

Remarks at a Health Care Rally in Greensburg, Pennsylvania July 15, 1994

Thank you very much. Mayor Fajt, Congressman Murphy, Senator Wofford, ladies and gentlemen: I must say, when I knew I was coming to Greensburg, I never dreamed that all of you would show up. And I am delighted to see you here. From the time we arrived at the Latrobe airport, and then driving all the way in, I felt so comfortable in this part of the country. I saw all these small towns, and we were coming in here—we must have gone about 2 miles where every last place of business was either a car dealership or a muffler shop or something else. *[Laughter]* When I was 6 years old, the first thing I ever did was try to fix a car that was burned up, and I've been struggling ever since. I got into public life so I wouldn't have to work that hard for a living. *[Laughter]*

I love seeing all the smiling faces. I even enjoy the honest debate we've got here in the crowd about the health care system. But most important of all, I want to thank you for coming out here today to give democracy a chance to work, and to listen to the two people who were here before me, Louise Mastowski and Lynn Hicks, because they're really what this struggle for health care is all about. They're really what the struggle for the future of America is all about.

If you look at the people in this crowd, almost all of you are hard-working middle class people who have obeyed the law, paid your taxes, and played by the rules your entire life. And I ran for President because I was sick and tired of seeing this country talk to you and say one thing and then go to Washington and do another. I watched the deficit—*[applause]*. I'm running today as President—every day, back and forth from meeting to meeting and town to town and issue to issue—to do just what I said I would do back in 1992, to try to move this country forward and make it work for middle class America again.

And when I took office I had seen years and years in which the deficit exploded, our country was getting deeper and deeper in debt, the wealthiest people had their taxes cut, the middle class had their taxes increased, and we avoided facing the tough problems that every country in the world that wants to go into the 21st

century has got to face. And I want you to know that this health care issue is in some ways the toughest of all. And I came here today to have a neighborly talk about what the real facts are and to ask you to help the United States Congress to make a decision that is in your interest.

But let me back up and say every time we try to change something, the same old arguments and the same old rhetoric keeps coming out to try to paralyze people from moving this country forward. Last year, last year, after 12 years in which the deficit of this country had exploded, we were driving ourselves into debt, the Congress adopted an economic program by the narrowest of margins, with the help of your Congressman and your Senator Harris Wofford.

And now we've had a year to see it work. We had \$255 billion of spending cuts. We had a tax increase on 1.5 percent of Americans, the wealthiest Americans. Fifteen million working Americans got a tax cut—families. Ninety percent of the small businesses in this country were eligible for reduced taxes. And guess what? We're going to have 3 years of reduction in our Government deficit for the first time since Harry Truman was President. And we've got 3.8 million new jobs.

Just this week, just this week it was reported that our Government deficit is now smaller as a percentage of our income than it's been since 1979. We are moving this country in the right direction, creating jobs, reducing the deficit. We have taken \$700 billion of debt off our children's future that was projected to be there when I became President of the United States. And you know, all the talk in the world and all the things that you hear in Washington will not change the fact that we stepped up to it and we did the right thing to move this country forward. Now the question is, what are we going to do to guarantee that the people that work hard have a future?

We made a good beginning. We created some jobs; we reduced the deficit. But we've got to educate and train people for tomorrow. We've got to guarantee that every American working family can change jobs and always know that they've got a good education. We've reformed

the college loan program now so that 20 million Americans are eligible for lower interest rates on their college loans, so people can go to school. The Congress has before it a crime bill which will put 100,000 more police officers on the street, pass the "three strikes and you're out" law, and give our kids some things to say yes to as well as to say no to, so we can keep more kids out of trouble. Yesterday hearings began on our welfare reform law to make welfare a second chance, not a way of life, and to move people from welfare to work. We are moving forward.

And I am proud of what has been done. But I have to tell you that unless we face up to our responsibility to reform health care, the future of middle class America and the ability of our administration to continue to move this economy forward is in doubt. And here's why: because more and more Americans are losing health care coverage.

In the last 5 years, 5 million more Americans are without health care coverage. We are the only major country in the world where we've got fewer people with health insurance now than we did 5 years ago. Ten years ago, 88 percent of our people had health insurance. Now we're down to 83 and dropping. Meanwhile, we are spending more money on health care than anybody else in the world. We spend 14 percent of our income on health care—nobody else spends more than 10—so that we have fewer people. And the politicians have it; the wealthy have it; the poor have it; if you go to jail, you've got it. Only the middle class can lose it. I don't think that makes much sense in the United States.

You know, you hear all this rhetoric—and I want to answer some of the charges on some of the signs out here today. People say, oh, we're rationing health care; that's what my plan does. Well, it doesn't, but I'll tell you something. You tell me how you can justify in the United States of America rationing health care to a dairy farmer like Louise. How can you justify rationing health care to a fine woman and her husband and their five children? We say this is a pro-family country. There's a man, his wife, and five children; we have just rationed health care to them. No other advanced country in the world would cut them off without any health care. Only the United States does it. I think we can do better.

When I arrived at the Latrobe airport, I met three more people just like these two women who talked today. One of them was Patricia Courson; she lives in Ellwood City, near here. Until last year her husband had a good job at a hospital that came with a quality health care plan. He can't get any coverage through his new job. She works part-time at a supermarket; she's not covered either. For a year they've paid their own cost out of pocket, with a kind of a carry-forward policy that some of you have had before, too. But it's about to run out. And she's got a respiratory ailment, and she has to have treatment every night. So it looks like they're going to lose this coverage. Now, they've worked all their lives; they've paid for their health care all their lives. They haven't done anything wrong. There are 600,000 people in Pennsylvania alone in the same boat. And their health care has been rationed. They are not on welfare, they are working, and they do not have it. This woman wrote me the following: She said, "I don't want to die. I've got things to do, grandchildren to help grow up. We're going to fall between the cracks." That's right. They're not poor, they're not rich, they're not politicians, and they're not in jail, so they can lose their health insurance.

Now, that is the issue, folks. And even though everybody knows we need change, even though everybody knows we're the only advanced country that doesn't cover everybody, even though you now know we're actually losing ground, we're having a hard time. Well, let me tell you, don't feel bad, we've been trying to do this for 60 years. We never have been able to do it. Why? Because every time we tried to cover all the middle class working people in the country for 60 years, the same crowd got up with the same arguments and said this is socialism, this is rationing, this is the Government taking over the health care system.

And you know what? We didn't do it. Now, the Harry and Louise ads are just the 21st century, the latest example in the last part of the 21st century, what's been going on for 60 years, scaring you to death about what we're trying to do. Now, let me just talk about this. When I put my plan out—let's just go through what it said—I said I didn't want a Government plan, I wanted private insurance for everybody. The only thing I wanted the Government to do was to require everybody to have private insurance, to ask employers and their employees to split

the cost, and to give a break to small business people and farmers so they could buy insurance at affordable rates. That's what I wanted to do.

Now, I then went around the country, and I listened to people who actually read it. And they said, "Look, there are some problems with that." So we came back and said, okay, we need improvements in our plan. There ought to be less bureaucracy, less regulation, even more choice and flexibility for consumers so they could pick their own doctors, and an even bigger break to small business. So we said, okay, we'll do all that. And then they said, "Well, there are still three things wrong with it. It's socialism, it's rationing, and it's bad for small business." So I want to just tell you something, folks. Socialism is when the Government runs a health care system. We don't have socialized medicine in this country, and my plan is for private insurance and private doctors. So when they say it, they are not telling the truth.

Now, nobody thinks Medicare is socialism, I take it. You know how Medicare is paid for? How many of you know how Medicare is paid for? Raise your hand if you know. You pay for it every month in a payroll tax. Is that socialism? No. I don't want to raise—I don't even want to pay for it like Medicare. I just want people who don't have insurance to have it.

The second thing they say is rationing. You saw rationing up here today. There are 39 million Americans like Louise and Lynn and their children and their grandchildren that don't have any insurance. That is rationing. Under our plan you get to choose your doctor, we keep the same private health care system, and we protect people. Let me tell you this. You all think about this, everybody in this crowd today: More and more and more working Americans are insured at work under plans that give them no choice of doctor. They are losing their choices today. More than half of the American people have no choice today. Under our plan you get more choices than you got today, not less. So the rationing argument is a bum rap. We're rationing today.

Now, the last argument, and the one that's really gotten everybody in a tizzy in Washington, is that it is fair and right and just to ask all people to have health insurance and ask employers and employees to split the difference, but if you do, it will be too tough on small business. Now, that's an important argument because most of the new jobs in this country are being

created by small business. Congressman Murphy and I talked on the way in about how even though the economy's pulling out in America, you need more jobs here. The last thing in the world we need to do is to do anything that will undermine the job base here. So what's the answer? The answer is to give a break to small business in two ways: cut their costs and allow them to go into pools where they can buy insurance more cheaply.

But let me say this, and I want you to listen because I would not—I ran for President to create jobs, not to cost them. We passed an economic program that gave 90 percent of the small businesses in this country an eligibility for increased tax cuts, not tax increases.

But you think about this: There's only one State in America, one State, Hawaii, that's got the same system I recommended. And you know what? For 20 years they said here's the deal: Every employer and employee have to buy health insurance, and they're going to split the deal. They have to do it, at least 50-50. Guess what? In Hawaii people live longer, the infant mortality rate is lower, and the small business insurance rates are 30 percent lower than they are in the rest of the United States of America. It is cheaper there, not more expensive.

Now, so, the people in Washington are saying, "Well, just make a few little reforms." Let me tell you what I do not want to do. Under the guise of saying we're making progress on health care but we're not making any tough decisions, I don't want to see us pass a bill that will one more time give more help to the poor, raise middle class insurance rates, and leave more people like Louise and Lynn without insurance. And I don't think you want me to do that either. Let's cover everybody and make America work.

Folks, all over America the airwaves are full of a lot of rhetoric. This has gotten to be about politics. I don't know whether Louise or Lynn or those three people I met at the airport today are Republicans or Democrats or independents. I don't have any earthly idea who they voted for for President, and frankly I don't care. They're Americans. They work hard. They're entitled to health insurance. That is the issue. This is not a political issue. This is a practical problem.

Let me just say this in closing. I just got back from a very moving trip to Europe. I went to the Baltic countries, the first American Presi-

dent ever to be there, as the Russian armies are withdrawing, thanks in large measure to our efforts. I went to Berlin and was the first American President ever to be able to speak in the Eastern part of Berlin, with over 100,000 people there. And I met with three big groups of our military men and women and their families, their spouses, and their children, three big groups, enthusiastic crowds. And I was shocked. They only asked me about one issue, one, our military families. They said, "Please, Mr. President, a lot of us have to leave the service; a lot of us are coming home. We had health care in the service. Don't let us come home to America that we served that won't give our children health insurance. Don't let us do that." That's all they talked about.

So I tell you, folks, we've made changes in our plan. We've made it better for small business, more flexibility, guaranteed even more choices. And I want to challenge the people in Congress, especially the Members of the other party, not to pass a program that claims to do something it doesn't do. Let's don't burn the middle class one more time. Let's help the middle class. Let's help small business. Let's provide health care to all Americans. We can do it. Other nations have done it, and we can do it, too.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:28 p.m. at Greensburg Courthouse Square. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Daniel Fajt of Greensburg, and residents Louise Mastowski and Lynn Hicks.

Statement on the Closing of the Embassy of Rwanda *July 15, 1994*

The United States cannot allow representatives of a regime that supports genocidal massacre to remain on our soil.

NOTE: This statement was included in a statement by the Press Secretary announcing the closing of the Embassy of Rwanda and ordering all personnel to leave the United States.

Memorandum on Employee Absence Due to Tropical Storm Alberto *July 15, 1994*

*Memorandum for the Heads of Executive
Departments and Agencies*

Subject: Excused Absence for Employees
Affected by the Flooding Caused by Tropical
Storm Alberto

I am saddened by the devastating losses caused by the flooding that has resulted from tropical storm Alberto and the impact on the well-being and livelihood of our fellow Americans. Many parts of the Federal Government have been mobilized to respond to this disaster and to begin a massive effort to recover from the ravages of this flooding.

As part of this effort, I request heads of executive departments and agencies who have Federal civilian employees in the areas designated as disaster areas because of the flooding to use their discretion to excuse from duty, without charge to leave or loss of pay, any such employee who is faced with a personal emergency because of the flooding and who can be spared from his or her usual responsibilities. This policy should also be applied to any employee who is needed for emergency law enforcement, relief, or clean-up efforts authorized by Federal, State, or local officials having jurisdiction.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON