

she thought she was too old and didn't want to bump anybody else out of it, but I really, just by sort of filling my head with all of this, I became much more sensitive about the time. I mean, to a lot of these people, the difference in 48 hours is an eternity about whether a given procedure will work or not—and you're just out there fiddling around. I mean, it's just—it's absolutely inexcusable.

And a lot of these people—like when you ask them for their name—a lot of these people are following the path of least resistance. They're doing what they think will please the people for whom they work. They're not out there trying to kill your patients. They're out there doing what they think is going to please the people that cut them a check every 2 weeks. And we've got to change that.

[Secretary Shalala suggested that the Patients' Bill of Rights would actually save money because it would reduce the cases of wrongly denied coverage for symptoms of a disease at an early, perhaps curable, and less expensive stage. Dr. Evjy agreed, and noted that the insurance system had a responsibility to provide patients with accurate options, much the way doctors must explain conditions to their patients. Mr. Fleming noted that the ERISA laws governing the majority of health plans were outdated and out of pace with medical technology and that insurance carriers must also keep pace with modernity. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Togo D. West, Jr., endorsed Mr. Fleming's point and stressed the importance of definite timelines in providing care. Secretary Shalala said congressional action was necessary to give the public the rights the President gave to those in Federal plans. A participant noted that the Patients' Bill of Rights would be instrumental in ensuring information to empower patients and providers to work col-

lectively. Dr. Dickey agreed and said she looked forward to working with the President to enact such legislation.]

The President. I want to thank all of you. This has been very helpful to me and to members of our administration and I hope to the press and to the public. So thank you for hosting us. And I want to say a special word of thanks to Mary and to David and to Mick and Dr. Evjy and to Carol for relating some painful personal experiences.

And I would just leave you with this thought: For me, this is about even more than health care; this is about how people feel about America. I mean, for 6 years I've worked hard to make this country work again, to give people the sense that they can be really not only proud of America, but they can feel that it is a fair and decent place where everybody has a chance. And that obviously has to apply to decisions of life or death in the health care field, just as much as going to vote, getting a job, living in a safe neighborhood.

These stories are not the kind of stories any American of conscience would ever want to be told in the United States. And it's not the United States we want, as we stand on the verge of a new century. I know it's been painful for you, but you've done your country a great service today, and I thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2 p.m. at the American Medical Association. In his remarks, he referred to association officers Randolph D. Smoak, Jr., M.D., chairman, and E. Ratchiffe Anderson, Jr., M.D., executive vice president. The President also referred to his memorandum of February 20 on Federal agency compliance with the Patient Bill of Rights.

Statement on Signing the Agriculture Export Relief Act of 1998

July 15, 1998

Late last night, I was pleased to sign into law a bill that exempts agriculture credits from the nuclear sanctions imposed on Pakistan and India.

We need to make sure that our sanctions policy furthers our foreign policy goals without im-

posing undue burdens on our farmers. That's why I supported this legislation to ensure that U.S. wheat and other farm products will not be the unintended victims of an important non-proliferation law. When implementing sanctions, we must never forget their humanitarian impact.

This action allows us to send a strong message abroad without ignoring the real needs of those here at home. After Congress phased out Federal farm supports, it became more essential for American farmers to sell their grains, meats, fruits, and vegetables to markets around the world. And today, products from one of every

three acres planted in America are sold abroad. Whenever we can, we should look for ways to expand our agricultural exports, not restrict them.

NOTE: S. 2282, approved July 14, was assigned Public Law No. 105-194.

Statement on the Report Entitled “America’s Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being”

July 15, 1998

Today my administration released an important report card on our Nation’s children, “America’s Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being.” Last year I called for this yearly report to provide the American people with a portrait of our children in critical areas such as health, education, and economic security.

In this second annual report, we find much to be grateful for—infant mortality is at an all-time low; the number of children with high blood lead levels, which can cause IQ or behavioral problems, has declined dramatically; more toddlers are up-to-date on their immunizations; more children are entering preschool, improving in math, and moving on to graduate from college; teen pregnancy has decreased; and a majority of parents are reporting that their children are in very good or excellent health. These strides reflect strategic investments in our Nation’s children, which have always been central

to my agenda to prepare America for the 21st century.

The report released today also demonstrates that we must now commit ourselves to making further progress for our children. Unfortunately, substance abuse and cigarette smoking among children are at unacceptable levels; reading scores are stagnant; and too many of our Nation’s children live in poverty.

We have demonstrated that we can work on a bipartisan basis to address the challenges our children face. That’s why, as I said yesterday, I am extremely disappointed that some in Congress have taken actions that threaten to undermine the important progress we have made by failing to provide critical investments for our young people. Our children deserve progress, not partisanship. As we pause to consider this report card on our children, I urge Members of Congress to work together to build a stronger future for our Nation’s children.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on Financial Assistance for Farmers

July 15, 1998

Dear Mr. Leader:

I am very concerned about the financial stress facing farmers and ranchers in many regions of the country. Natural disasters, combined with a downturn in crop prices and farm income, expected by the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to remain weak for some time, cause me to question again the adequacy of the safety net provided by the 1996 farm bill. In some areas of the U.S., as many as five consecutive

years of weather and disease-related disasters have demonstrated weaknesses in the risk protection available through crop insurance.

During the debate on the 1996 farm bill, I encouraged Congress to maintain a sufficient farm safety net, and since its enactment my Administration has repeated that call, proposing measures to buttress the safety net that are consistent with the market-oriented policy of the