

Week Ending Friday, July 20, 2001

The President's Radio Address

July 14, 2001

Good morning. This week in Washington, we have turned our attention to the goal of better health care for all Americans. I have asked Congress to send me a strong Patients' Bill of Rights, one that provides immediate access to specialists and an immediate appeal to a panel of doctors when an HMO denies care. I hope to sign a bill that gets people help when they need it, not a bill adding hundreds of dollars to the high premiums they already pay.

I am also asking Congress to join me in modernizing and strengthening Medicare. All of us, young and old, have a stake in the outcome of this discussion. From its beginning 36 years ago, Medicare has represented a basic binding commitment to our seniors. That commitment will always stand. And as medicine advances and the needs of our seniors change, Medicare must advance and improve, as well.

The most pressing challenge is the lack of coverage for prescription drugs. To begin solving this problem, I am proposing a new national drug discount program for seniors. This is a straightforward, nonbureaucratic program which can be in place by January. Everyone in Medicare will be eligible for a drug discount card, costing no more than \$1 or 2 per month. Present this card at a participating pharmacy, and you will receive a substantial discount—at least 10 percent. It's as simple as that, and it's convenient, as well.

This program will provide immediate help to seniors without destabilizing Medicare's finances. Yet, my prescription drug plan is only a first step. We need broader reform to bring Medicare into the 21st century. We need to expand coverage, improve services, strengthen Medicare financing, and give seniors more control over the health care they receive. And as Congress takes up legislation, they should be guided by some basic principles.

First, for everyone in retirement or near retirement, any changes in their Medicare coverage should be up to them. No senior should have to accept something different if they like Medicare just the way it is.

Second, all seniors should be offered a range of new Medicare plans, both Government and private. Every plan offered to seniors should have at least the same benefits as the Government plan. And all plans must offer prescription drug coverage.

Third, everyone enrolled in Medicare should have the power to choose which plan works best for him or her. The plans will compete with each other, forcing them to offer better service, extra benefits, and lower premiums.

Fourth, reform must provide special help to seniors with low incomes and unusually high medical costs. We must put caps on the amount any senior can be asked to pay in a year. And since the reformed Medicare will cover prescription drugs, low income seniors will no longer have to pay for costly Medigap insurance.

And finally, we must strengthen Medicare's finances and make sure that the benefits promised to our seniors will be always there.

Medicine in America is constantly improving, and Medicare must improve at the same pace. By these principles, we can assure that Medicare will always offer seniors the care they need with the quality they deserve.

Thank you very much for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 11:21 a.m. on July 13 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on July 14. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on July 13 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
Congressional Medal of Honor
to Captain Ed W. Freeman**

July 16, 2001

The President. Please be seated. Good morning, and welcome to the White House. Today, for the first time, I will present the Medal of Honor. It's a unique privilege to present the Nation's highest military distinction to Ed Freeman of Boise, Idaho. This moment is well deserved, and it's been long in coming.

Our White House military unit is accustomed to a lot of great events, but I can assure you they started this day with a great sense of anticipation. After all, they know how rare this kind of gathering is and what it means. To be in the presence of one who has won the Medal of Honor is a privilege; to be in the room with a group of over 50 is a moment none of us will ever forget. We're in the presence of more than 50 of the bravest men who have ever worn the uniform, and I want to welcome you all to the White House.

It's an honor, as well, to welcome Barbara—a name I kind of like—[*laughter*—Ed's wife, along with his family members and members of his unit from Vietnam. As well, I want to welcome the Vice President, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Chief of the Joint Chiefs, as well as members of the Joint Chiefs. I want to welcome Senator McCain. I want to welcome Senator Craig, Congressman Otter, and Congressman Simpson from the delegation of Idaho. I want to welcome you all.

It was in this house, in this office upstairs, that Abraham Lincoln signed into law the bills establishing the Medal of Honor. By a custom that began with Theodore Roosevelt, the Medal of Honor is to be presented by the President. That duty came to Harry S. Truman more than 70 times. He often said that he'd rather wear the medal than to be the Commander in Chief. Some of you might have heard him say that. [*Laughter*] Perhaps you were also here on May 2, 1963, when John F. Kennedy welcomed 240 recipients of the Medal of Honor.

By all rights, another President from Texas should have had the honor of conferring this medal. It was in the second year of Lyndon Johnson's Presidency that Army Captain Ed Freeman did something that the men of the 7th Cavalry have never forgotten. Years pass, even decades, but the memory of what happened on November 14, 1965, has always stayed with them.

For his actions that day, Captain Freeman was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. But the men who were there, including the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Bruce Crandall, felt a still higher honor was called for. Through the unremitting efforts of Lieutenant Colonel Crandall and many others, and the persuasive weight from Senator John McCain, the story now comes to its rightful conclusion.

That story began with the battalion surrounded by the enemy in one of Vietnam's fiercest battles. The survivors remember the desperate fear of almost certain death. They remember gunfire that one witness described as the most intense he had ever seen. And they remember the sight of an unarmed helicopter coming to their aid.

The man at the controls flew through the gunfire not once, not 10 times, but at least 21 times. That single helicopter brought the water, ammunition, and supplies that saved many lives on the ground. And the same pilot flew more than 70 wounded soldiers to safety.

In a moment, we will hear the full citation, in all its heroic detail. General Eisenhower once observed that when you hear a Medal of Honor citation, you practically assume that the man in question didn't make it out alive. In fact, about one in six never did. And the other five, men just like you all here, probably didn't expect to.

Citations are also written in the most simple of language, needing no embellishment or techniques of rhetoric. They record places and names and events that describe themselves. The medal itself bears only one word, and needs only one: Valor.

As a boy of 13, Ed Freeman saw thousands of men on maneuvers pass by his home in Mississippi. He decided then and there that he would be a soldier. A lifetime later, the Congress has now decided that he's even