

a vision. And one of the things I appreciated about the Saudi initiative a while ago was it laid out a potential peace process, a plan for peace, a way to get to peace in the region—something we all long for.

Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority

Q. Are you ready to include Arafat in that open invitation? Are you ready now to include Arafat in that open invitation?

The President. Mr. Arafat must perform. Mr. Arafat must do his job. I've called upon Mr. Arafat in the past; I'll continue to call upon Mr. Arafat to lead. The other day—somebody asked me one time, a while ago,

they said, "Has he disappointed you? Has he lost your respect?" I said, "Well, he hasn't earned my respect yet. He must earn my respect by leading." And there are a lot of people, a lot of Palestinians who are suffering, and now is the time for him to step up.

This has been a hopeful day for the region, and we must continue to press forward to peace.

I want to thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:25 p.m. at the Bush Ranch. In his remarks, he referred to King Mohamed VI of Morocco.

Remarks at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, New Mexico
April 29, 2002

Well, thank you very much for that warm, New Mexican welcome. It's nice to be back in this beautiful State. I'm particularly delighted to be sharing the podium with a remarkable American, Pete Domenici. He didn't finish the story. After I interrupted him, he re-interrupted me—[laughter]—and gave me my marching orders. [Laughter] I said, "Yes, sir, Mr. Senator." [Laughter]

No, I really enjoy working with Pete, and I appreciate so very much that leaders such as Pete have been working to make America a more welcoming place for people with disabilities. The work is progressing. We are making progress, but it certainly isn't finished. There's a lot to do, and some of the greatest health needs and obstacles and stigmas concern mental health. We are determined to confront the hidden suffering of Americans with mental illness.

Pete and I share a lot in common. We love the Southwest. We care deeply about issues that face our country. And we both married above ourselves. [Laughter] I love being with Pete and Nancy, because their

love and respect for each other is so evident and so profound. And I love watching Nancy's face, because it reveals and is a window into a compassionate heart. And I want to thank Nancy Domenici.

I also want to thank Charles Curie for coming. Pete introduced Charles. Charles is a good hand, and I appreciate him being here. I also want to thank Phil Eaton and all the good folks here at the University of New Mexico. I'm so honored also to be traveling today with Heather Wilson. Heather is a solid citizen who brings a lot of dignity to the office she holds and a lot of class. And I'm proud to call her friend. I want to thank the State officials who are here, the Lieutenant Governor, thank you for coming.

I also want to tell you about a lady I met named Lucy Salazar. Where's Lucy? Is she here? Lucy, thank you for coming. It's kind of off the subject but really not off the subject, because one of the things I try to do when I go into communities is herald soldiers in the armies of compassion, those souls who have heard the call

to love a neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself and have followed through on that call, the selfless citizens whose compassion for their neighbor is really one of the things that makes America so strong and powerful, particularly as we stand tall in the face of evil.

I like to tell my fellow citizens that if you're interested in fighting evil—which, by the way, we're going to do—if you're interested—[laughter]. But one way to help is do some good. And it's that collective good that will define the true value and character of our country.

And Lucy Salazar is a retired Federal Government worker. She teaches reading skills to pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children. She's incredibly important. She helps those with disabilities participate in the fine and performing arts. She volunteers through her church. She is a great citizen, and oftentimes, citizens such as her never get the praise they deserve. Lucy, thank you for coming and representing thousands of people like you.

Millions of Americans—millions—are impaired at work, at school, or at home by episodes of mental illness. Many are disabled by severe and persistent mental problems. These illnesses affect individuals; they affect their families; and they affect our country.

As many Americans know, it is incredibly painful to watch someone you love struggle with an illness that affects their mind and their feelings and their relationships with others. We heard stories today in a roundtable discussion about that—what the struggle means for family.

Remarkable treatments exist, and that's good. Yet many people—too many people—remain untreated. Some end up addicted to drugs or alcohol. Some end up on the streets, homeless. Others end up in our jails, our prisons, our juvenile detention facilities.

Our country must make a commitment: Americans with mental illness deserve our understanding, and they deserve excellent

care. They deserve a health care system that treats their illness with the same urgency as a physical illness. To meet this goal, we've got to overcome obstacles, and I want to talk about three such obstacles this morning.

The first obstacle is the stigma, the stigma that often surrounds mental illness, a stigma caused by a history of misunderstanding, fear, and embarrassment. Stigma leads to isolation and discourages people from seeking the treatment they need. Political leaders, health care professionals, and all Americans must understand and send this message: Mental disability is not a scandal; it is an illness. And like physical illness, it is treatable, especially when the treatment comes early.

Today, new drugs and therapies have vastly improved the outlook for millions of Americans with the most serious mental illnesses and for millions more with less severe illnesses. The treatment success rates for schizophrenia and clinical depression are comparable to those for heart disease. That's good news in America, and we must encourage more and more Americans to understand and to seek more treatment.

The second obstacle to quality mental health care is our fragmented mental health service delivery system. Mental health centers and hospitals, homeless shelters, the justice system, and our schools all have contact with individuals suffering from mental disorders. Yet, many of these disorders are difficult to diagnose. This makes it even harder to provide the mentally ill with the care they need. Many Americans fall through the cracks of the current system. Many years and lives are lost before help, if it is given at all, is given.

Consider this example—and for the experts in the field, they will confirm this is a story which is oftentimes too true—a 14-year-old boy who started experimenting with drugs to ease his severe depression. That happens. This former honor student became a drug addict. He dropped out of school, was incarcerated 6 times in

16 years. Only 2 years ago, when he was 30 years old, did the doctors finally diagnose his condition as bipolar disorder, and he began a successful program, a successful long-term treatment program.

And to make sure that the cracks are closed, I am honored to announce what we call the New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. It is charged to study the problems and gaps in our current system of treatment and to make concrete recommendations for immediate improvements that will be implemented, and these will be improvements that can be implemented and must be implemented by the Federal Government, the State Government, local agencies, as well as public and private health care providers.

To chair the Commission, I've selected Michael Hogan, Dr. Hogan. I appreciate your coming, Michael. Dr. Hogan has served as the Director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health for more than 10 years and is recognized as a leader in this profession. He has been focused, as a State official, on how our mental health system works and how it doesn't work.

I look forward to the Commission's findings. I look forward to their proposals. I look forward to making progress and fixing the system so that Americans do not fall through the cracks.

The third major obstacle to effective mental health care is the often unfair treatment limitations placed on mental health in insurance coverage. Many private health insurance plans have developed effective programs to identify patients with mental illnesses, and they help them get their treatment they need to regain their health.

But insurance plans too often place greater restrictions on the treatment of mental illness than on the treatment of other medical illnesses. As a result, some Americans are unable to get effective medical treatments that would allow them to function well in their daily lives.

Our health insurance system must treat serious mental illness like any other disease.

And that was Senator Domenici's message to me at the Oval Office. [Laughter] And it was Nancy's message when we had them up for dinner. [Laughter] And I want to appreciate the fact that they have worked tirelessly on this problem.

I have a record on this issue. As the Governor of Texas, I signed a bill to ensure that patients who critically need mental health are treated fairly. Senator Domenici and I share this commitment: Health plans should not be allowed to apply unfair treatment limitations or financial requirements on mental health benefits.

It is critical that we provide full—as we provide full mental health parity, that we do not significantly run up the cost of health care. I'll work with the Senator. I will work with the Speaker. I will work with their House and Senate colleagues to reach an agreement on mental health parity this year.

We must work for a welcoming and compassionate society, a society where no American is dismissed and no American is forgotten. This is the great and hopeful story of our country, and we can write another chapter. We must give all Americans who suffer from mental illness the treatment and the respect they deserve.

Thank you all. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:34 a.m. at the Continuing Education Center. In his remarks, he referred to Charles G. Curie, Administrator, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Department of Health and Human Services; R. Philip Eaton, interim vice president, Health Sciences, University of New Mexico; and Lt. Gov. Walter Bradley of New Mexico. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. The Executive order of April 29 establishing the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks at a Luncheon for Representative Heather Wilson in Albuquerque April 29, 2002

The President. Gosh, thanks for that warm welcome. It's great to be back in New Mexico. I'm glad to know my Texas passport is still active. [Laughter]

I'm here because it is very important for the people of New Mexico to send Heather Wilson back to the United States Congress. I'm here to give my whole-hearted support to her candidacy.

Before I spend a little time fleshing that out, I want to say something about the senior Senator from New Mexico. There's no finer American in the United States Senate than Pete Domenici. I'm proud to call him friend, and I'm proud to get lectured by him all the time. [Laughter] It seems like he's always got important issues on his mind, the labs, mental health parity. But he is a great ally and a really fine Senator.

I'm also honored to have served with—been the President at the same time that Joe Skeen was the United States Congressman from another congressional district here in New Mexico. We're going to miss old Joe, but I'm confident he still has my address and willing to give—

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. That's good. But thank you for your service.

I want to thank John Dendahl, the party chairman of the Republican Party of New Mexico, and all the party leaders who are here. I particularly want to say something about the grassroots, the people who work the phone banks and lick the envelopes and do all the work necessary to keep people like me and Pete and Heather in office. And I want to thank you for your loyalty; I want to thank you for your passion for our political party; and I want to thank you for the endless hours you put on our behalf.

I want to thank the Lieutenant Governor and all the State officials who are here.

And I want to thank you all for supporting Heather. Here's the way I feel: Anytime you find somebody who brings such class and dignity to a political office, we as Americans owe our support to her. And Heather Wilson brings a lot of class and a lot of dignity.

You know, in Washington there's a lot of—there can be a lot of noise, a lot of shrill voices, people who are—people up there sometimes are the ones who like to divide people into camps and call names and point fingers. They think that's effective, and it's such a wonderful contrast to have the quiet dignity and the competence of Heather Wilson in the United States Congress. It is so good and refreshing and good for our democracy and good for our country that people like Heather are willing to serve. She can get things done for New Mexico.

The thing I appreciate, Heather, is she is there for the right reason, to serve the people, to represent the people of New Mexico. And I'm proud of our political party, make no mistake about it, but I'm proud of the fact that Heather puts our country first, that she understands the importance of our Nation and what it stands for.

I remember so well going to Griegos Elementary with Heather. She said, "You come to my district. I want you to go, first and foremost, to an elementary school." Because she understands that when we educate our children, the American Dream will be extended to every neighborhood. I appreciate that spirit.

She told me that the day I signed the no-child-left-behind legislation, which was a significant piece of educational reform, supported both by Heather and by Pete, that she went back to Griegos. And it was a fitting place for her to go, because this is a piece of legislation which says that