

Legislative Agenda

Q. Sir, do you think the Patient's Bill of Rights is going to pass, sir?

President Clinton. Do I believe it will?

Q. Do you believe the Patient's Bill of Rights will pass, given that you're to receive the report of the quality care commission today?

President Clinton. I do. I hope it will pass this year, and I think there are relatively few differences. The difference between the business and the insurance community on the one hand, and the medical and patient community on the other, about many things, but there's, you know, there's some discussion about the litigation issues and all that. We have to resolve some of the differences. I have been impressed with the number of Republicans who have agreed with what I think is an almost unanimous position of the Democratic Caucus in the House, and I think there's a similar sense in the Senate that it is urgent that we do something on this.

So I'm hopeful that we can do it this year. If we—I'm hopeful that that will happen. I hope we get the tobacco settlement. Obviously, I'd like it if my entire legislative program could be adopted this year, as well as some of their ideas, but at a minimum we shouldn't leave without dealing with the tobacco issue.

Q. Are you going to keep Congress in until it passes, sir?

President Clinton. Well, I would certainly consider that. I don't think they should leave without resolving the tobacco thing. You know, passing over from one year to the next is understandable in a measure of this size and magnitude, but we're talking about 1,000 children a day who are going to have their lives shortened. You can't justify taking another whole year to deal with this. The issues are somewhat complicated, but they're not that difficult, and they ought to be dealt with this year.

Q. Once the Paula Jones case is resolved—

NCAA Basketball Tournament

Q. Did you see the tournament?

President Clinton. It's a great tournament. It's the most interesting tournament we've had in some time, really.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:05 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Boris Yeltsin and Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin of Russia; President Jiang Zemin of China; James M. Sasser, U.S. Ambassador to China; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; and Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks on Signing the Memorandum on Establishment of the Quality Interagency Coordination Task Force

March 13, 1998

Thank you very much. Mr. Vice President, thank you for your work on this issue and your interest in it. I thank Secretary Shalala, Secretary Herman, Secretary West, the members of the White House staff who worked on this. But especially let me thank the members of the Commission and the Executive Director of the Commission, Janet Corrigan. They have done a remarkable citizen service for the people of the United States of America, and we're all very grateful to them.

As we approach a new century with all its stunning advances in science and technology, we know that many of them will come in medicine and health. We must act now to spread these breakthroughs and improve the quality of health care for every American. I accept the Commission's report. I endorse your recommendations.

For 5 years we have worked to expand access to quality health care for the American people, step by step: health insurance coverage for people who move between jobs; expanded health care coverage for millions of children; strengthened Medicare with more preventive benefits. Last year, as the Vice President said, this Commission recommended a Patient's Bill of Rights. Last month I acted to ensure by Executive order that one-third of all Americans—those in Medicare, Medicaid, veterans health care systems and other Federal plans—enjoy the benefits of this Patient's Bill of Rights. Now these protections must be extended to all Americans. And in the remaining 68 days of this congressional session, Congress must

take the next step and make the Patient's Bill of Rights the law of the land.

Now, as you have told America in this report, we must also seize this moment of opportunity to improve the quality of health care for all our people. For all its strengths, our health care system still is plagued by avoidable errors, overused and underused procedures and gaps in the quality of care. For example, when hundreds of thousands of Americans are needlessly injured while in the hospital, when 18,000 Americans die of heart attacks that did not have to be fatal, when 80,000 women undergo unnecessary hysterectomies every year, surely we can do better.

This Commission has drawn a road map for higher quality across American health care. Above all, our Nation must develop uniform national standards so that health plans can compete on quality, not just cost and so that health care consumers can judge for themselves. This is the best way to assure quality health care for all Americans.

We can take three steps to advance these high health care standards. First, health care quality standards should be set at a forum bringing together providers, business and labor, consumers, insurers, and Government. I've asked the Vice President to convene this health care quality forum this June.

Second, I'm ordering Federal agencies to create a task force to find ways to improve quality in the health care systems that we operate. The Federal Government must lead the way in lifting health care quality for all our people.

Third, I support this Commission's recommendation to create a permanent Health Care Quality Council to set new goals and track our progress in meeting those goals. A council should be established by any health care quality legislation enacted this year.

We can make this year a time of real achievement in our mission to improve health care for every American. The American health care system has been the best in the world in the 20th century. If we press forward with medical research, enact a Patient's Bill of Rights, insist on high quality everywhere in America, continue to expand quality affordable coverage, protect and preserve Medicare and Medicaid, we can make

American health care the best in the world in the 21st century.

Now I intend to sign an Executive order to all the relevant agencies to make sure they work together to develop the standards you recommend for quality health care, first for those whom we reach, and hopefully as a model for all Americans.

Again, I thank this Commission. I ask the people and the members of the press here present to remember just the single instances I cited from the Commission's report of examples where we still have serious quality challenges. And I ask you all to rededicate yourself to this purpose on this day.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:45 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Janet Corrigan, Executive Director, President's Advisory Commission on Quality and Consumer Protection in the Health Care Industry.

Memorandum on the Establishment of the Quality Interagency Coordination Task Force

March 13, 1998

Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Director of the Office of Personnel Management

Subject: Establishment of the Quality Interagency Coordination Task Force

Last November, I endorsed the "Patient Bill of Rights" recommended by the Advisory Commission on Consumer Protection and Quality in the Health Care Industry (the "Quality Commission"). On February 20, 1998, after receiving your encouraging reports from the Vice President about the degree to which your agencies are in compliance with these rights, I directed you to take all administrative actions under your authority to come into compliance.

As a result of my February 20 memorandum and your commitment to implement the Patient Bill of Rights, the Federal Government will be taking the lead in ensuring patient protections. By holding the Federal