

## Remarks Following a Discussion on Health Care in Landover, Maryland *July 18, 2007*

Today I've had a really good discussion about health care and health care problems with three businessowners and employees of the small businesses with Secretary Leavitt and Mark McClellan and Administrator Preston. I heard a common complaint, that health care is—the costs are too high; that small-business owners feel very pinched by these high costs; that they don't like the idea of having to make the decision between providing health care for their employees and not expanding their businesses.

And the fundamental question, given these frustrations, is, what do we do about it as a nation? There is an interesting debate taking place in Congress, and there is a philosophical divide. Some in Congress believe the best solution to solving the frustrations of uninsured and high costs for small businesses is to expand the role of government. I have a different point of view. I believe the best way to deal with the frustrations of high cost of health care and uninsured is to change the Tax Code, is to make health care in the private sector more affordable and more available.

The debate in Congress is now centering around what's called SCHIP, which is the children's health care insurance program. It was a program initially designed to help poor families afford health care for their children. I support that concept. As a matter of fact, the budget I submitted funds health care for poor children. Members of Congress have decided, however, to expand the program to include, in some cases, up to families earning \$80,000 a year, which would cause people to drop their private insurance in order to be involved with a government insurance plan.

And when you couple that with the idea that some have suggested of reducing the age at which you can be eligible for Medicare, you're beginning to get a sense of

a strategy to grow the government role in the provision of health care. I believe government cannot provide affordable health care. I believe it would cost—it would cause the quality of care to diminish. I believe there would be lines and rationing over time. If Congress continues to insist upon expanding health care through the SCHIP program, which, by the way, would entail a huge tax increase for the American people, I'll veto the bill.

Our proposal is a strategy that says to small-business owners and individuals, we want you, one, to be in charge of your health care system—health care decisions; and, two, we believe you're discriminated against in the Tax Code. You work for a large company, you get a tax break on your health care. You work for a small business and/or you're in the individual market, you don't get the same tax break. And that's unfair, and it's not right. And therefore, I have proposed to the United States Congress that we have a \$15,000 deductible for families and a \$7,500 deductible for individuals, all aimed at encouraging people to be able to afford insurance and aimed at the encouragement of the development of an individual market.

I believe strongly that small businesses ought to be afforded the chance to purchase health care across jurisdictional boundaries. Mike owns a small restaurant; he ought to be able to pool risk with restaurants in Texas or California or anywhere else, so he can better afford insurance. I want patients making decisions, not bureaucrats in Washington, DC. I want the system to benefit the individual, the small-business owner, not large insurance companies.

And I really do believe that government involvement in health care will lead to less quality care and rationing over time. And therefore, we proposed a plan. I urge the Congress to work with us on making the

Tax Code fair. I know there's different ideas as to whether or not there ought to be a \$15,000 deductible or a credit. I'm open-minded; I'm willing to listen. But what I'm not willing to listen to is a direct expansion of the Federal role in providing—a massive expansion of the Federal role in providing health care for individuals across the country.

Thank you all for having me. Cliff, thank you; you have a very interesting company here. I'm proud to be with small-business owners. I understand the role of small businesses in our society. We have worked to reduce taxes on small businesses because we want you to grow. And the fact that you are growing across the country collectively is one reason why our economy is so strong. And this economy is doing well. The unemployment rate is 4.5 percent; small businesses are growing; people are working; stock market is up; inflation is

down. And we're going to keep it that way. One way you keep it that way is to have good health care policy emanating out of Washington and another is to keep taxes low. And that's what we're going to do. So thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:27 a.m. at Man & Machine, Inc. Participating in the discussion were Mark B. McClellan, visiting senior fellow, AEI-Brookings Joint Center for Regulatory Studies; Mike Kostinsky, owner, and Debbie Couch, manager, Sorrento of Arbutus; Clifton Broumand, president and chief executive officer, and Lenny Merryman, operations manager, Man & Machine, Inc.; and Phyllis Burlage, owner, and Lori Emmert, office manager, Burlage & Associates. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

## Remarks Following a Meeting With the Import Safety Working Group *July 18, 2007*

The American people expect their Government to work tirelessly to make sure consumer products are safe. And that is precisely what my administration is doing.

I've called together key members of my Cabinet to review the procedures in place, the regulations in place, the practices in place to make sure that our food supply remains the safest in the world. The world is changing, and in order to make sure that we can continue to have the confidence of our consumers, that—we will continually review practices and procedures to assure the American consumer.

And so I've asked Mike Leavitt, the Secretary of HHS, to lead a task group that will report back to me in 60 days on a strategy that will review procedures in place and regulations in place to make sure that they're meeting the needs of a changing

world, that part of our strategy is we work with our countries from which we import goods to make sure that their procedures and practices will give us comfort. And finally, we'll be working with companies that import goods from around the world to make sure that their practices meet the high standards that we set for the United States.

This is a serious issue; food safety and consumer safety is a serious issue. We take it seriously, and we spend a lot of time on it in this administration. So, Michael, I want to thank you very much for taking on this task force. It's important for the American people to know their Government is on top of the situation and constantly reviewing procedures and practices. So thank you.