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large Medicare health maintenance organization (HMO) payment increases while preventing passage of a strong Patients' Bill of Rights. Managed care reform in the 106th Congress should focus on patient protections, not on excessive payments to managed care plans. Moreover, these reimbursement increases are effectively diverting resources from critically important health care priorities.

This past weekend marked the 1-year anniversary of the overwhelmingly bipartisan passage of the Norwood-Dingell Patients' Bill of Rights. Despite the bipartisan majority supporting this bill in the Senate, parliamentary and political tactics have blocked an up-or-down vote on this long-overdue legislation.

At least as disconcerting is that Congress is proposing to dedicate $25 to $53 billion in increased payments to managed care—without a sound policy basis. The Congress is currently contemplating dedicating 40 to 55 percent of their total investment in provider payments and beneficiary services to increase managed care payments—over twice the amount they plan to spend on hospitals and over five times the amount that they plan to spend on beneficiaries. The Congress is proposing this investment despite studies showing that Medicare managed care plans are overpaid by nearly $1,000 per enrollee and that their payment rates have grown faster under the Balanced Budget Act than the payment rates for traditional Medicare.

It is important to note that increased payments provide no guarantee that Medicare HMOs will stop dropping benefits or abandoning seniors' communities altogether. It is clear that increasing payments to managed care plans did not work this year—we invested an additional $1.4 billion in Medicare+Choice, yet watched nearly 1 million seniors and people with disabilities lose access to plans. Without explicit accountability provisions, it will not work next year either.

The unwarranted managed care payment increases would deprive funding for initiatives that would have real effects on peoples' lives, such as: restoring State options to insure vulnerable legal immigrants; fully funding the Ricky Ray Relief Fund; providing health insurance to children with disabilities; funding grants to integrate people with disabilities into the community; improving nursing home quality; eliminating Medicare preventive services cost sharing; targeting dollars to vulnerable hospitals; assuring adequate payments to teaching hospitals and home health agencies; and funding other critical health priorities. These high-priority initiatives are outlined in additional detail in the attached document.

These initiatives represent our highest health priorities. In contrast, Congress is increasing reimbursement to managed care plans at a time when Medicare managed care plans are about to receive billions of dollars in increased Medicare payments, which are linked to increases in fee-for-service payments to hospitals, nursing homes, and other providers.

It is long past time that we work together in a bipartisan fashion to respond to the Nation's highest health care priorities. It is irresponsible to provide excessively high reimbursement rates for HMOs without ensuring that they are accountable through the Patients' Bill of Rights and through commitments to provide stable and reliable services to Medicare beneficiaries. I urge you to produce more balanced legislation that puts Medicare beneficiaries and the Nation's taxpayers first.

Sincerely,

William J. Clinton

NOTE: Letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Trent Lott, Senate majority leader. An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.

Remarks at a Reception for Representative Robert E. Wise, Jr.

October 10, 2000

Thank you. Well, let me say, I'm delighted to be here for a number of reasons. One is I'm kind of tied down, you know, working and trying to get the Congress out of town, and I don't have much time to travel. And I meant to go see Versailles this month, so "Chez Rockefeller" is almost as good.

[*Laughter*] And I always love coming back here.

Secondly, Jay and Sharon have been great friends to Hillary and me for many, many years. We served as Governors together. We sat together. We cogitated together. We voted together. We did a lot of good things together. And our States were remarkably similar in the years when we served as Governors. And maybe the similarity in part explains the fact that the people of West Virginia had been so very good to me in 1992 and 1996, something for which I am profoundly grateful. And so I wanted to be here for all those reasons.

I also wanted to be here because Bob Wise has also been good to me in the Congress. He has been an excellent Congressman for West Virginia and for the United States. He's been a great ally of the good things that we have done. He has also been a ferocious advocate for West Virginia.

And finally, I wanted to be here because I believe, as Jay said, that it really matters who's the Governor. I was Governor for a dozen years. I don't think I ever would have gotten tired of doing it. And if I had thought that the country was being aggressively moved in 1991, I think I'd probably still be doing it.

But what I'd like to say tonight is to try to tie together the decision the people of West Virginia have to make in national politics with the decision you have to make in State politics and explain why they are so important.

When I was a Governor in Arkansas, we didn't have an unemployment rate below the national average in the last 10 years I served as Governor, except one. The year I ran for President, we were first or second—I never saw the final figures—in job growth, and we finally got going. But it took 10 years to turn—to take our State through the kind of economic transition that a lot of the rural States with agricultural-based economies and industries that were fading away needed to go through. And they've done very well in the last 8 years, and I'm grateful for that.

But the first thing I want to say is it's hard for Governors to see if the Nation has a bad economic problem. Therefore, the country has a big decision to make about whether you want to continue to change in the direction that we're in, which means that people like Jay, as he said, have to take a tax cut that's much less than the one you'll get from the other side, but we'll have a tax cut that will deal with the things people need most in terms of education and child care and long-term care and retirement savings, and we'll have enough money left to invest in education and to keep paying this debt down.

If you have their tax cut plus the Social Security privatization plus all their spending promises, we're back in deficits, which means higher interest rates, slower job growth, and you all know that States like West Virginia and Arkansas get hurt the worst when the economy turns down, job growth slows down, interest rates are higher. It costs more to borrow money to start new businesses and expand them. It means fewer jobs, less wage increases, and a lower stock market. So I think our deal works pretty well for everybody up and down the income scale, and I think we should continue it.

Now, having said that, I can tell you that, if you have a good economic policy, how well a State does depends, in no small measure, on how aggressive and creative and consistent the Governor is. And Bob Wise is aggressive, creative, and consistent. I would put those adjectives in different order, depending on what day it is. But he is always there. This guy will work. He'll show up every morning; he'll be there at night; and he'll be thinking about something new he can do. And he'll push, and that's important.

The second thing I would like to say is there's a great interest in this country today on education, and the voters have to decide. Both the candidates for President favor accountability. I personally think that the Vice President's accountability system is better than Governor Bush's, but I don't want to get into that, because it takes—that's an hour discussion. But we favor accountability-plus. That is we believe we should help have smaller classes, more well-trained teachers in the early grades, modernize schools. I did an event on all this at a West Virginia school—[*inaudible*]—Senator Byrd, you may remember—preschool, after-school, and summer school programs for all the kids who need

it, and tax deductions to send your kids to college. That's what we believe.

The Federal Government only provides 7 percent of the total education budget of the Nation. It was 9 percent under President Johnson. It slipped with—it was heading to 5 when I took office, and we've reversed it. But I think it's a mistake to do this voucher proposal, in part because we only have 7 percent of the money, and it costs a lot of money to do a little good. Even if you assume it's a good thing, it costs a lot of money to do a little good.

And we now know something that we did not have the research on when Jay Rockefeller and I served as Governor. We now know, from research, how to turn around failing schools. We have the research. There is no excuse, therefore, for us not to be doing it. But I can tell you, if you make the right decision in the Presidential race and we get a good result in the congressional races, it still won't amount to a hill of beans if the Governor has no consuming, passionate, consistent interest in education.

Now, I'll just give you one other example. In 1992—in '91 and '92, when I ran for President, I used to talk to Jay Rockefeller all the time about health care, because I knew how much he cared about it. I knew he knew more about it than I did, and he had a big influence on me on this issue. When Governor Bush tells you that we had 8 years and didn't do anything, that's just not true.

When we took office, Medicare was supposed to go broke last year. It's now alive until 2026. We put 27 years on the life of Medicare. That's the longest life it's had since it was created in 1965. And you can now keep your health insurance if you change jobs or in a period of sickness. We have a lot more preventive care for—under Medicare—for breast cancer screenings, for prostate screenings; we've dramatically improved diabetes care; we've insured 2½ million kids under the Children's Health Insurance Program; and the number of uninsured people in American went down last year for the first time since 1987.

So we've done a lot, but there's still a lot to do. And we're in a big debate. Jay and I were just talking about the debate we're having with the Republicans now. We actually cut too much money out of the Medicare program in the Balanced Budget Act. We have to put some back in. We believe that we ought to help the hospitals, the nursing homes, and the community and home providers, and make sure that we can maintain the fabric of health care. Fifty-five percent of the money in the Republicans' budget goes to the HMO's. This is a huge issue that will affect the ability of the next Governor of West Virginia to protect the health care of the country.

So there's big partisan issues here: whether you're for the Patients' Bill of Rights; whether you believe everybody, all the old people in the country, the retired people—I hope to be one of them one of these days—should have access to affordable medicine. Sixty-five is not old anymore. If you live to be 65 in America today, your life expectancy is 82. And the human genome project will mean young women within a decade—I'll predict it; you wait and see if I'm right. I believe within a decade young women will come home from the hospital with babies that will have a life expectancy of 90 years. That's what I believe will happen because of the human genome project.

But I think this is all-important, and this is a matter of national policy. Now, having said that, let me tell you that when we made the agreement with the Republicans in 1997, on the balanced budget, we agreed to give the money to all the States to design a Children's Health Insurance Program. And you've got States that are just doing fabulously with it.

In States, you can never predict. Alaska, with a lot of desperately poor people living all strewed out from here to yonder, has an enormously high enrollment. Why? Because the Governor wanted the kids enrolled. Arizona has a very low enrollment. Why? Because the legislature asked to be passed a bill prohibiting the children from being enrolled in the schools where they are, because the legislative majority there—I need to say, of the other party—saw this as some great scheme to socialize medicine. All they're doing is paying for medicine, for medical coverage for kids in low-income working families. And everybody else is somewhere in between.

But you get the point. If you want children in West Virginia to have good health care, it doesn't matter what we do in Washington, even if we have good policy, unless the Governor cares enough to make sure that maximum efforts are made in an intelligent way to take care of the families. And West Virginia is just like Arkansas. You've got a whole lot of people who work like crazy, work 40 or 50 hours a week for low incomes, who cannot afford health insurance. This is a big deal to you.

So what I want to say is, obviously, I'm interested in the races for Congress, especially one Senate race, and I'm passionately committed to the campaign of the Vice President and Senator Lieberman. But I'm telling you, I spent a dozen years as a Governor, and I worked with some of the ablest people I ever met in that period, and I think I know something about West Virginia. It really matters. You need somebody that is creative, aggressive, and consistent, somebody that understands the economy, education, and health care. He does. He should win, and I hope you won't quit helping him tonight.

I know this is a close race. Listen, it's hard to beat any incumbent Governor when the economy is doing well. I used to tell everybody, "If the economy was better, I could have a lobotomy and get reelected"—[*laughter*]—when I was running. It's hard. But he is doing very well, and he's doing very well because people sense these things about him. So we still—we've got more than a month left in this campaign, folks. And if you can give him any more money, you ought to. And if you can't give him any more money, you ought to go home and start talking to people about why this matters.

But I'm just—we have got a chance here to see States that have been left out and left behind for a long time if we could just keep this economy going, really balloon, and do well. But it will matter profoundly who the Governor is. And I think, again, you need somebody that understands how Washington works and how it affects West Virginia, somebody that's committed to jobs, schools, and health care, and somebody that's intelligent, creative, aggressive, and consistent. He is.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:05 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to reception hosts Senator John D. Rockefeller IV and his wife, Sharon; Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush; Gov. Tony Knowles of Alaska; and Gov. Cecil H. Underwood of West Virginia. Representative Wise is a gubernatorial candidate in West Virginia.

Remarks at a Reception for Representative Joseph Crowley

October 10, 2000

Thank you. Let me say, first of all, I am delighted to be here for many reasons. First of all because I love Rosa, because—and Rosa does that sort of "born in a log cabin" routine better than anybody I know—[*laughter*]—what she neglected to tell you was that her mother, the seamstress, is the best politician I have ever met in my life to this day—[*laughter*]—and because her husband, the man who shares this house, Stan, had so much to do with my becoming President in 1992 and is now, tonight in Florida working with the Vice President as he prepares for this important debate, and has also helped my friends Tony Blair and Prime Minister Barak and other good people around the world, and because Rosa's been there for 8 years now with me working on many of the things that have helped turn our country around.

I'm here because I really like Joe Crowley, because he's been real good to Hillary, which means a lot to me—[*laughter*]—and because—I'll tell you another Queens story, because I love Queens. And in early '92, you know, we were pretty desperate to get press in early '92. I mean, here I was from Arkansas; nobody in New York knew who I was.

Harold Ickes says, "We're going to meet with the Queens Democratic Committee, and Tom Manton is for you, and I think they will endorse you." I said, "They're going to endorse me?" I was like fifth in name recognition in New Hampshire at the time. And he said, "Yes. Yes, it's going to happen. But we're going to take a subway out there," which I thought was great. I like to ride the subway.

So we took a subway there, and there was this typically passive New York press person