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The President's Radio Address

April 8, 2000

Good morning. In less than a week, Members of Congress will adjourn for spring recess, leaving behind a great deal of unfinished business. Today I'd like to speak with you about some of the pressing priorities that are languishing in Congress and the real consequence of this delay on people's lives.

First, we've waited far too long for a strong and enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights. Last October the House passed the bipartisan Norwood-Dingell Patients' Bill of Rights by an overwhelming margin. I would sign that bill tomorrow. Unfortunately, the Senate passed a much weaker bill. Now both bills have been gathering dust on a shelf for more than 5 months.

Delay may be easy for the congressional majority, but it's proving very hard on our families. According to a new analysis of physician reports, every single day the Congress sits on this legislation, thousands of patients experience serious declines in health as a direct result of bottom-line-driven managed care decisions.

At this time of great change in our health care system, patients need a guarantee that they can see a specialist and go to the nearest emergency room, a guarantee that their doctor can discuss the best treatment options, not just the cheapest, a guarantee to an internal and external appeals process, and a guarantee that they can hold a health plan accountable if it causes them great harm. They need a strong Patients' Bill of Rights. And they need it now.

Second, we've waited too long for an increase in the minimum wage. Last year we introduced legislation to give a well-deserved raise to 10 million working families by lifting the minimum wage by a dollar an hour. A dollar an hour—it may not sound like much,

but in the 7 months that have gone by since our legislation would have gone into effect, families have lost more than \$600 in income. That's enough to pay for 2 months of groceries or almost a semester of community college. For these hard-pressed families, the cost of congressional delay can be measured not just by the day but literally by the hour.

Third, we've waited too long for Congress to fund our supplemental budget—budget priorities like helping the victims of Hurricane Floyd, aiding families struggling with high energy prices, supporting our troops and our peacekeeping efforts to build stability in Kosovo, providing debt relief to the poorest nations, and combating drug traffickers in Colombia. Now, delays in this funding could jeopardize military readiness, undermine international support for Colombia's democracy and its antidrug efforts that directly protect our people here, and leave many hurricane victims in temporary shelter for the second straight winter.

Finally, we've waited too long for commonsense gun safety legislation. Last year, with a tie-breaking vote by Vice President Gore, the Senate passed a bill that would require child safety locks for every handgun sold, ban the importation of large ammunition clips, and close the loophole that allows criminals to buy firearms at gun shows. Unfortunately, the House failed to pass similar measures. And even more disturbing, 9 months now have gone by, and the Congress has taken almost no action to complete a bill for me to sign.

Every day we wait, 89 Americans—12 of them young people—are killed by gunfire. Of course, no legislation can prevent every act of gun violence or every gun accident. But when there are simple safety measures we can take, measures that will save lives. There is absolutely no excuse for sitting on our hands. Two days ago Senators from both parties voted to push congressional negotiators to produce a final gun bill by April the 20th, the anniversary of Columbine. That's the very least we can do.

With only a week to go before recess, I ask the congressional leaders to think about these daily tallies: 12 children dying from gunfire; thousands of managed care patients

suffering unnecessary declines in health; millions of working families missing out on a long-overdue raise. These are just some of the everyday costs of failing to do the people's business. So let's get back on track. Let's work together to protect the health, the safety, the welfare of the American people. Let's safeguard their financial security, and in so doing, our national security. And let's do it now.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 3:00 p.m. on April 7 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on April 8. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 8 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Luncheon in New Orleans, Louisiana

April 8, 2000

Thank you. Well, thank you very much, Arnold. And Celia, thank you. We would have all come here today just to see your beautiful home. And unless you're lucky, half of us may take a swim before we leave. [Laughter] But I thank you so much for opening your home and for reminding me of that speech that I gave. It seems like a long time ago in one way, and another just like yesterday.

I want to thank my good friend Sheriff Harry Lee, who proved to me that you could get bad press and the people would stay with you. [Laughter] So I simply decided to test the theory, and it got a little out of hand. [Laughter] Now, that's a crack I probably wouldn't make anyplace in America outside of Louisiana. [Laughter]

I got tickled when Mayor Rendell said he'd never met anybody like Ray Reggie. I thought, that's true, but if you stayed down here long enough, you'll meet 4 or 500 people you never met anybody like before and never will again. [Laughter]

So Ray, thank you. Thank you, David Young. Thank you, Mary Lou Winters. I want to congratulate our young State representative, Karen Carter. Her father has been a friend of mine forever. And once Karen came

up and accosted me and chewed me out over something she thought I was wrong about, and then she later thought maybe she'd gone too far. And I told her daddy that I'd be proud if my daughter could talk to the President that way. [Laughter] Not because—because she wasn't disrespectful; she was just aggressive and articulate. And I'm glad to see her being so successful.

And Mrs. Morial, it's nice to see you. I want to say a special word of thanks to Bill and Andrea Jefferson for being here. Bill Jefferson was for me when only my mother thought I could be elected President. [Laughter] In our immediate household, it was a close call. So I thank him for all of his friendship and support over the years.

And I thank all of you who worked so hard to raise these funds for our party. I want to thank all the young people who worked on this event. And my friend Mayor Rendell—you know, when I first met Ed Rendell, we went to Philadelphia. I was running for President, and he took me to a neighborhood where he had worked to eradicate gangs and drugs, in a very poor neighborhood. And we walked down the street, and I could see his evident pride that he had helped to change the lives of people who were very often overlooked by other public officials. And then we got to the end of the street, and he challenged me to shoot baskets. There was a little park there. And even though he knew I might become President, he beat me anyway—[laughter]—which I sort of respected. And we've been friends ever since. And I have been waiting for 8 years for a chance to get even. And when I talked him into becoming chairman of the Democratic Party I said, "You know, it's just a little part-time job; it won't take much work." [Laughter] He had a full head of hair when he took this job. [Laughter]

But he's really been wonderful. And I think it's a great thing to have our party headed by someone who's actually been elected to something, served people at the grassroots level, understands the problems and the promise of all different kinds of people. And Philadelphia is a magnificent city that's been very good to me and to the Vice President. So I want to thank him.