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Patients' Bill of Rights

Q. Mr. President, on the question of where patients could go to hold HMOs accountable if they're wrongfully denied coverage, Democrats say that Federal court, your preferred venue is too slow, too expensive, and frequently too far away from where people live. Why are you so adamant about keeping people out of their own State courts?

The President. Terry, I think if you look at this piece of legislation, you'll find there's a compromise between those who say it should only be in the Federal court and those who say it should only be in the State court. And the Fletcher bill has come up with an alternative procedure, one that will allow a certain cause of action to be in the Federal court and other cause of action to be in a State court. And it's the right approach. It's a good compromise between two positions.

Q. But what's wrong with Federal court?

The President. Stretch [Richard Keil, Bloomberg Radio].

Bipartisanship/Stem Cell Research

Q. Mr. President, a two part question. Around the table here today you have all—only Republicans. Do you plan talks like this with the Democratic leaders in the House and the Senate, talks about Patients' Bill of Rights? And related to that, how close are you on a decision on stem cell research, and can you tell us which way you're leaning?

The President. I'll make a decision about that very emotional issue later on. In terms of whether I've talked to Democrats, of course I do. And there's a Democrat sponsor of this bill. He doesn't happen to be at the table, but he's on the right track, as far as I'm concerned, like the other sponsors of this bill.

Thank you all for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:33 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

Statement on Patients' Bill of Rights Legislation

June 27, 2001

The bipartisan proposal introduced today by Representatives Ernie Fletcher, Collin Peterson, Nancy Johnson, and Richard Burr, along with Speaker Hastert and the chairmen of the three committees with jurisdiction, Chairmen Boehner, Tauzin, and Thomas, makes progress in our effort to provide patients with a strong and enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights.

This proposal, like the legislation introduced by Senators Frist, Breaux, and Jeffords, is another example of a Patients' Bill of Rights that reflects the principles I laid out earlier this year. I am encouraged that the bill introduced today brings us significantly closer to enacting a good Patients' Bill of Rights.

This legislation provides strong patient protections to all Americans. It ensures that patients have the right to an independent medical review when they have been denied medical care, and it holds health plans accountable by providing patients with meaningful, effective remedies when they have been harmed by a denial or delay in receiving such care.

I am committed to providing patients with expanded remedies to hold their health plans accountable and believe we can do so while protecting workers and their families from costly litigation that would increase health care premiums and leave too many Americans without health insurance. This legislation introduced today provides patients with meaningful remedies while preserving uniformity and certainty for employers who voluntarily offer health care benefits for millions of Americans across the country.

Remarks at the President's Dinner

June 27, 2001

Thank you all. Please be seated. Mr. Vice President, 11 months ago I made the smartest decision I could make when it came to politics. I picked you to become the Vice President. What a good man this guy is, and what a great job he's done for America.

I think you're the one over there with the light shining off your head. [*Laughter*] Oh yes, there you are. But I do know you're sitting next to a fabulous woman. Lynne Cheney is a great friend of Laura and mine, and we're real proud that she is a part of our team, as well.