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Week Ending Friday, June 29, 2001

The President's Radio Address

June 23, 2001

Good morning. Here in Washington, we are nearing some important decisions on the health of Americans. Congress will soon vote on a Patients' Bill of Rights to help patients get the treatment they deserve without delay or legal haggling. I want that bill to be strong and effective. A woman should be able to visit her gynecologist, and parents, their children's pediatrician, without going through a gatekeeper. A person should be able to see a specialist when he or she needs one and to get emergency treatment at the nearest emergency room.

If an HMO denies the treatment you need, then you should have the right to an immediate, impartial appeal to a panel of doctors. If the panel rules in your favor, you should receive your treatment, period. If the HMO ignores the findings, you should be able to go to court. The system should not favor HMOs, and it should not favor trial lawyers; it should favor patients with quick action to make sure they get the treatment they need.

Today I want to address another kind of protection that is needed in these times of accelerating medical progress. Just a few months ago scientists completed the mapping of the human genome. With this information comes enormous possibilities for doing good. Through a better understanding of the genetic codes, scientists might one day be able to cure and prevent countless diseases.

As with any other power, however, this knowledge of the code of life has the potential to be abused. Employers could be tempted to deny a job based on a person's genetic profile. Insurance companies might use that information to deny an application for coverage or charge excessive premiums.

Genetic discrimination is unfair to workers and their families. It is unjustified, among other reasons, because it involves little more than medical speculation. A genetic predisposition toward cancer or heart disease does not mean the condition will develop. To deny employment or insurance to a healthy person based only on a predisposition violates our country's belief in equal treatment and individual merit.

In the past, other forms of discrimination have been used to withhold rights and opportunities that belong to all Americans. Just as we have addressed discrimination based on race, gender, and age, we must now prevent discrimination based on genetic information. My administration is working now to shape the legislation that will make genetic discrimination illegal.

I look forward to working with Members of Congress to pass a law that is fair, reasonable, and consistent with existing discrimination statutes. We will all gain much from the continuing advances of genetic science. But those advances should never come at the cost of basic fairness and equality under law.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9 a.m. on June 21 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on June 23. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 22 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of the address.

Remarks to the United States Conference of Mayors in Detroit, Michigan

June 25, 2001

Well, thank you all very much. Thanks. Please be seated. Well, Victor, thank you very much. I appreciate your kind remarks.

Before I begin, I'd like to introduce the First Lady. She and I are coming up from