

June 27 / Administration of George W. Bush, 2001

Remarks Following a Meeting With Republican Congressional Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

June 27, 2001

Patients' Bill of Rights

The President. It's been my honor to welcome Members of the House of Representatives here to discuss a very important issue, which is Patients' Bill of Rights.

We had a good discussion about making sure that American workers and Americans have got good and decent health care. And there is such a bill that would provide American workers with the right kind of protections. And it's a bill that's been crafted in the House of Representatives, called the Fletcher-Peterson-Johnson bill. Two of the authors are here around the table. This piece of legislation, I am convinced, is—will make a big difference in people's lives. It will protect patients.

There are some other alternatives that are working their way—being debated on the House and the Senate that will run up the cost of health insurance for American workers and could conceivably cost millions of people their health insurance. I can't accept that kind of legislation.

I look forward to signing a bill such as the one that we've discussed here, a good piece of legislation that will make sense for the American workers. I'll be glad to answer some questions.

Sandra [Sandra Sobieraj, Associated Press].

Q. Sir, do you think the Democrats are playing politics here and angling for a veto, looking ahead to the 2002 elections?

The President. I don't. I think the Democrats are, hopefully, trying to come up with a good piece of legislation. I know the Republicans are. We had that kind of discussion. There seems to be a desire on the parts of people in Washington to get a good bill done. It's certainly my desire.

But I also think the American people will respect a President who stands on prin-

ciple, and I've articulated the principles that I think are important for a piece of legislation. And the most important principle is that we don't have a piece of legislation that hurts the working people, that causes them not to have health care insurance, because health care insurance is more—will make it much more likely that the worker and their families are able to be treated well.

Now, I realize there are some complaints with HMOs. I signed legislation in Texas that dealt with those complaints. I look forward to signing legislation here that does just that, and the bill we discussed around this table is a piece of legislation that I will sign.

Situation in Macedonia

Q. Mr. President, you issued an order today on Macedonia. Do you think the ethnic Albanian rebels are getting a lot of financial support from the United States, and do you see any chance of committing U.S. troops to Macedonia to prevent a civil war?

The President. Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters], I take no option off the table in terms of the troops. We're a participant in NATO. I went to Europe recently and said, "We went into the Balkans together; we'll come out together," and I meant it.

Secondly, we've got some evidence that the ethnic Albanians, the extremists, are raising money not only in America but in Europe. And America will do our part to make sure that monies do not go to fund extremist activities that become a destabilizing influence for a democratically elected government in Macedonia.

Terry [Terry Moran, ABC News].

Patients' Bill of Rights

Q. Mr. President, on the question of where patients could go to hold HMOs accountable if they're wrongfully denied coverage: Democrats say that Federal court, your preferred venue, is too slow, too expensive, and frequently too far away from where people live. Why are you so adamant about keeping people out of their own State courts?

The President. Terry, I think if you look at this piece of legislation, you'll find there's a compromise between those who say it should only be in the Federal court and those who say it should only be in the State court. And the Fletcher bill has come up with an alternative procedure, one that will allow certain causes of action to be in the Federal court and other causes of action to be in a State court. And it's the right approach. It's a good compromise between two positions.

Q. But what's wrong with Federal court?

The President. Stretch [Richard Keil, Bloomberg Radio].

Bipartisanship/Stem Cell Research

Q. Mr. President, a two part question. Around the table here today you have all—only Republicans. Do you plan talks like this with the Democratic leaders in the House and the Senate, talks about Patients' Bill of Rights? And related to that, how close are you on a decision on stem cell research, and can you tell us which way you're leaning?

The President. I'll make a decision about that very emotional issue later on. In terms of whether I've talked to Democrats, of course I do. And there's a Democrat sponsor of this bill. He doesn't happen to be at the table, but he's on the right track, as far as I'm concerned, like the other sponsors of this bill.

Thank you all for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:33 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. The Executive order and related proclamation of June 26, concerning persons who threaten international stabilization efforts in the Western Balkans, are listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Statement on Proposed Patients' Bill of Rights Legislation
June 27, 2001

The bipartisan proposal introduced today by Representatives Ernie Fletcher, Collin Peterson, Nancy Johnson, and Richard Burr, along with Speaker Hastert and the chairmen of the three committees with jurisdiction, Chairmen Boehner, Tauzin, and Thomas, makes progress in our effort to provide patients with a strong and enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights.

This proposal, like the legislation introduced by Senators Frist, Breaux, and Jeffords, is another example of a Patients' Bill of Rights that reflects the principles I laid out earlier this year. I am encouraged that the bill introduced today brings us sig-

nificantly closer to enacting a good Patients' Bill of Rights.

This legislation provides strong patient protections to all Americans. It ensures that patients have the right to an independent medical review when they have been denied medical care, and it holds health plans accountable by providing patients with meaningful, effective remedies when they have been harmed by a denial or delay in receiving such care.

I am committed to providing patients with expanded remedies to hold their health plans accountable and believe we can do so while protecting workers and