

Remarks on Funding for Breast Cancer Research October 21, 1998

The President. Thank you very much. I'm delighted to be here with this distinguished panel of people, and I hope I can communicate a little bit of what we've tried to do in this area in just a few moments. As all of you know, I think, I have been spending most of the last week in the Middle East peace talks at Wye Plantation on the Eastern Shore. And when I conclude my remarks, I have to go take a call from Secretary Albright and see if I'm going back. So I hope you'll forgive me for leaving.

Let me say I'm delighted to be here with all of you. I thank all of you for your work. I am glad to see Senator Jeffords here. I used to refer to Senator Jeffords as my favorite Republican, and then I was informed that I had endangered his committee chairmanship and his physical well-being. [*Laughter*] So I never do that anymore, but I'm honored to have you back in the White House, Senator. And Mayor Beverly O'Neill from Long Beach, California, thank you for coming; and to all the rest of you.

Twenty-five years ago America declared war on cancer. Twenty-five years from now we have a good chance to have won the war. I hope the war on cancer 25 years from now will have about as much meaning to children in school as the War of 1812. I hope schoolchildren don't even know what chemotherapy means.

For nearly 6 years, we have worked hard to bring us closer to that day. We've helped cancer patients to keep their health coverage when they change jobs, accelerated the approval of cancer drugs while maintaining high standards of safety, continually increased funding for cancer research.

Recently, I named Dr. Jane Henney the first woman and the first oncologist to be the Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration. And I am pleased to report that about 2 hours ago she was actually confirmed by the United States Senate.

Thanks to the work of a lot of you in this room, we have made genuine progress. We're closing in on the genetic causes of breast cancer, colon cancer, prostate cancer, and now testing medicines to actually prevent those cancers. New tools for screening and diagnosis are returning to many patients the promise of a long

and healthy life. From 1991 to 1995, cancer death rates actually dropped for the first time in history.

I'm especially proud of the 5 years of progress we've made in prevention, detection, and treatment of breast cancer. Not one day goes by that I don't think about my mother and, through her, all the other women in this country who have had that dreaded disease. It requires more than courage to deal with it. We all owe it to ourselves and our future to make the sustained commitment to research that, once and for all, can win this war.

Without research, there would be no mammography. Without research, there would be no genetic testing for vulnerability to breast cancer. Without research, there would be no—how do you pronounce that—

Audience members. Tamoxifen.

The President. —tamoxifen. I practiced this twice this morning. But since then, my chain of thought has been interrupted. [*Laughter*] Anyway, we wouldn't have it without research.

This afternoon, before I came over here, I signed the balanced budget that we fought so hard in the last days of this Congress. It has, among other things, breakthrough funding for cancer research and a general, large increase in research funding for our country's future, a part of the commitment that Hillary and I made when we asked Americans to honor the millennium by honoring our past and envisioning our future.

I'm pleased that the new budget includes a record increase of \$400 million in new support for the National Cancer Institute. With nearly \$3 billion in funding, NCI now will be able to fund critical new research, including a trial to expand the use of Herceptin to treat breast cancer earlier and 10 more new clinical trials for breast cancer treatment. This is an important victory for women's health. It reflects a balanced budget that honors our values. In this, as in so many other things, I also would like to thank the Vice President, who spearheaded our drive to get the research funding into the budget.

If you will, I'd like to mention just a couple of other ways that this budget strengthens our

Nation. First, it honors our duty of fiscal responsibility. It is a budget surplus that we now enjoy for the first time in nearly three decades, the largest in our history. And despite the temptations here just before an election to spend it on tax cuts and new spending programs, the budget actually meets my challenge to set aside the surplus until we save Social Security for the 21st century.

It also provides funding within the balanced budget to begin to hire 100,000 new teachers to reduce class size in the early grades, thousands of tutors to help children read, up to 100,000 mentors to help poor children prepare for college, after-school programs to give a quarter of a million children someplace to learn instead of the streets, a half a million summer jobs to teach young people the discipline and joy of work.

The budget strengthens our Nation in other ways as well. It will bolster our own prosperity and help us to meet our responsibilities to deal with the global economy turmoil by meeting our obligations to the International Monetary Fund. It actually strengthens the protection of the environment. It guarantees safer water, cleaner air, more pristine public lands. It will help struggling farmers who face natural disasters and dramatically declining markets as a result of the trouble in Asia.

We had to fight for each of these priorities, and the budget is not perfect. You know, I lost the line item veto in our court case, and there's a lot of little things tucked away there that I wish weren't in that budget. But on balance, it honors our values and strengthens our country and looks to the future.

Now, I believe that it's important to point out, too, that if we had the right sort of spirit throughout the year, we wouldn't have had to cram a year's worth of work into a 4,000-page, 40-pound document passed several days after the budget year had run out. There are still some elements of partisanship that I would like to note in the hope that they can be removed.

In the past few days, the Congress persisted in tying our United Nations dues to unrelated and controversial social provisions, which endanger the health of women and deny them even basic information about family planning, even though studies show that countries where women have access to strong family planning actually have fewer abortions. I've made it clear many times that I will veto such provisions. Con-

gress sent me the bill to fund our arrears to the United Nations, knowing full well I would do so. So today I did. I regret that.

I regret, too, that the 105th Congress leaves town with unfinished business, challenges that must be met in the coming months and years to strengthen our families and our Nation.

The next Congress must pass the Patients' Bill of Rights. I might say, there is bipartisan support for this, just not enough to get it by. Our plan says to cancer patients and all Americans: You should have the right to a specialist, such as an oncologist; you should not have to worry that you will have to change doctors in the middle of a cancer treatment if your employer changes health care providers; you should have a right to an independent appeals process if critical treatment is delayed or denied. Managed care or traditional care, every American should have quality care.

The next Congress should act in other ways to strengthen the health of women. This year I asked Congress to cover clinical trials for Medicare beneficiaries so they, too, can get cutting-edge treatment. *[Applause]* Thank you. And I asked Congress to outlaw discrimination based on the results of genetic screening. Both these measures failed to pass. The next Congress should pass them.

The next Congress should also meet our obligations to our children by modernizing our schools. And above all, the next Congress must be the Congress that acts to save Social Security.

This year we had a series of bipartisan forums around the country on how to reform Social Security to meet the burdens that will be there when the baby boomers retire, and we'll only have about two people working for every one person drawing Social Security. We're going to have a national conference in December. We were successful in saving the surplus until we could consider the cost in future years of reforming Social Security.

Social Security lifted a generation of elderly Americans from poverty. Today, even though most Americans have other sources of income who draw Social Security, fully one-half of our seniors would be in poverty without it. So here at the White House on Friday we will talk about the vital importance of Social Security, especially to women, who have fewer pensions and smaller savings.

If we want to keep this commitment as strong for our children as it was for our parents, and

if we want to see the baby boomers retire in dignity without imposing unfair burdens on our children and their ability to raise our grandchildren, we must act now.

I must say, I was disappointed a couple of days ago that the Senate majority leader said he may not now want to join me in reforming Social Security next year. If we don't, then there will be more pressure to squander this money on tax cuts or spending programs. I think that is unhelpful. We know that we can make modest changes now that have a huge impact down the road, in much the way that modest investments in research now have a huge impact down the road on health care. And I believe this is an issue which really binds the American people, not only across generations but across political parties. None of us—none of us—wants to leave a legacy of burdening our children to support our retirement or risking that those of us who, unlike me, won't have a good pension, will face an undignified and impoverished old age just because the demographics are changing in America. So we need progress, not partisanship, on Social Security.

Now, there are 436 days left in this millennium. It can—it should be a time when we redouble our efforts to honor our parents, to strengthen our Nation, to prepare for our children's future, and to honor the tenacity and courage that those of you here have shown every day in dealing with this great challenge.

Again, let me say, I am very proud of what this budget did for cancer research. I'm very proud of what we are doing together to deal with the challenge of breast cancer. I want you to know that, that I believe that we are within reach of genuine cures and genuine prevention strategies of stunning impact. And we have to remember that on the things that really count, whether it's cancer research or saving Social Security or educating our children, this country needs to be united. This country needs to be reconciled to one another, all of us, across all the lines that divide us. There are plenty of things to fight about. But on the fundamental things, we need to be one. That is, parenthetically, the argument I've been making for a week out at the Middle East peace talks.

The only way that life ever really works is when we understand that the only victories that have lasting impacts are not victories over other people but victories for our common humanity. And that's what I'm going to work for now. To me, that's what every day your struggle against breast cancer symbolizes. And I'm very grateful to all of you.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:15 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. H.R. 4328, the Omnibus Consolidated and Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act, 1999, approved October 21, was assigned Public Law No. 105-277.

Statement on Senate Action To Confirm Jane E. Henney as Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration

October 21, 1998

I am extremely pleased that today the Senate, with strong bipartisan support, overwhelmingly voted to confirm Dr. Jane E. Henney to be the next Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration. I am confident that as the first woman and first oncologist to be confirmed as FDA Commissioner, Dr. Henney will live up to the trust the Senate has placed in her.

The Nation now has an FDA Commissioner who is committed to assuring that Americans have safe food, safe and effective drugs and medical devices, and improved public health. Dr. Henney has blazed many trails, and no one

is more qualified to lead the FDA. She has served four Presidents and helped guide some of America's finest academic health centers. Her expertise in science and technology and lifelong dedication to individual patients will enable her to strike the important balance between the need for timely approval of prescription drugs and medical devices, while maintaining safety and quality.

I commend the Democrats and Republicans who worked to give Dr. Henney a full and fair hearing and help expedite this confirmation. I also want to thank representatives of consumers,