

the ability to choose a Medicare option that includes prescription drug benefits.

My framework for Medicare reform also called for immediate help to seniors through a prescription drug discount card. And I'm pleased that both the House and Senate bills would make a discount card available to seniors. The card would help senior citizens by reducing their prescription drug costs, beginning early next year and continuing until the new prescription drug program under Medicare takes full effect in 2006.

The Congress must now pass a final bill that makes the Medicare system work better for America's seniors. This is an issue of vital importance to senior citizens all across our country. They have waited years for a modern Medicare system, and they should not have to wait any longer.

Earlier this month in Chicago, I met Gene Preston and his wife, Dorothy. They spend about \$300 a month on prescription drugs, and they do not have prescription drug coverage. Gene says, "Everything is going up in price. Before, we could save a couple of bucks at the end of the month. But right now we're just holding even, if not going below even." When Congress completes its work, seniors like Gene and Dorothy Preston can look forward to better health care coverage and relief from the rising cost of prescription drugs.

I appreciate the hard work of Members of Congress who have set aside partisan differences to do what is best for the American people. I urge Members to seize this opportunity to achieve a great and compassionate goal. I urge them to finish the job of strengthening and modernizing Medicare, so that I can sign this crucial reform into law.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 2:35 p.m. on June 26 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on June 28. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 27 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Statement on the Death of Katharine Hepburn

June 29, 2003

Katharine Hepburn delighted audiences with her unique talent for more than six decades. She was known for her intelligence and wit and will be remembered as one of the Nation's artistic treasures. Laura joins me in sending our thoughts and prayers to her family.

Remarks to Senior Citizens in Miami, Florida

June 30, 2003

Thank you very much. Thanks for coming. *Sientese, por favor. Muchas gracias.* I'm honored to be here. Thank you for letting me come by to talk about a subject that is, I know, important to many, and that is the opportunities and the chances of modernizing Medicare. I am really glad to have the invitation to come to the Little Havana Activities and Nutrition Centers. After all, it gives me a chance to check up on *El Gobernador*—[laughter]—*mi hermanito, mi grande hermanito.* [Laughter]

I'm really proud of Jeb. He's—as you know, we've got a very close family, and any chance we have to get together to visit and compare notes about the latest thing Mother has told us to do, it gives us—it's a great opportunity. So—but thanks for letting me come.

I—as Tommy mentioned, that we're making historic progress in Washington. It's really a matter of will. It's a matter of putting aside politics and focusing on what we're supposed to be focusing on, that is, the people. And so today I want to spend some time talking about the historic opportunity we have to modernize Medicare on behalf of America's seniors.

There's some differences between the two bills. The Senate had one version. The House of Representatives had another. But there's a lot of commonality between them. And I'm confident that the Members, when they get back from their Fourth of July breaks, will

get to work, iron out the differences in a constructive way, and get a good bill to my desk so that I can then say, and all of us can say, we've done our jobs on behalf of America's seniors.

Tommy has—Tommy Thompson has been the point person for the administration on Capitol Hill, working this issue hard. He has done a really good job. He was my friend when he was the Governor of Wisconsin, so I saw that he was a good, hard worker and a productive person as the Governor of Wisconsin. He was a reformer, and he was on the leading edge of change in a lot of areas. And I was really happy to be able to convince him to serve in the incredibly important position of Secretary of HHS. And he hasn't let me down, and he's not letting the American people down, Tommy, and I want to thank you for your service.

And I'm glad that Josefina came. I understand she used to be the president and CEO of this—of the Little Havana Activities and Nutrition Centers. She is—she did such a good job here that we spirited her up to Washington, DC, to serve our country. I want to thank Josefina, and I also want to wish her a happy birthday.

Toni Jennings, the Lieutenant Governor, is with us today, and I'm honored that the Lieutenant Governor would be here. Thank you, Toni.

I see that the Diaz-Balart boys are with us today. Keep your remarks short. [Laughter] No, I'm looking forward to visit—to spend a little quality time with them. They're a good friend, strong allies. They know what I know, that under the current leadership in Cuba, there will never be freedom. They know that, and I know that as well.

And one thing we believe in in America is freedom for everybody. We believe freedom is the desire of every human heart. We believe freedom is the future of every country. We believe in a free Cuba.

I also want to thank Congressman Mark Foley for joining us today. Congressman, thank you for being here. I'm honored you're here. I appreciate your time. Terry White is here, the secretary of the Florida Department of Elder Affairs. Terry, thank you for coming, *Senor Blanco*. I—Dr. Rhonda

Medows is with us today. I'm honored that the doc is here.

We've got *el alcalde de Miami*. Thank you, *Senor*. Thank you very much, Alex, for coming, and as well—I mean, Manny, for coming. And Alex Penelas is here as well, the mayor of—*donde?* Okay. [Laughter] At least he got his name mentioned; that's a smart move. I appreciate Rene Rodriguez, the director of the Miami-Dade Housing Authority, for being here. Berta, *donde esta* Berta? Berta Ruano, thank you very much, Berta, for letting us come.

And finally, when I landed at the airport on Air Force One, I was honored to walk off, and after I saw Brother and others that were there, I met a lady named Ana Cooper. Ana is right here. Thank you for coming, Ana. Let me tell you about Ana. Stand up, please. So you're wondering who Ana is. You're wondering who Ana Cooper is; she is a volunteer. She volunteers to help seniors have a better life. She spends time comforting seniors. She takes time out of her day to help somebody in need. And that's an important part of America. It's a really important part of our system. It's a part of a compassionate tomorrow when a fellow citizen is willing to dedicate time to help somebody who needs help.

And I want to thank Ana. She's a—what I call a USA Freedom Corps greeter. Everywhere I go in America, I try to recognize an individual who is serving something greater than themselves in life. If you're such an individual, I want to thank you for that.

If you're interested in helping, you can get on the Internet and look up usafreedomcorps.gov. It's an opportunity for young and old alike to serve your community. The strength of our country is more than just military might. The strength of our country is the heart and soul of our fellow citizens, people like Ana who are willing to help somebody in need. Ana, thank you for the example you've set, and I appreciate you coming.

I mentioned our love for freedom in America. We love it. We love it for people of Cuba. We love it for the people of Iraq. We love it for the people of Afghanistan. We also know that a free society is more likely to be a peaceful society. And so when you hear me talk about freedom, you must also know that I talk about peace, that our deep

desire in America is for the world to be more free and more peaceful. And we'll stay the course.

We have made great progress at freeing people from barbaric regimes, which also means that America is more secure. We will stay on guard in America because we understand there are still enemies of freedom, enemies for what we stand for. And I want to thank the local authorities and the State authorities and our Federal authorities, who are all working closely together to keep the homeland more secure. But in order to make sure the homeland is more secure, we must hunt down enemies wherever they hide. The best way to make America secure is to find the enemy before the enemy comes to us. And that's what we will do.

We must also worry about the economic security of our fellow citizens. And I want to thank the Members of Congress who have worked closely with the administration to create the environment for additional job growth. Your Governor and the good people down here have led the Nation in new job creation. And I want to thank the people of Florida for setting the pace for job recovery. But so long as anybody is looking for work and who wants to work and can't find a job, we will worry about it. And we will create the conditions necessary for economic vitality, including, most importantly, to make sure our small businesses are strong and vibrant all across the United States of America.

And then we're worried in Washington, DC, and we're doing something about it, about the health security of the American people. And one of the things we finally recognized in Washington, well, we recognized it—actually get something done about it—is that medicine is becoming more modern, yet the systems dealing with medicine, like Medicare, aren't. In other words, there have been great advancement in medicine, and yet the Medicare system is stuck in the past. And so we decided to do something about it.

We decided to make sure that prescription medicines, which oftentimes replace surgeries and long hospital stays, become an integral part of a modern medical system available for our seniors and everybody else; in other words, that we now focus on preven-

tion as opposed to reaction as an integral part of a modern medical system.

One of the things that we've got to always worry about and work on in Washington is to make sure that pharmaceutical drugs are more affordable and more available. And I took some strong action to help that be the case by making sure that generic drugs are not delayed in making it to the marketplace.

In our system today, if a pharmaceutical company invents a new kind of medicine, they're given patent protection for a period of time. And that's okay. It makes sense. After all, we want a—we want new medicines coming on the market, and patents provide incentives for people to reinvest and to take research and development risks. But what we can't afford is to have generic drugs delayed because of loopholes in the laws and regulations. We cannot allow drug companies to block generics, which are cheaper at the counter for our citizens—"less expensive" is a better way to put that, still of high quality but of less expense—because of arguments over minor features.

In other words, the generic gets ready to come on the market, and the initial company will say, "Wait a minute. You're—you know, you've got the pill bottle—the color of the pill bottle looks like that you're infringing on the patent," and delays take place. And we can't allow these excuse-making delays to take place. So the Federal Drug Administration has taken strong action which will get generics quicker to the markets, which will save our seniors and all people relying upon pharmaceutical savings.

We anticipate the savings will be up to \$35 billion over a 10-year period. And that's a good, positive step on behalf of making sure our drugs are more affordable.

But the other thing we've done is we made sure that Medicare is heading toward reform. And a reform in Medicare means a couple of things. It means seniors get to have choices, and all choices will include prescription drug benefits. The Medicare system of today does not have prescription drug benefits, as you know. We've got to change that. If medicine is changing, we want Medicare to change with it, on behalf of the senior citizens all across the country.

And so, as Tommy mentioned, we've had a debate up in Washington, and that is how best to provide a modern system to our seniors. One of the things I reminded people of and will continue to do so until I get a bill on my desk, that Members of the United States Congress and their staffs get a choice about what kind of plan—health care plan best suits their needs. In other words, Congress said, "Let us have a consumer-friendly system." A consumer-friendly system is one that says we trust the consumers to make the best choice. Senior citizens are consumers, and therefore, the plan ought to match your needs, not the needs designed by a bureaucrat—not your needs as decided by a bureaucrat in Washington, DC. If choice is good enough for Congress, it ought to be good enough for the seniors in America, was my point.

I appreciate these men—I appreciate their consistency. They understood that, and that's a vital part of the bill which came out of the House of Representatives and the Senate. And basically it says this: It says that if you like your current Medicare system, you like the way the Medicare system is today, you should have the option of staying in that system, plus an additional benefit, and that would be prescription drugs. In other words, if you're happy where you are, we're going to add a prescription drug benefit.

Now, as well, if you enhanced benefits or—such as more coverage for preventative care or other services, you ought to have that choice as well. In other words, you take what the Government provides, and if you want to make it better, you ought to have that choice—your choice to make. That ought to be available part of the program. As well, if you like the affordability of managed care plans—Medicare + Choice—if you like that and you're in the plan, that ought to be a part of your option. In other words, there's three opportunities. The plans ought to be tailored to your demands.

Low-income seniors will receive extra help. We want to help those who are—who need help. So that ought to be a part of our Government policy so that seniors will have the ability to choose a Medicare plan which best fits their needs. And all the plans will mean there is a prescription drug benefit

available. So we're modernizing Medicare, and it's important that we do.

I talked to Myrtle Ball today—I had the honor of meeting with some of your fellow citizens prior to coming out here to talk, and I heard their stories. It's a good opportunity for Jeb and me and Tommy to listen to what people—what's on their mind. And pretty much common story—Myrtle is diabetic. She takes eight medications, and those cost her at least \$700 a month, which is nearly half her income. And that bothers her, and it worries her. So she's cutting down, cutting the pills in half in some cases, to try to make those—stretch those dollars. The bill we passed—both bills we passed, and the combined bill we passed, Tommy and I concluded, will help somebody like Myrtle, help her meet the needs so that she doesn't feel stressed in later years of life.

Teresa Tibble is here, and she takes care of her mom, Betty, at home. And Teresa, I want to thank you very much for doing that. She is a dutiful daughter. Her mom has got Alzheimer's. And Teresa wants to live with her mom so her mom feels comfortable. I think Jeb and I were touched by what it means to be sitting at a table with a daughter who has said, "I've got a responsibility to my mom." And I want to appreciate Teresa for doing that. The extra money that will come from the benefit that's going to end up in the bill will help Teresa take care of her mom at home.

I also met the Gensels. They're here, Judy and Jerry. And they—now, they're typical of a lot—because of Jerry's previous job, he was—had some benefits, some benefits as a retiree, but in his case, they run out in a couple of years. And so in the—from a private-sector plan—so he's concerned, obviously. When the benefits expire as a result of the retirement package he had earlier, what's going to happen to Judy and Jerry? And this bill will help. This bill will make a difference.

In other words, this bill is more important for people to realize, instead of the rhetoric, that it actually is going to affect people's lives in a positive way. And here are some people's lives that will be affected, and I'm sure a lot of your lives will be affected as well. We've just got to get the job done now. We've got

to make sure that the bills are reconciled and get them to my desk. And I look forward to signing a good Medicare bill.

Finally, there's one other issue I want to talk about. I mean, if we're concerned about health care which is accessible and affordable, we better be concerned about the number of lawsuits that are taking place all across America. You see, it's one thing for somebody to be able to sue a bad doctor. We're for that. But the problem is, we've got a lot of lawyers filing suits against any doctor. And let me tell you the effect of frivolous lawsuits, the effect it's having all across America.

It means that doctors are practicing what they call preventative medicine. In other words, if you think somebody's going to sue you, if you're in a litigious society, then you'll take extra care by prescribing more and more either procedures or whatever it may be. And that runs the cost of medicine up. It makes it more likely your bill is going to go up.

And secondly, lawsuit after lawsuit after lawsuit that oftentimes—you know, that people just settle in order to get it off the docket cause premiums to go up, which also makes medicine more costly. In a lot of cases around the country, docs have just had it. They said their premiums have gone up so high that they can't practice medicine anymore. So you know what they do? They take the shingle down, which makes it—there's less doctors available. We've got a problem.

I met with docs all across our country. The premiums are just going out of sight because of frivolous lawsuits are running up the cost of doing business, and it costs you more money. It just does. And people say, "Well, you know, that's not a Federal issue. It's a State issue." And I want to applaud my brother, working hard on this issue. And I hope the legislature responds positively so that people all across this State are going to have affordable and accessible health care. But it also runs up the cost of the Federal bills.

I mean, if somebody is practicing preventative medicine, it's going to mean Medicare costs go up. Medicaid costs will go up. Veterans health benefits go up. I've looked at the cost of all these frivolous lawsuits to the Federal Government and have come to the conclusion we have a Federal problem as

well, which requires a Federal solution. In order to make sure health care is vibrant and viable, we need medical liability reform all across America, and we need a Federal medical liability reform.

I want to thank you all for—I want to thank you for giving me a chance to come by and visit with you. Let me conclude by telling you something that I know is true. We are fortunate to be Americans. We live in a great country. We live in a great country that has got the best health care system in the world, and we need to keep it that way. We live in a great country because we believe in serving concepts greater than ourselves. We live in a great country because we believe in values and ideals from which we will not vary. We believe strongly in freedom. We believe in peace. We believe in human dignity. We believe in the worth of each individual. We are a great country, and I'm proud to be the President of this great country.

Thank you all for coming. May God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:19 a.m. at the Metropolitan Senior Center, Little Havana Activities and Nutrition Centers. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Jeb Bush and Lt. Gov. Toni Jennings of Florida; Josefina Carbonell, Assistant Secretary for Aging, Department of Health and Human Services; Representatives Lincoln and Mario Diaz-Balart of Florida; Dr. Rhonda Medows, secretary, Florida Agency for Health Care Administration; Mayor Manuel A. Diaz of Miami; Mayor Alex Penelas of Miami-Dade County; and Berta Ruano, assistant to Ramon Perez-Dorrbecker, president, Little Havana Activities and Nutrition Centers. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks at a Bush-Cheney Luncheon in Miami

June 30, 2003

The President. Thank you all for coming. It's a big deal to be introduced by your brother—[laughter]—especially one who's been so successful as the Governor of the State of Florida. I'm proud of him. I'm not surprised. We both share the same political consultant—[laughter]—our mother. [Laughter] Her fees are low, but her opinion is plentiful. [Laughter]