

need to ensure that every American, young and old, has adequate, affordable health care.

Today I want to again urge the Congress to step up to this challenge by making the passage of a strong Patients' Bill of Rights and the provision of a voluntary Medicare prescription drug benefit top priorities when they return to Washington.

This critical legislation is long overdue. The more than 190 million Americans who use managed care or other insurance plans have waited too long for a strong, enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights. They deserve the right to see a specialist, to emergency room care, wherever and whenever they need it, and the right to hold health care plans accountable for harmful decisions.

Last year, in an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote, the House passed a strong Patients' Bill of Rights that provides the right protections all Americans need and deserve. It's a bill I would sign. But more than 6 months later the bill is still languishing in Congress. Despite their pledge to complete a real bill, the Republican majority has not only delayed action, it's actually considering legislation that would leave tens of millions of Americans without Federal protections.

A right that can't be enforced isn't a right at all, it's just a request. We need a strong bill that protects all Americans and all plans, not one that provides more cover for the special interests than real coverage for American patients.

Congress also has an obligation to strengthen Medicare and modernize it, with a voluntary, affordable prescription drug benefit. No one creating a Medicare program today would even think of excluding coverage for prescription drugs. Yet more than three in five older Americans still lack affordable and dependable prescription drug coverage.

Just this week we saw further evidence of the unacceptable burden the growing cost of prescription drugs places on senior Americans. According to a report by the nonprofit group, Families USA, the price of prescription drugs most often used by seniors has risen at double the rate of inflation for 6 years running, a burden that falls hardest on seniors who lack drug coverage because they simply don't receive the price discounts most insurers negotiate.

Seniors and people with disabilities living on fixed incomes simply cannot continue to cope with these kinds of price increases. That's why we must take action to help them, not next year or the year after that but this year. My budget includes a comprehensive plan to modernize Medicare and provide for a long overdue prescription drug benefit for all beneficiaries.

I'm pleased there's growing bipartisan support for tackling this challenge. Earlier this month Republican leaders in the House put forth an outline of a plan that offers as a stated goal access to affordable coverage for all older Americans. Unfortunately, their plan falls short of meeting the goal. It would do virtually nothing for seniors with modest middle class incomes between \$15,000 and \$50,000 a year. Nearly half of all Medicare beneficiaries who lack prescription drug coverage fall into that category.

It's not too late to give all our seniors real prescription drug coverage this year. We can work together on a plan that's affordable, dependable, and available to all older Americans.

So I say to Congress, when you come back to Washington next week, let's get back to work on a strong, enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights; let's get back to work on voluntary Medicare prescription drug benefits. The health care of Americans is too important to be sidetracked by partisan politics. The need is urgent, and the time to act is now.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 5:58 p.m. on April 28 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on April 29. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 28 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Remarks at the White House Correspondents' Association Dinner April 29, 2000

The President. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, President Page, President-elect Dillon, distinguished guests. I am really happy to be here. Happy to be reunited at long last with the White House Press Corps.

[*Laughter*] If I may, let me direct your attention to a photograph. [*Laughter*] Taken just moments ago, it proves beyond a doubt that I am indeed happy to be here. [*Laughter*]

Now wait a minute. It seems that my hair in that photo—[*laughter*—is a little longer than it is tonight. So maybe I am happy to be here, and maybe I'm not. Feel free to speculate. [*Laughter*] Admittedly, looks and photos can be deceiving. Now look at this photo. It's a recent one of the Vice President applauding one of my policy initiatives. [*Laughter*] But look a little closer. Those are not his real hands. [*Laughter*]

Now this photo. [*Laughter*] It made all the papers, but I have to tell you something. I am almost certain this is not the real Easter Bunny. [*Laughter*] The next one is my favorite. I really like it. Let's see the next photo. [*Laughter*] Isn't it grand? [*Laughter*] I thought it was too good to be true. But there is one thing beyond dispute tonight. This is really me. I am really here. And the record on that count is clear, in good days and bad, in times of great confidence or great controversy, I have actually shown up here for 8 straight years. Looking back, that was probably a mistake. [*Laughter*] In just 8 years, I've given you enough material for 20 years. [*Laughter*]

This is a special night for me for a lot of reasons. Jay Leno is here. Now, no matter how mean he is to me, I just love this guy—[*laughter*—because, together, together, we give hope to grey-haired, chunky baby boomers everywhere. [*Laughter*]

Tonight marks the end of an era—the after-dinner party hosted by Vanity Fair. [*Laughter*] As you may have heard, it's been canceled. Every year, for 8 years, the Vanity Fair party became more and more and more exclusive. So tonight, it has arrived at its inevitable conclusion: This year, no one made the guest list. [*Laughter*] Actually, I hear the Bloomberg party will be even harder to get into than the Vanity Fair party was. But I'm not worried, I'm going with Janet Reno. [*Laughter*]

Now, the Bloomberg party is also a cast party for the stars of "The West Wing," who are celebrating the end of their first season. You'll have to forgive me if I'm not as excited as everyone else is at the thought of a "West

Wing" finale party. But I've got to give them credit; their first season got a lot better ratings than mine did—[*laughter*—not to mention the reviews. The critics just hated my travel office episode—[*laughter*—and that David Gergen cameo fell completely flat. [*Laughter*]

Speaking of real-life drama, I'm so glad that Senator McCain is back tonight. I welcome him, especially. As you all know, he just made a difficult journey back to a place where he endured unspeakable abuse at the hands of his oppressors, the Senate Republican caucus. [*Laughter*]

I am glad to see that Senator McCain and Governor Bush are talking about healing their rift. Actually, they're thinking about, talking about healing their rift. And you know, I would really like to help them. I mean, I've got a lot of experience repairing the breach. I've worked with Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, I've worked with Israelis and Palestinians, with Joe Lockhart and David Westin. [*Laughter*] But the differences between Bush and McCain may be just too vast. I mean, McCain as Bush's running mate? Hasn't the man suffered enough? [*Laughter*]

George W. Bush has got a brand-spanking-new campaign strategy. He's moving toward the political center, distancing himself from his own party, stealing ideas from the other party. I'm so glad Dick Morris has finally found work again. [*Laughter*]

You know, the clock is running down on the Republicans in Congress, too. I feel for them. I do. They've only got 7 more months to investigate me. [*Laughter*] That's a lot of pressure. So little time, so many unanswered questions. [*Laughter*] For example, over the last few months I've lost 10 pounds. Where did they go? [*Laughter*] Why haven't I produced them to the Independent Counsel? How did some of them manage to wind up on Tim Russert? [*Laughter*]

Now, some of you might think I've been busy writing my memoirs. I'm not concerned about my memoirs, I'm concerned about my resume. Here's what I've got so far. Career objective: To stay President. [*Laughter*] But being realistic, I would consider an executive position with another country. [*Laughter*] Of course, I would prefer to stay within the G—

8. [Laughter] I'm working hard on this resume deal. I've been getting a lot of tips on how to write it, mostly from my staff. They really seem to be up on this stuff. [Laughter]

And they tell me I have to use the active voice with a the resume. You know, things like: "Commanded U.S. Armed Forces;" "ordered air strikes;" "served three terms as President"—everybody embellishes a little—[laughter]—"designed, built, and painted bridge to 21st Century;" "supervised Vice President's invention of the Internet;" "generated, attracted, heightened and maintained controversy." [Laughter]

Now, I know lately I haven't done a very good job at creating controversy, and I'm sorry for that. You all have so much less to report. I guess that's why you're covering and commenting on my mood, my quiet, contemplative moments, my feelings during these final months in office. [Laughter] In that case, you might be interested to know that a film crew has been following me around the White House, documenting my remaining time there.

This is a strange time in the life of any administration, but I think this short film will show that I have come to terms with it. Can we see the film?

[At this point, a video was shown.]

The President. You like me. You really like me. [Laughter] Now, you know, I may complain about coming here. But a year from now, I'll have to watch someone else give this speech. And I'll feel an onset of that rare affliction, unique to former Presidents: AGDD, Attention Getting Deficit Disorder—[laughter]—plus—which I'll really be burned up when Al Gore turns out to be funnier than me. [Laughter]

But let me say to all of you, I have loved these 8 years. You know, I read in the history books how other Presidents say the White House is like a penitentiary and every motive they have is suspect. Even George Washington complained he was treated like a common thief, and they all say they can't wait to get away. I don't know what the heck they're talking about. [Laughter] I've had a wonderful time. It's been an honor to serve and fun to laugh. I only wish that we'd even laughed more these last 8 years, because

power is not the most important thing in life, and it only counts for what you use it.

I thank you for what you do every day, thank you for all the fun times that Hillary and I have had. Keep at it. It's a great country. It deserves our best.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 p.m. in the Ballroom at the Washington Hilton. In his remarks, he referred to Susan Page, president, and Arlene Dillon, president-elect, White House Correspondents' Association; "Tonight Show" host Jay Leno; Senator John McCain; David Gergen, editor at large, U.S. News and Weekly Report; David Westin, president, ABC News; Dick Morris, political consultant; and Tim Russert, moderator, "Meet the Press."

Commencement Address at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, Michigan

April 30, 2000

Thank you very much. I must say I was very moved by Secretary Slater's remarks. But I realize he was lifted to new heights of eloquence by being back at his alma mater. And I also realize he was once again proving the adage of Clinton's third law of politics: Whenever possible, be introduced by someone you have appointed to high office. [Laughter] They will praise you to the skies, true or false. [Laughter]

I must say, I was afraid, though, Rodney was about to commit—we have been friends for many years—I've never heard him say anything politically incorrect. I've never heard him utter a curse word. I've never heard him betray a character flaw. But I almost heard an ethnic slur today when he said he got me because I look like President Shelton. [Laughter] All gray-haired, middle-aged Scotch-Irish guys look alike, you know. [Laughter]

I'm very proud of Secretary Slater, and you should be, too. And I'm proud of General Coburn and his leadership in the Army, and Gene Conti, who is the Assistant Secretary for Policy at our Transportation Department with Secretary Slater. We have been richly blessed by this university. And President