asking our top public health officials, led by Secretary Donna Shalala, to convene a task force to find new ways of targeting existing Federal programs to reduce racial and ethnic disparities. Our new Surgeon General, Dr. David Satcher, will launch a comprehensive campaign to educate the public and work with community leaders and health professionals to reach more Americans.

These steps, along with our drive to give 5 million more children, many of them minorities, health insurance, and our huge increase in overall medical research, will bring

us closer to our goal. But to truly eliminate these disparities and ensure better health for all Americans, all Americans must do their part.

I'm pleased to announce that Grant-Makers in Health, a major coalition of over 136 philanthropic foundations across the country, is joining our efforts. Together, we'll host a national conference this spring to help solve this national problem, community by community.

Above all, Americans must take more responsibility for our own health and the health of our children, for good health is the greatest gift God can bestow, and it is each of our duty to protect it. America has the best health care system in the world, but we can't take full pride in that system until we know that every American has the best health care in the world. With these steps, I'm confident that we can meet the challenge and go forward as one America into the 21st century, stronger and healthier than ever before.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.

Statement on the Supreme Court Decision Not To Review New Jersey's "Megan's Law"

February 21, 1998

This morning the Supreme Court declined to review a challenge to the community notification provision of New Jersey's "Megan's Law," thus leaving intact a crucial tool to protect children from known sexual predators. Because of the importance of this law to families and communities, my administration has defended its constitutionality, enacted a similar Federal Megan's Law, and worked with States to establish a national sex offender registry. We will continue to do everything we can to make sure that community notification and sex offender registration laws are enforced and upheld throughout the country.