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Remarks at the Dedication Ceremony for the Dale and Betty Bumpers Vaccine Research Center in Bethesda, Maryland

June 9, 1999

Thank you very much, Senator Harkin, for your friendship, your leadership, and for your successful efforts to get this facility named for Dale and Betty Bumpers. You know, ever since the Republicans won a majority in the House and the Senate in 1994, it's been impossible to get anything named for a Democrat. [*Laughter*] We named more buildings than ever before in the history of the country, at a breathtaking rate, and I just wanted to come here to make sure this was actually going to happen today. [*Laughter*] And I really thank you, Tom Harkin, for your persistence.

Thank you, Dr. Varmus, Dr. Satcher. Secretary Shalala, thank you for your remarks and what you said. I want to thank all the leaders of the NIH who are here, and others involved in all the various endeavors, especially Sandy Thurman, who leads our efforts on AIDS. I want to say a special word of appreciation to the families of Dale and Betty Bumpers who are here, including two of their three children.

I want to express the regrets of the First Lady and the Vice President for not being able to be here today. And in particular, because of our long friendship and common interest, I know that Hillary wanted to come.

Forty-four years ago Edward R. Murrow described the day Dr. Salk announced his discovery of a polio vaccine with these words, ''The Sun was warm, the Earth coming alive. There was hope and promise in the air. The occasion called for banners in the breeze and trumpets in the distance.''

Indeed, that discovery did herald the dawn of a golden age of development of vaccines and prevention of disease. In the 50 years since, we have benefited from the discovery of vaccines against some 20 infectious diseases; tens of millions of lives have been saved; tens of millions of children have been spared the agony and crippling pain of polio, mumps, rubella, measles, most recently, meningitis.

Twenty years ago we eradicated smallpox, the disease that for thousands of years struck down men, women, and children all around the world and destroyed entire civilizations. We have eliminated polio from our own hemisphere and, as you've already heard, we'll eliminate it from the Earth early in the new millennium.

The triumph of vaccines over infectious disease is one of the great achievements of a remarkable 20th century. And at century's end, the men and women who labor in labs to unlock the mysteries of human biology and disease, especially those here at the National Institutes of Health, have made this one of America's great citadels of hope, not only for our people but for people throughout the world.

I think it is important to note, though, that we are here today because the triumph of immunization over disease is also the triumph not just of scientists but of countless citizens across America, public health specialists, advocates, volunteers, leaders in Government, who work together to support new research and to bring lifesaving vaccines to all people. It is the triumph of the couple we honor today, my friends of many, many years, Dale and Betty Bumpers.

More than 25 years ago, Betty Bumpers was the first person to open my eyes to the fact that though many vaccines had been discovered, approved, and marketed, too few children in our State, then, and across America, were being immunized. As the First Lady of our State, she visited every community and every school, talking to parents and teachers about the necessity of immunizing their children. In fact, Betty became so identified with the immunization cause that people used to joke that every time she walked into a school, the kids would start to cry. [*Laughter*] They knew that when she came in, somebody was going to have to get a shot.

Her work inspired President Carter to launch a nationwide campaign to immunize all children by the time they entered school. Today, I am still amazed by her tirelessness in traveling across the country with Rosalynn Carter to ensure that every child is immunized by the age of 2. I'd also like to say something that many of you know: She is here today, just 2 days after back surgery,