

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 That's an outdated system, and it made no sense for American seniors.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

in January of 2006. Thanks to the leadership of Secretary Leavitt and Mark McClellan, we are on track to deliver prescription drug coverage on time to every American senior.

As Medicare's professional staff prepares to implement the prescription drug benefit, we also must ensure that seniors are ready to take full advantage of their new opportunities. And that's why I've come here today. It's important for everyone to understand that Medicare prescription drug coverage is voluntary. Seniors can choose to take advantage of the benefit, or they can choose not to. It's up to them.

And there's plenty of time to make the decision. Starting on October 1st, Medicare beneficiaries will begin getting information about the new prescription drug plans available. They will receive a handbook called "Medicare and You" that includes detailed information about their options. If they like what they see and choose to get prescription drug coverage, they can enroll any time between November 15th of this year and May 15th of next year. Beneficiaries should make their decisions as soon as they are ready, because enrolling before May will ensure that they pay the lowest possible premiums.

The Federal Government will work hard to ensure that Medicare beneficiaries understand their options. I've asked every agency that touches the lives of seniors or disabled Americans to devote resources to explaining the prescription drug benefit. And we need the help of people in the private sector as well. The only way to reach everyone on Medicare is to mobilize compassionate citizens in communities all over the country. And that's why we've come together this afternoon to kick off a nationwide outreach campaign.

Over the next 11 months, we will unite a wide range of Americans from doctors to nurses to pharmacists to State and local leaders to seniors groups to disability advocates to faith-based organizations. Together, we will work to ensure that every American

on Medicare is ready to make a confident choice about prescription drug coverage, so they can finally receive the modern health care they deserve.

As we spread the word about the new opportunities in Medicare, we will make it clear that prescription drug coverage will provide greater peace of mind for beneficiaries in three key ways.

First, the new Medicare coverage will provide greater peace of mind by helping all seniors and Americans with disabilities pay for prescription drugs, no matter how they pay for medicine now. On average, Medicare beneficiaries will receive more than \$1,300 in Federal assistance to pay for prescription drugs. Seniors with no drug coverage and average prescription expenses will see their drug bills reduced by half or more. The new Medicare benefits will also provide special help for seniors with the highest drug costs. Starting in January, Medicare will cover 95 percent of all prescription costs after a senior has spent \$3,600 in a year. Seniors will never be able to predict what challenges life will bring, but thanks to Medicare, they can be certain they will never have their entire savings wiped out to pay for prescription drugs.

Second, the new Medicare coverage will provide greater peace of mind by offering beneficiaries better health care choices than they have ever had. Seniors will be able to choose any Medicare prescription drug plan that fits their needs and their medical history. Seniors who want to keep their Medicare the way it is will be able to do so. Seniors using Medicare Advantage to save money will be able to keep their plans and get better drug benefits. Seniors who receive drug coverage from a former employer or union can count on new support from Medicare to help them keep their good benefits. Every prescription drug plan will offer a broad choice of brandname drugs and generic drugs. Seniors will also have the choice to pick up their prescriptions at local pharmacies or to have the medicine delivered to their home.

These options might sound familiar to some of you here at the Department. It's got to sound familiar to Members of the United States Congress. After all, these health care choices, these kind of choices are available for people who work here in Washington. And if these choices are good enough for people who work here in Washington, they ought to be good enough for the seniors all across the country.

Third, the new Medicare coverage will provide greater peace of mind by extending extra help to low-income seniors and beneficiaries with disabilities. For years, beneficiaries on the tightest budgets received no help from Medicare to pay for prescription drugs. Because we acted, about a third of American seniors will be eligible for a Medicare drug benefit that includes little or no premiums, low deductibles, and no gaps in coverage. On average, Medicare will pick up the tab for more than 95 percent of prescription drug costs for low-income seniors. To receive this important assistance, low-income seniors have to fill out a straightforward, four-page application form with, at most, 16 questions. No financial documents or complicated records are required, and the forms are easy to obtain. In fact, millions of applications have already been mailed to low-income seniors. If you or a family member receives one of these, I urge you to fill it out and send it in. Some of the seniors groups that are here have a saying, "When in doubt, fill it out." [Laughter] By encouraging all low-income seniors to sign up for extra assistance, we will ensure that Medicare gives its greatest help to those with the greatest needs.

With all of these essential reforms, the Medicare Modernization Act created a new commitment to seniors and Americans with disabilities, and all of you are helping to make good on that commitment. By lending a hand to neighbors in need, you are strengthening your communities and showing the great compassion of our country. Many organizations have already launched innovative efforts to reach seniors. And I'll

continue to call on people to put forth innovative strategies to reach our seniors.

For example, in Wisconsin and Indiana, more than 270 community leaders are coming together to find ways to get information to rural seniors. In Chicago, a food pantry, the Catholic Archdiocese, and a news publication are all working to get the word out about the new Medicare benefits. The Federal Department of Transportation, under the leadership of Norm Mineta, is working with local agencies to post Medicare information in buses and at highway rest stops. Thousands of pharmacies are working with Medicare to provide information for seniors. Countless other organizations are holding community events and connecting with seniors face to face, so Medicare recipients can get their questions answered and make informed choices about prescription drug coverage. In other words, we're on a massive education effort, starting today. And I'm asking for America's help.

You can help by making a call to your mother or father and tell them what's available. You can help by showing an older neighbor how to fill out a form. You can help by spending an afternoon at the local retirement home. And by the way, when you help somebody, you're really helping yourself. You can get information 24 hours a day calling 1-800-MEDICARE. It's pretty easy to remember, 1-800-MEDICARE. Or you can use the Internet to visit the official Medicare web site at medicare.gov. All you've got to do is type in medicare.gov, and you're going to find out what I'm talking about.

Remember that information about prescription drug plans will be available starting October 1st, and November 15th is the first day to sign up for the new coverage. You need to circle those dates on your calendar and tell the seniors in your life that modern medicine is on the way. This is a good deal, and people need to take advantage of it.

I think the passage of the Medicare Modernization Act is a good lesson for all

of us who work in this city. You know, it wasn't all that long ago the leaders who talked about Medicare reform faced a lot of name-calling—to say the least. When Congress finally rose above politics and fulfilled its duty to America's seniors, it showed what's possible in Washington, DC. We need that same spirit—[*applause*]. I mean, this bill is proof that Americans really aren't interested in seeing one party win and another party lose. What Americans want to see is people coming together to solve problems. That's what they want to see.

We had a problem in Medicare. It wasn't working the way it should. It wasn't mod-

ern. It wasn't answering the needs of our seniors. And by coming together, we have done our job here in Washington. And as a result of working together, we have changed Medicare for the better. Medicare is now modern, reformed, and compassionate. And I urge all seniors—all seniors and those folks here in America who want to help seniors, look into this new prescription drug benefit; it will make your life better.

Thank you all for coming. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:22 p.m. at the Department of Health and Human Services.

Statement on the Presidential Elections in Iran *June 16, 2005*

In recent months, the cause of freedom has made enormous gains in the broader Middle East. Millions of people in Afghanistan and Iraq defied terrorists to cast their ballots in free elections. Palestinians voted for a new President who rejects violence and is working for democratic reform, and the people of Lebanon reclaimed their sovereignty and are now voting for new leadership. Across the Middle East, hopeful change is taking place. People are claiming their liberty. And as a tide of freedom sweeps this region, it will also come eventually to Iran.

The Iranian people are heirs to a great civilization—and they deserve a Government that honors their ideals and unleashes their talent and creativity. Today, Iran is ruled by men who suppress liberty at home and spread terror across the world. Power is in the hands of an unelected few who have retained power through an electoral process that ignores the basic requirements of democracy.

The June 17th Presidential elections are sadly consistent with this oppressive record.

Iran's rulers denied more than a thousand people who put themselves forward as candidates, including popular reformers and women who have done so much for the cause of freedom and democracy in Iran.

The Iranian people deserve a genuinely democratic system in which elections are honest—and in which their leaders answer to them instead of the other way around. The Iranian people deserve a truly free and democratic society with a vibrant free press that informs the public and ensures transparency. They deserve freedom of assembly, so Iranians can gather and press for reform and a peaceful, loyal opposition can keep the Government in check. They deserve a free economy that delivers opportunity and prosperity and economic independence from the state. They deserve an independent judiciary that will guarantee the rule of law and ensure equal justice for all Iranians. And they deserve a system that guarantees religious freedom, so that they can build a society in which compassion and tolerance prevail.

Today, the Iranian regime denies all these rights. It shuts down independent newspapers and web sites and jails those who dare to challenge the corrupt system. It brutalizes its people and denies them their liberty.

America believes in the independence and territorial integrity of Iran. America believes in the right of the Iranian people to make their own decisions and determine

their own future. America believes that freedom is the birthright and deep desire of every human soul. And to the Iranian people, I say: As you stand for your own liberty, the people of America stand with you.

NOTE: The statement referred to President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority.

Remarks in a Discussion on Implementing the Medicare Modernization Act in Maple Grove, Minnesota

June 17, 2005

The President. Thanks for the warm welcome. Thanks for the warm day too. [Laughter] It's good to be back in the great State of Minnesota. Thanks for coming. I think you're going to find this to be an interesting discussion we're about to have about Medicare. We're here to say to the seniors who live here in Minnesota and around the country that Medicare has been strengthened, reformed, and modernized, and we hope you take a look at it—the new program, because it's going to benefit a lot of people.

So what you're about to see is Government in the process of educating folks about what's available, and I want to thank my fellow panelists for being here. I think you're going to find this to be an interesting discussion.

Before I begin, I just want you to know that Laura sends her best. She's doing great, working on some new comedy material. [Laughter] But I'm really proud of her, and she and I are having the times of our life representing the United States of America, and I'm really lucky to have her by my side.

I want to thank the Governor for being here. Governor, thanks for coming, I'm proud you're here. Thanks for serving. We've got the secretary of state here. Mary,

thanks for being here. Oh, there she is. Hi, Mary. Thank you for coming. We've got the mayor, mayor of Maple Grove. I saw the mayor come in. Mayor—there he is. I appreciate you being—sitting by your old classmate. Thanks for having us. I want to thank all the folks who serve in the statehouse and local government. I appreciate you serving your State. I really want to tell you to thank your families. It's not easy to be in public office, and it's not easy to be in public office if you're a family member. But thanks for serving.

I really want to thank the folks here at Maple Grove for letting us come by. It's not easy to host the President. [Laughter] It turns out his entourage is quite big these days. [Laughter] But I really want to thank you for letting us do this. I think you're going to find this will help the seniors who use this fantastic facility. It will help them at least understand there's new options available to them when it comes to making sure there's a prescription drug benefit available to them.

I want to thank Mark. I'm going to talk a little bit about Mark in a second here, but I want to thank Rhonda Whitenack, who is the Social Security Administration training instructor. I just was with Rhonda and some folks who have taken time out