

welcome you here, Madam First Lady. Thank you for coming. We're really glad you're here. Your husband is kind of like me; we both married well. [Laughter]

We come from many faiths. In America, every religion is welcome. That's the great thing about our country. Every faith is important. In America, people of faith have no corner on compassion, but people of faith need compassion to be true to the call to "*Ame al projimo como a si mismo*," love your neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself. That's a universal call.

For Hispanic Americans, a love of neighbor is more than a Gospel command; it's a way of life. We see the love of neighbor in the strong commitment of Hispanic Americans to family and the culture of life. For Hispanic Americans, families are a source of joy and the foundation of a hopeful society. We're working to support and defend the sanctity of marriage and to ensure that the most vulnerable Americans are welcomed in life and protected in love.

We see the love of neighbor in the tireless efforts of Hispanic American faith-based and community organizations that work daily to bring hope to harsh places. In Boston, the Leon de Judah congregation mentors inner-city teens so they have a chance to realize the great dreams of America. In St. Louis, Accion Social Comunitaria helps immigrants and their children adapt to American life. In the Archdiocese of Miami, Catholic Charities ministers to people with HIV/AIDS. Inner-city Philadelphia, Cortes runs a fantastic program to help lift the spirits of every single child.

Many in the Hispanic community understand that by serving the least of *nuestros hermanos y hermanas*, that we're serving a cause greater than ourselves. And by doing so, we're helping all citizens have an opportunity to realize their dreams here in America.

Finally, we see the love of neighbor in tens of thousands of Hispanics who serve America in the cause of freedom. One of

these was an immigrant from Mexico named Rafael Peralta. The day after Rafael got his green card, he enlisted in the Marine Corps. Think about that. While serving in Iraq, this good sergeant wrote a letter to his younger brother. He said, "Be proud of being an American. Our father came to this country, became a citizen because it was the right place for our family to be." Shortly after writing that letter, Sergeant Peralta used his own body to cover a grenade an enemy soldier had rolled into a roomful of Marines. This prayer breakfast, we remember the sacrifices of honorable and good folks like Sergeant Peralta, who have shown their love of neighbor by giving their life for freedom.

Hispanic Americans answer the call to service willingly, because you understand that freedom is a divine gift that carries with it serious responsibilities. And as you go about the work of repairing broken lives and bringing love into the pockets of hopelessness and despair, be strong, because you're sustained by prayer. Through prayer—[applause].

One of the most powerful aspects of being the President is to know that millions of people pray for me and Laura, people that I'll never have a chance—think about a country where millions of people of all faiths, people whom I'll never have a chance to look face to face with and say, "Thank you," take time to pray. It really is the strength of America, isn't it? Through prayer we ask that our hearts be aligned with God's. Through prayer we ask that we may be given the strength to do what's right and to help those in need.

I want to thank you for the fine tradition you continue here today. This is an important tradition to continue right here in the heart of the Nation's Capital. I want to thank you for what you do for our Nation. *Que Dios les bendiga*, and may God continue to bless our country. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:28 a.m. at the Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. Danny Cortes, senior vice president, and Rev. Luis Cortes, Jr., president and chief executive officer,

Esperanza USA; and Vivian Fernandez de Torrijos, wife of President Martin Torrijos Espino of Panama. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks on Implementing the Medicare Modernization Act June 16, 2005

Thank you very much. Please be seated—unless you don't have a seat. [*Laughter*] Thanks for coming. It's glad—I'm glad to be back to the Department of Health and Human Services. The last time I visited here was to witness Secretary Leavitt's swearing in. I said I'd be coming back to check up on him. [*Laughter*] I'm back. [*Laughter*] He's doing a fine job; really appreciate your leadership.

I'm grateful to the men and women of this Department for their compassion and service. Thanks for serving our country. I want to thank you all for helping us launch a vital effort to bring greater peace of mind to America's seniors and people with disabilities. Over the next 11 months, we will spread important news to everyone receiving Medicare. This great and trusted program is about to become even better. Starting this November, every American on Medicare can sign up to get help paying for their prescription drugs.

I appreciate Mike Leavitt's understanding of how important it is to spread the news. I also want to thank my friend Mark McClellan for doing such a fine job at the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services. I want to thank you all who work there with him. You've got an important job now. We've passed good law. Now it's important for people to get the news.

I want to thank members of my Cabinet who are here who are going to help spread the news to their Departments, Secretary Elaine Chao, Secretary Alphonso Jackson, Secretary Norm Mineta, Secretary Jim

Nicholson. Thank you all for coming, as well as Commissioner Jo Anne Barnhart of the Social Security Administration. Welcome. Thank you all for being here.

I appreciate so very much all the other administration officials who are here. I want to thank an old family friend of ours, Dr. Louis Sullivan, former Secretary of HHS, for joining us. Louis, I was looking at that picture up there—[*laughter*—looks like him. [*Laughter*] Tell me who the painter was—I'd like one to look like me one of these days. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank Senator Craig Thomas from Wyoming for joining us. Thank you for being here, Senator. I also want to thank former Senator John Breaux for joining us. I can remember John was one of the leaders in the United States Senate in trying to bring people together to reform Medicare. I want to thank you for your help on this. I want to thank you for being here. I particularly want to thank the leaders and representatives of the health care, faith-based and community organizations who are all going to help spread the word to our seniors about what is available. I appreciate you being here. I want to thank you for your compassion and your care for America's seniors.

I also want to welcome the Medicare beneficiaries who are here in attendance. Listen carefully, I think you're going to like what you hear.

Forty years ago—think about that, 40 years ago this summer, President Lyndon Baines Johnson, from the great State of

Texas—[laughter]—signed a law creating Medicare to guarantee health care for seniors and Americans with disabilities. In the decades since that historic act, Medicare has spared millions of our citizens from needless suffering and hardship. Medicare is a landmark achievement of a compassionate society. It is a basic trust that our Government will always honor.

Medicare has also faced challenges. For decades, medicine advanced rapidly and grew to include innovations like prescription drugs, but Medicare didn't keep pace. As a result, Medicare recipients were left with a program based on the medicine of the 1960s. For example, Medicare would pay \$28,000 for ulcer surgery but not \$500 for the prescription drugs that eliminate the cause of most ulcers. Medicare would pay more than \$100,000 to treat the effects of a stroke but not \$1,000 for blood-thinning drugs that could prevent strokes. That's an outdated system, and it made no sense for American seniors. It made no sense for Americans with disabilities, and it made no sense for American taxpayers.

Year after year, politicians pledged to reform Medicare, but the job never got done until 2003, when members of both political parties came together to deliver the greatest advance in health care for seniors since the founding of Medicare. This new law is bringing preventive medicine, better health care choices, and prescription drugs to every American receiving Medicare. The Medicare Modernization Act renewed the promise of Medicare for the 21st century, and I was honored and proud to sign that piece of legislation.

Over the past year, millions of Americans have started to benefit from the new Medicare program. Every senior entering Medicare is now eligible for a "Welcome to Medicare" physical. It's a fundamental improvement, and it makes a lot of sense. Medicare patients and doctors are now able to work together to diagnose health care and health concerns right away. And there's a simple reason: The sooner you diagnose

a problem—you can treat problems before they become worse. Medicare now covers preventive screenings that can catch illness from diabetes to heart disease. Medicare is covering innovative programs to help seniors with chronic diseases like high blood pressure. I urge every senior to take advantage of these new benefits in Medicare.

In the 21st century, preventing and treating illness requires prescription drugs. Seniors know this. Yet because Medicare did not cover prescription drugs, many seniors had to make painful sacrifices to pay for medicine. In my travels around the country, I met seniors who faced the agonizing choice between buying prescription drugs and buying groceries. I met retirees who resorted to cutting pills in half. I met Americans who were forced to spend their retirement years working, just to pay for their prescriptions. These hardships undermine the basic promise of Medicare. And thanks to Medicare Modernization Act, those days are coming to an end.

To provide immediate help with drug costs, the new Medicare law created drug discount cards. Over the past year, millions of seniors have used these cards to save billions of dollars. In Missouri, I met a woman who used her discount card to buy \$10 worth of drugs for \$1.14. She was happy with the card. Another senior went to her pharmacy and spent under \$30 for medicine that used to cost about four times as much. And here is what she said: "When he got out my medicine card . . . and told me what the savings was, I about dropped my false teeth." [Laughter]

The Medicare Modernization Act created a prescription drug benefit to replace drug discount cards and bring savings and peace of mind to all 42 million Medicare beneficiaries. The new benefit will help every senior as well as Americans with developmental and physical disabilities and mental illnesses and HIV/AIDS. Congress scheduled the prescription drug benefit to start