

report back to me early next year with a comprehensive plan to fight waste, fraud, and abuse further in the Medicare program.

In the fight against Medicare fraud, Congress must also do its part. And I am encouraged by the bipartisan oversight hearings being held in Chicago this week by Senators Collins and Durbin. When it returns next year, I'll ask Congress to pass legislation that can save Medicare another \$2 billion over the next 5 years: First, legislation that will allow us to empower our new fraud hunters to spot overpayments and keep crooked medical service providers from getting into the Medicare system to start with.

Second, the legislation will allow Medicare to pay much lower rates for prescription medications. Under current law, Medicare loses hundreds of millions of dollars each year by paying as much as 10 times more than the private sector does for certain drugs. It's just wrong.

Third, the legislation will force private insurers to pay claims that they are legally responsible for, so that Medicare does not get stuck with the bill. This happens more often than you would think.

Fourth, legislation will allow us to crack down on medical providers, particularly those claiming

to deliver mental health care, who bill for services they never, in fact, provide, a large and unfortunately, growing problem, according to our recent reports.

By passing these commonsense measures to fight Medicare waste and fraud, Congress can do more than help save taxpayers' money. It can demonstrate a bipartisan desire to preserve and strengthen Medicare for the future. If we take these actions now, we can help to assure that the system that has served our parents and grandparents so well will be there to serve our children and grandchildren well into the 21st century.

Thanks to the advocates who are here—Senator Harkin and others—I'm confident that is exactly what we will do next year.

Thank you very much, and happy holidays.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:50 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Margaret Dixon, immediate past president, American Association of Retired Persons; Deborah Briceland-Betts, executive director, Older Women's League; and George J. Kourpias, president, National Council of Senior Citizens.

Statement on International Maritime Organization Action To Protect the Northern Right Whale

December 7, 1998

Today's vote by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to strengthen protections for the northern right whale is a vital step to ensure the survival of these majestic but endangered creatures.

Like many other marine mammals, the northern right whale once was hunted nearly to extinction. The 300 or so that survive spend much of the year in waters off Cape Cod and off the Georgia and Florida coasts. Biologists believe the greatest human threat they face today is collisions with large ships.

In April I instructed our representatives to the IMO to seek strong measures to address

this threat. Under our proposal, approved unanimously today by the IMO, commercial ships entering the whale's calving and feeding grounds will be required to report by radio to the U.S. Coast Guard, which will relay back the latest information on the whales' locations and advice on avoiding collisions.

Today's action by the IMO demonstrates once again that through international cooperation we can restore and protect our precious oceans and the magnificent diversity of life they sustain.