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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 checkups. 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.

Remarks at the National Governors' Association Dinner

February 22, 1998

Good evening. Governor and Mrs. Voinovich, Governor and Mrs. Carper, ladies and gentlemen, welcome again to the White House. Hillary and I always look forward to this night every year. It brings back a lot of happy memories. And I'm especially glad to have you here this year.

I want to begin by thanking you, all of you, for the contributions that you have made to the success that the United States is now enjoying. The American people have the lowest unemployment rate in 24 years, the lowest crime rate in 24 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 27 years, the lowest inflation rate in 30 years. And a lot of that credit goes to you and the people with whom you work and the commitments that you have made to forge the right kind of government for this new era in which we live. A lot of you work every day at building a government that is smaller but more effective, that works as a catalyst and a partner, does actually give our people the tools they need to make the most of this remarkable time in which we're living.

I also want to say I looked at the document you prepared for your meeting; I read it this afternoon while I was thinking about a few other things, but I enjoyed it very much. And I think it shows that you agree with me that these good times, impose upon us a special obligation to make the most of them, to strengthen our country for the century ahead.

You know, this country was founded by people who came here seeking relief from the arbitrary exercise of absolute power. They thought they had a better idea. They thought that when free people were able to pursue happiness and work to form a more perfect Union, they could build a truly remarkable society. And more than 200 years later, I think we'd all have to admit that they were right.

I have said many times, but I would like to say again, that it seems to me that at every important time in our country's history we have been faithful to the basic ideas of our Founders, no matter what the challenge was. We have always improved America when we deepen the meaning of our freedom, widen the circle of opportunity, and strengthen the bonds of our Union.

For your contributions to that, I am profoundly grateful. I hope you enjoy this evening. I look forward to tomorrow. And I'd like to ask everyone here to join me in a toast to the Governors of the 50 States and all the territories—[*laughter*]—and everybody else who is here.

[*At this point, a toast was offered.*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:30 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to chairman of the National Governors' Association Gov. George V. Voinovich of Ohio and his wife, Janet; and vice chairman Gov. Tom Carper of Delaware and his wife, Martha.

Remarks at the National Governors' Association Meeting

February 23, 1998

Good morning. Governor Voinovich, Governor Carper, Mr. Scheppach, and to the members of the administration that are here, and all the Governors, let me welcome you back to the White House. Before I begin, let me say what I know is on all of our minds—our thoughts and prayers are with the people in central Florida where tornadoes have now killed 28 people. Governor Chiles is going to visit with our FEMA Director, James Lee Witt, the area today, and they will have our concerns with them.

I'd also like to say I'm sorry we're starting a little late, but I've been working on the situation in Iraq. The Vice President and I met with National Security Adviser Berger this morning. Last night, just before our dinner, I spoke with the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, and I have called Prime Minister Blair this morning; we had a long talk about the situation. I still have to talk to President Yeltsin and President Chirac, and I may have to leave the meeting and then come back. But that's all I have to say now, but I'm sorry we're starting a little late.

I'd like to confine my opening remarks—and I'll try to truncate them since we're starting late—to education. For 20 years now,