

great news for HUD, the administration, and most importantly, the millions of Americans served by HUD's programs.

When we first took office, Al Gore and I promised the American people that we would improve the way our Government serves them. We had no greater challenge than HUD, which was mired in bureaucracy and which Congress had targeted for elimination. That was then, but this is now. Today, we have a Department that has turned itself around and, as this report clearly states, can serve as a role model for all Federal agencies.

I want to congratulate Secretary Cuomo, his team at HUD, and all of the Department's 9,000 employees for this significant achievement. I have no doubt it will serve as a milestone in HUD's history and foreshadow the kind of service that the Department will offer the American people in the years to come.

Statement on Labor Department Regulations on Private Health Care Plans

November 20, 2000

Today I am pleased to announce that the Labor Department is issuing final regulations requiring private health plans covering 130 million Americans to provide a fast and fair internal appeals process for patients when coverage has been denied or delayed. Under this new rule, for the first time, health plans would be required to make coverage decisions quickly—within 72 hours for urgent requests—and to provide consumers with meaningful information on their rights and benefits. Currently, many health plans do not have the medical expertise to make such decisions, and approval of necessary services can take as long as 300 days.

Under the strong leadership of Secretary Herman, we are taking an important step towards providing Americans the health care protections they need. It is the final executive action I can take to provide critical protections to patients in private health plans. It builds on my administration's previous action to provide critical patient protections to the 85 million Americans in Federal health plans. But the only way to give every American in

every health plan the right to see a specialist, to go to the nearest emergency room—not the cheapest—and to hold health care plans accountable when they cause harm, is to pass a real, enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights. Whether it is this year or next year, Congress should come together to pass this long overdue legislation.

Statement on the Death of Lars-Erik Nelson

November 21, 2000

Hillary and I are deeply saddened to learn of the death of Lars-Erik Nelson, one of New York's most distinctive voices and one of America's leading journalists. He was a fearless, independent, no nonsense reporter and columnist who believed in getting to the heart of a story and getting it right.

Lars-Erik Nelson distinguished himself as a foreign correspondent and as a skilled Russian translator, but his real gift was translating complex stories about our democracy for the American people. He did it with humor and a dogged pursuit for the truth. As his friends knew, beneath his gruff exterior was a gentle spirit and a warm heart. Hillary and I will miss him and the unique insight that he shared with New York and the entire Nation. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Mary, and his entire family.

Remarks at the Thanksgiving Turkey Presentation Ceremony

November 22, 2000

The President. I want to thank Secretary Glickman and National Turkey Federation Chairman Jerry Jerome and President Stuart Proctor for being here. And I want to welcome the young people who are here, especially those who are from the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Washington.

[At this point, there was a noise from the far end of the Rose Garden.]

The President. I am—what's all that noise up there? *[Laughter]* What is it? It sounds like another turkey about to fly down here. *[Laughter]*

I want to thank the National Turkey Federation for once again donating this year's tom turkey. This is the eighth I've had the privilege to meet and set free in the Rose Garden. [Laughter]

I'm told that Jerry, the turkey, traveled all the way here from Wisconsin, proving that the Cheese State is about more than good cheese. It's also, I might add, about a very well-behaved turkey. [Laughter]

Tomorrow we will celebrate the first Thanksgiving of the new millennium and the last one of our Presidency. As Hillary and Chelsea and I sit down to our dinner, we will give special thanks for the privilege it has been to live here and to serve for the last 8 years.

It's still a bit of a mystery when exactly the first Thanksgiving was actually held. Some say it was in 1513, when Ponce de Leon landed in Florida. But the expert opinions about that are divided, and a recount is still underway down there. [Laughter] Others say it occurred in 1541, when Francisco Vasquez de Coronado arrived on the Texas panhandle. Some conspiracy theorists say neither of those are true.

The most popular story, of course, and the one all of us learned as kids, is that Native Americans and Pilgrims shared a feast of thanks to celebrate their first harvest in 1621, soon after the Pilgrims arrived in Plymouth, Massachusetts. It was a famous meal of maize, squash, and venison and lasted 3 whole days. Now, that would take a lot of turkey.

But no matter what its roots, Thanksgiving is a tradition that has been celebrated in this country since our beginning. George Washington was the first President to declare a national day of thanks, in 1789. And Abraham Lincoln made the tradition a permanent one in 1863, in the darkest days of the Civil War, because he recognized, as he put it, "the blessings of fruitful years and healthful skies."

The times have changed, but the message hasn't: To give thanks for all God's blessings, for our strong families, our spirited communities, and the good fortune of living in our country's most prosperous and peaceful time.

I am profoundly grateful on this Thanksgiving that we have now more than 22 million

new jobs, poverty and unemployment at record lows, and the highest homeownership in history. The American people worked hard for these results, and I hope they're thankful for them as well.

We should also be grateful for the strength of our democracy and the freedom we enjoy, thanks to the courage and patriotism of our men and women in uniform and the strength and abiding power of the Constitution and the rule of law.

As we gather around our dinner tables with family and friends and celebrate our great bounty, we must not forget, also, those who will be hungry this holiday season. That's why it is so important that all Americans, like the young people here today, not only give thanks but give something back to their communities to help those who are less fortunate than themselves.

Almost 50 years ago, President Truman began the tradition of keeping at least one turkey off the Thanksgiving dinner table. And I am very pleased to follow in his footsteps and to hereby officially pardon this turkey in order that he be sent to the petting zoo in Fairfax County, Virginia, to live his remaining days in peace and happiness making children happier, if not more peaceful.

Thank you, and Happy Thanksgiving. Let's bring the turkey up.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:20 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Jerry Jerome, chairman, and Stuart Proctor, Jr., president, National Turkey Federation. The President also referred to Kidwell Farm at Frying Pan Park in Fairfax County, VA, future home of the turkey.

Remarks at the Capital Area Food Bank and an Exchange With Reporters

November 22, 2000

The President. First of all, I want to thank Secretary Glickman and all the people that he mentioned for the work that they've done that he discussed today. And I want to say a special word of appreciation to Lynn Brantley. Thank you for your kind comments, but actually, the District of Columbia could