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The President's Radio Address

February 11, 2006

Good morning. Today I want to talk to you about the new Medicare prescription drug coverage that went into effect on January 1st of this year.

When I came into office, I found a Medicare system that was antiquated and not meeting the needs of America's seniors. The system would pay tens of thousands of dollars for a surgery but not a few hundred dollars for the prescription drugs that could have prevented the surgery in the first place. So working with Congress, we passed critical legislation that modernizes Medicare, provides seniors with more choices, and gives seniors better access to the prescription drugs they need.

Since the program went into effect 6 weeks ago, more than 24 million people with Medicare now have prescription drug coverage, and hundreds of thousands more are enrolling each week. The competition in the prescription drug market has been stronger than expected and is lowering costs for taxpayers and seniors alike. This year, the Federal Government will spend 20 percent less overall on the Medicare drug benefit than projected just last July. The average premium that seniors pay is a third less than had been expected—just $25 per month instead of $37 per month. And the typical senior will end up spending about half of what they used to spend on prescription drugs each year.

Last month in Oklahoma City, a senior named Dorothy Brown signed up for Medicare prescription drug coverage. Dorothy has six prescriptions, and previously she paid about $300 a month for her medicines. A Medicare enrollment counselor at a shopping mall helped Dorothy log on to the Medicare web site, where she typed the information on Dorothy's Medicare card and listed Dorothy's prescriptions. When the counselor was finished, the computer showed five different plans that fit Dorothy's needs. Dorothy chose the least-expensive plan, and now, instead of paying $300 a month, she will pay about $36 a month for her medicines. As a result, Dorothy will save more than $3,000 this year.

For Dorothy and for the vast majority of our seniors, the new prescription drug program is working well. Still, when you make a big change in a program involving millions of people, there are bound to be some challenges, and this has been the case with the new drug coverage. Some people had trouble the first time they went to the pharmacy after enrolling. Information for some beneficiaries was not transferred smoothly between Medicare, drug plans, and the States. And in the early days of the drug coverage, waiting times were far too long for many customers and pharmacists who called Medicare or their drug plans to seek help.

Secretary of Health and Human Services Mike Leavitt has traveled to 18 States in the past 3 weeks to meet with Governors and make sure the prescription drug program is working for everyone, and we're making good progress. We're ensuring that drug plans have more up-to-date information on their beneficiaries, and we're improving data-sharing among Medicare, health plans, and the States. We have also extended the transition period from 30 days to 90 days, to guarantee that seniors do not go without the medicine they need as they switch to a new drug plan. We have also acted to ensure that phone calls to the Medicare help line are now answered with little or no waiting time, and we're working with insurers to help them do the same on their phone lines.

Despite early challenges, the results so far are clear: The new Medicare prescription drug plan is a good deal for seniors. If you're a Medicare recipient and have not yet signed up for prescription drug coverage, I encourage you to review your options and choose the plan that is right for you. Americans who

have parents on Medicare should encourage and help them to sign up. Citizen groups, faith-based organizations, health professionals, and pharmacies across America are working to help answer questions. Seniors can also get information 24 hours a day by calling 1–800–MEDICARE or by visiting the official Medicare web site at medicare.gov.

Prescription drug coverage under Medicare has been available for just a few weeks, but its benefits will last for decades to come. I was proud to sign this Medicare reform into law. And because we acted, millions of American seniors are now saving money, getting the life-saving drugs they need, and receiving the modern health care they deserve.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:10 a.m. on February 10 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on February 11. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 10 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks on Presenting the National Medals of Science and Technology

February 13, 2006

Thanks and welcome to the White House. It is an honor to be in the company of so many bright and distinguished Americans. Each of our honorees has been blessed with talent, and each has used their talent to the fullest.

The work we honor today has improved the lives of people everywhere. It has helped to move our economy forward, and it's helped to make sure that America is the leader of innovation in our world. The medals are our Nation's way of expressing gratitude to gifted and visionary citizens. I also appreciate the family members and friends who are here as well.

I want to thank members of my Cabinet who have joined us, Secretary Gutierrez, Secretary Bodman. I want to thank Dr. Jack Marburger, who is the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy. I thank David Sampson from Commerce for joining us. I want to thank Dr. Arden Bement, the Director of the National Science Foundation, who is with us, Dr. Kathie Olsen, the Deputy Director of the National Science Foundation. I want to thank the representatives from the National Science Foundation and members of the board of the National Science and Technology Medals Foundation. Those were the folks who decided that you won. [*Laughter*]

I thank Dr. Bill Jeffrey who is with us, Director of the National Institute of Standards and Technology. I want to thank the previous recipients of the National Medals of Science and Technology who've joined us. I thank my friends Congressman Sherry Boehlert, as well as Dave Reichert from the United States Congress for being here. Thank you both for coming. Most of all, thank you all for joining us.

The medals I'm about to present are the highest award a President can bestow for astounding achievement in science and technology. They recognize work that has helped expand the horizons of human knowledge. The National Medal of Science honors those whose research has enhanced our understanding of life and the world around us. And the National Medal of Technology recognizes innovators whose work keeps America on the cutting edge with discoveries that change the way we live.

The spirit of discovery is one of our national strengths. Our greatest resource has always been the educated, hard-working, ambitious people who call this country their home. From Thomas Edison's light bulb to Robert Ledley's CAT scan machine, most of America's revolutionary inventions began with men and women with the vision to see beyond what is and the desire to pursue what might be.

Think back to how much this country has changed since the—since we first created the National Medal of Technology in 1980. Twenty-five years ago, most Americans used typewriters instead of computers. Most of us used pay phones instead of cell phones. Most of us used carbon paper instead of laser printers. Most of us had rolodexes—you might remember those—[*laughter*]. And on the long family trip, we'd play the license plate game—[*laughter*]—and now we're watching DVDs.