

in cooperation and consultation with the Council and relevant Federal agencies, to report back to me within 120 days on the aggressive steps you will take to significantly reduce the risk of illness and death by *Listeria monocytogenes* ready-to-eat foods. In particular, within this time period, I direct the Secretary of Agriculture to complete proposed regulations that include any appropriate microbiological testing and other industry measures to: 1) prevent cross-contamination in the processing environment; 2) ensure that the processing of ready-to-eat products meets appropriate standards; and 3) ensure that such products are safe throughout their shelf life. In addition, I direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services, within this time frame, to develop an action plan identifying additional steps necessary to reduce *Listeria monocytogenes* contamination. This plan should include consideration of control measures for at-risk foods and the publication of guidance

for processors, retailers, and food service facilities. Finally, you should consider whether enhanced labeling is necessary to provide additional safeguards for consumers. These actions should be based in science and should establish the foundation for a comprehensive approach that significantly reduces the opportunity for *Listeria* product contamination and *Listeria*-related illnesses to occur. All these actions, taken together, should allow us to achieve our Healthy People Goal by 2005 rather than 2010.

These steps will continue to ensure the safety of America's food supply and will help protect some of the Nation's most vulnerable populations from foodborne illness.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: This memorandum was embargoed for release by the Office of the Press Secretary until 10:06 a.m. on May 6.

## The President's Radio Address May 6, 2000

Good morning. Warm weather has finally taken hold in most of the country, and millions of families are now taking weekend picnics and hosting backyard barbecues. Today I want to speak with you about the foods we serve at these gatherings and how we can make them even safer than they already are.

Our food supply is the most bountiful in the world. And for 7 years now, our administration has been committed to making it the safest in the world. We've improved dramatically the Nation's inspection system for meat, poultry, and seafood. We've added new safeguards to protect families from unsafe imported foods. We've established a sophisticated early warning system that uses DNA fingerprinting techniques to detect and prevent outbreaks of foodborne illness. From farm to table, we've made great strides to ensure the safety of our food supply. But outbreaks of food-related illnesses are still far too prevalent. In fact, millions of Americans get sick from eating contaminated food each year.

One threat we must address immediately comes from a foodborne pathogen called *Listeria*, which has been the cause of recent recalls

of hot dogs and luncheon meats and several deadly outbreaks of disease. The most famous case emerged a year and a half ago, when *Listeria* killed 21 people and sickened 100 others, all of whom had eaten contaminated meat from a single plant. It was the Nation's most deadly food safety epidemic in 15 years.

Fortunately, *Listeria* is less common than *salmonella*, *E. coli*, and other foodborne bacteria, but unfortunately, it is far more dangerous. A staggering 20 percent of *Listeria* infections result in death. As with other food-borne bacteria, it's rarely healthy adults who come down with *Listeria* infections. Instead, it's the most vulnerable among us: infants, the elderly, pregnant women, and those whose immune systems have been weakened by chemotherapy or AIDS.

While our administration has already taken a number of important steps to reduce the threat of *Listeria*, it's clear we must do more to protect Americans from this deadly pathogen. So today I'm directing the Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services to prepare an aggressive new strategy to significantly reduce the risk of illness from *Listeria*. As part

of this strategy, we will propose new regulations to require scientific approaches, such as systematic testing for *Listeria* at food-processing plants, not just random checks. This and other measures will allow us to cut in half the number of *Listeria*-related illnesses over the next 5 years and save well over 1,000 lives.

Today I call on the food industry to work with us as we develop our new *Listeria* strategy. And I call on Congress to help us strengthen food safety across the board. Just this week, unfortunately, the Congress took a major step backward by refusing to fully fund our food safety initiative. In fact, they've now voted to block funding for our new efforts to protect millions of American families from the dangers of *salmonella* poisoning in eggs. We should be doing more, not less, to ensure the safety of our food.

If we work together, we can make real gains this year. We can increase the number of inspections of domestic and imported foods. We can expand the FDA's authority to turn away imported food that does not meet our high safe-

ty standards. And at long last, we can give the Department of Agriculture the authority to recall bad food and impose civil penalties for repeat violations. After all, the Department has the right to penalize a circus to protect animals from harm; it's about time we gave them the tools they need to protect human beings from harm, too.

Ensuring the safety of our food and the health of our people are among the most important parts of our citizens' basic contract with their Government. For the sake of millions of Americans, especially the most vulnerable among us, it's an obligation we simply must work together to uphold.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 12:47 p.m. on May 5 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on May 6. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 5 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

## Remarks on the Northern Ireland Peace Process and an Exchange With Reporters

May 6, 2000

*The President.* I would just like to make a brief statement about the acceptance by the IRA of the proposals by Prime Ministers Blair and Ahern. This is a very good day for the people of Northern Ireland. It is a truly historic step. For the first time, the IRA is clearly committed to decommissioning and a process to get there. I applaud that. I want to thank the Prime Ministers and Gerry Adams and everyone else who was involved in this. But this is a very good day.

Q. Do you think it will stick?

*The President.* Well, I do. Of course, the Unionists still have to formally accept it, but this idea of storing the weapons and having the storage site monitored, I think, is a way for both of them to achieve their previously stated objectives, both sides. So it's a very, very good day.

Q. Weren't we at this point once before, sir?

*The President.* No, we never got this far on the details of the implementation. We always knew, I think, that the sequencing of decommissioning and the full implementation of the accords by both sides and by the British Government would be a problem. And that's really what this last year-plus has been about. For all of us who've worked on it, this is a very happy.

But I really appreciate the work done by Prime Minister Blair and Prime Minister Ahern and the fact that the IRA has accepted it, and the Sinn Féin has obviously had a role in that. So this is a big step. And they've reached out to the Unionists now. Of course, I hope it will be fully accepted by all parties, and we can get the Government back up and go on.