

Remarks in a Visit With Senior Citizens in Atlanta, Georgia
July 22, 2005

The President. How are you? Say hello to my mother. How's everybody? So what are you doing here, Patty?

Patti Patterson. We're talking about the extra help application. I'm trying to get these guys to help me spread the word to anybody and everybody that they might know might be eligible for this extra help.

The President. Well, thank you. You know, sometimes when a person hears that their Medicare program is going to change, it creates a little anxiety. And what we need is people all around the country saying to a friend, "Just take a look at the new plan." I'm telling you, we're coming with a good plan for seniors. It's really going to help a lot of people.

So this is an effort to reach out to people all around the country—here in Atlanta and all around the country—to explain to people there are some new options in Medicare that will make their lives better. It's voluntary. If you like what you got, you can stay with what you got. If you're interested in the new ideas, we're out making sure people know those options are available.

I want to thank you for being interested in helping. This is going to require a lot of chatter, a lot of people talking to their neighbors, and a lot of people helping people understand what's available and the forums that are available and the programs that are available. And I want to thank you all for reaching out.

Ms. Patterson. Thank you.

The President. I brought somebody with me—[laughter]—my favorite senior citizen. [Laughter]

Former First Lady Barbara Bush. I have to be, I've got an almost 60-year-old son. [Laughter]

The President. We'd like to say hello to you. Thanks for doing this. This is a national effort that you're a part of.

Former First Lady Bush. Weren't you going to tell people they ought to ask doctors, lawyers, people they trust whether this is a good deal for them?

The President. Yes, I am.

Former First Lady Bush. Yes, you are. [Laughter]

The President. You ought to ask your people that you count on for advice, that this is a good deal. You know, for a lot of seniors, the prescription drug benefit is going to help change their lives in a positive way. Again, if you're happy with what you're getting from Medicare or your private insurance plan, nothing changes. That's what people have got to understand. But for a lot of folks, this new modernization of Medicare is going to provide some new benefits that are going to be incredibly important.

Former First Lady Bush. It saves them money.

The President. And save money, yes. See? That's why she's here—to remind me of what to say—[laughter]—and save their lives.

One of the things that's interesting about Medicare is that there's a new benefit that enables people to get preventative screenings early. If you now join Medicare, the first thing that happens is the Government will give you a screening to determine whether or not there's any illnesses or conditions that need to be addressed now. That's a change in Medicare. That seems to make sense to me. If you diagnose a problem early, it's easier to solve the problem. And then starting in January of next year, there's going to be a new prescription drug benefit. And seniors, by the way, will get more choices to choose from. But it's all voluntary. In other words, the Government is not saying, "You have to do this." The Government is saying, "These programs are available to you."

So we've got a lot of good folks explaining what's available. Mother and I are going to go over to have a little forum. And one of the persons in the forum is a pharmacist. So the corner store pharmacists are now beginning to understand what the new program is, and they'll help other seniors understand, when it becomes available.

Anyway, thanks for letting us come by and say hello. It's good to see you. We're coming around to shake hands.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:18 a.m. on the Budd Terrace at the Wesley Woods Center. Participating in the visit was Patti Patterson, Deputy Regional Communications Director, Social Security Administration, Atlanta Region.

Remarks in a Discussion on Senior Security in Atlanta July 22, 2005

The President. Thank you all. Thank you all very much. Please be seated. Thank you. I'm proud—thank you. Thank you all. We got work to do here. Thanks for the warm welcome. I know you're really cheering for Mother.

I'm really thrilled to be back in Atlanta. We're going to talk about Medicare and Social Security. Thanks for letting me come by to discuss these two really important programs with you. I think you're going to find it interesting.

I want to thank the Atlanta Chamber for sponsoring this event. I think it's a good use for the Chamber's time to let us come. I say "us" because there's going to be more than one speaker—you'll be happy to hear—to talk about things that are important for our senior citizens. This is an educational experience for people. And I can't thank you enough for sponsoring this. So to all the Chamber folks, Tom Bell and Sam Williams and the members of the Chamber, thanks a lot for letting us come by.

I want to thank my friend Sonny Perdue. You know, I saw Sonny at the airport. He and Mary kindly came by, and I said, "Sonny, how is your budget?" He said, "We got a surplus." I said, "Congratulations. That's a sign of leadership." And I want to thank you, Sonny, for serving your State.

I want to thank very much Jim Wagner, the president at Emory. We have just come from a Medicare education seminar at—on the campus of that fantastic university. It is a special place. Thanks for letting us come by. I appreciate you very much for letting us—for coming today as well.

It turns out when you fly from Washington on Air Force One, people sometimes like to get a ride. [Laughter] So I was honored to have coffee today on Air Force One with some really great members of the Georgia congressional delegation, starting with the United States Senator, Saxby Chambliss. And Johnny Isakson is with us too. I appreciate you, Johnny. And we flew down with Congressman Jack Kingston, Congressman John Linder, and Congressman Lynn Westmoreland, three Members of the House.

I want to thank the members of the statehouse who are here, Eric Johnson, Bill Stephens, Jerry Keen. I appreciate you all serving in the senate and the house of representatives here in the State of Georgia.

I want to thank my friend Julie Gerberding. She is the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Where are you, Julie? Somewhere. Thanks for coming. Oh, there you are. It's a really important agency, and she's doing a really fine job. I'm proud of your service