

Mr. Wisnieff. Fifty-two years.

The President. Fifty-two years?

Mr. Wisnieff. Fifty-two happy years. I hope you have the same.

The President. He said 52 happy years, by the way. Thanks for setting a good example.

[*Bob Wisnieff, retiree, made brief remarks.*]

The President. The key is saving a little money in retirement. They're on a fixed income. They've got now a prescription drug benefit. They don't have to make the awful choice between food, electricity, and prescription drugs. And they're actually putting a little extra money in their pocket. If that's true—is that true?

Mr. Wisnieff. That's true.

The President. Okay. If it's true, you ought to look at it. Senior citizens not only here in upstate New York but all across the country, ought to look at this plan, ought to look at the opportunities. If you like it, sign up. It's a good deal. If you need help, ask for help. If you want to find out more about it, call 1-800-MEDICARE or get on the Internet, medicare.gov.

For the students listening here, one of my jobs is to help explain things to the American people, explain why we make the decisions we make. Today I've tried to explain to you why the Medicare system needed to be changed and some of the principles inherent in the change that benefits our seniors. Part of explaining something is to have people who are actually involved with the program, people that are helping to educate, people that know something about the pharmaceutical industry, people who are benefiting from the plan, to come and share their experience as well. And so I want to thank you all for giving me a chance to come.

One thing I didn't say, I do want to conclude by saying, Dr. Steve Uebbing, who is the superintendent of schools—when I came through the line, he told me about his son Daniel's service in the United States military. I meant to thank a good, proud dad, but more importantly, I want to thank his son for volunteering to serve his country, for volunteering to serve.

And for the students listening, I urge you to find out a way to serve your community.

Mentor somebody; help feed the hungry; provide shelter for the homeless. If you're interested in volunteering for the military, that's one way to serve. Peace Corps is a fantastic opportunity to serve your country. Being a teacher is a fantastic way to serve your country. The strength of the United States of America is not the size of our military or the size of our wallets; the strength of the United States of America is found in the hearts and souls of decent, honorable, compassionate people who have heard a call to serve something greater than themselves.

Thank you all for giving me a chance to come by. I ask for God's blessings on you all and on the United States of America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:45 a.m. in the Canandaigua Academy Theatre. In his remarks, he referred to Stephen J. Uebbing, superintendent, Canandaigua City School District; and Mayor Ellen Polimeni of Canandaigua, NY.

Remarks Following a Visit to Ferris Hills at West Lake Senior Center in Canandaigua

March 14, 2006

The reason I have come is, I'm trying to explain to people the benefits of a new Medicare program. Congressman Randy Kuhl asked me to come, and so I did. It shows how influential he is.

I thought the system needed to be changed because it didn't provide a modern form of medicine. A lot of it was good, but some of it was stuck in the past. And so I worked with Congress to get a prescription drug benefit added on to Medicare. The problem is, is that when something changes, people get a little concerned; you know, they say, "Well, I'm not so sure I want to see a change; I'm not so sure change is something that I'm interested in." And I knew that was going to be the case.

But I also knew that if we could convince people who pay attention to take a look and see what options were available, that people would begin to make rational choices, particularly if they had some help. And so I want to thank the Thompson Health Care Group for helping. And as I said at the high school

over there, I said, “If your mom or dad could use a little Medicare, you owe them the opportunity to explain different options and show what’s available.” But the pharmacists are helping a lot to say, “Look, you ought to take a look at the program.”

So we’re in your community to urge people to, you know, kind of step back, see what’s available, design a program that meets your needs, if that’s your interest, and it’s going to save some money. That’s the key, because this—the benefit is costing less than anticipated, as a result of competition and choice. It’s really worthwhile looking at.

I’ve spent a lot of time, as my administration spends a lot of time, talking about how to get people—information into people’s hands. And so that’s why we’re here. Thank you for giving us a chance to come by and visit with you. It looks like you’ve got a beautiful facility.

Okay, well, thanks to the press for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:09 p.m.

Remarks on the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefits and a Question-and-Answer Session in Silver Spring, Maryland

March 15, 2006

The President. Listen, thank you all for coming. First of all, I’m proud to be traveling with a Cabinet Secretary. He runs Health and Human Services. His job is to make sure that the Medicare plan works the way it was designed to work.

We’ve come to answer some questions, if you have any—about any subject. [Laughter] But before I begin, I do want to share some thoughts with you.

First, speaking about Cabinet Secretaries, I know Mary Hill is here. Where’s Mary? Oh, hi, Mary. The reason I bring her up is that her daughter is married to one of my Cabinet Secretaries, and she is a fine woman—so is the Cabinet Secretary—[laughter]—Norm Mineta, Norm and Deni Mineta.

I want to thank the folks who run this fine facility. Thanks for letting us come by and talk about good health; that’s what we’re here

to talk about. By the way, Laura sends her best. You might remember her; she’s the most patient woman in America. I don’t know why she didn’t come; I should have asked her. I’ll ask her. You wanted her to come? Well, listen, that happens to me a lot—[laughter]—“You stay home; let Laura come.”

But I’m here to talk about Medicare. First of all, when I got to Washington I took a look at the Medicare system and thought it needed to be improved. When the Government makes a commitment, it ought to make good on its commitment, and it ought to do—make sure we deliver excellence when we say we’re going to do something. Lyndon Johnson—nice Texan—signed the Medicare bill, and it was a commitment by the Federal Government to provide health care for our seniors. And my attitude is, if we’re going to provide health care for the seniors, let’s provide a good system, a modern system.

And so I took a look at it and said that Medicare is doing a lot of good stuff, you know; it really is. It’s an important system. But I asked the question, couldn’t we do it better? And for example, just to give you an idea, you know, Medicare would pay \$28,000 for the surgery for ulcers but wouldn’t pay a dime for the medicine to prevent the surgery from being needed in the first place. That didn’t sound like a very good system to me. In other words, what had happened was, medicine started to change. You all know what I’m talking about. Pharmaceuticals became a really important part of the delivery of good health care. But Medicare did not change with medicine.

And so one of the things that we did, we worked with Republicans and worked with Democrats and said, “Let’s provide a prescription drug benefit for our seniors to make sure that Medicare is a modern system.” Now, I understood that when we began to change Medicare, modernize Medicare, it could create some confusion with people. You know, some people just don’t want to change. Some people thought things were just fine and that giving different options or giving people an opportunity to make different decisions could create some confusion.

Now, I understood that. But I also felt it was worth the risk of creating confusion to