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The President's Radio Address

June 7, 2003

Good morning. This week the House and Senate will be working on one of the most important issues facing Congress, improving Medicare to offer prescription drug coverage to American seniors. And on Wednesday I will travel to Chicago and talk about our responsibility to give seniors more choices and better benefits, including help with the rising costs of prescription drugs.

We have a tremendous opportunity to reform Medicare and help our seniors. The budget I proposed and which the Congress passed provides $400 billion in additional funds over the next 10 years to strengthen and improve Medicare, so we have the resources to make reform work. We're also seeing a growing consensus, in both houses of Congress and both parties, that our seniors need a strengthened Medicare system that includes prescription drug coverage. The time is right to make progress.

Our nation has made a binding commitment to bring affordable health care to our seniors. We must honor that commitment by making sure Medicare stays current with the needs of today's seniors. When Medicare was launched 38 years ago, medicine focused on surgery and hospital stays, and that is mainly what Medicare covers. Today, doctors routinely treat their patients with prescription drugs, preventative care, and groundbreaking medical devices, but Medicare coverage has not kept pace with these changes. Our goal is to give seniors the best, most innovative care. This will require a strong, up-to-date Medicare system that relies on innovation and competition, not bureaucratic rules and regulations.

My views on Medicare are clear. First, those who like the Medicare system as it is should be able to stay just where they are and also receive prescription drug benefits.

Second, those who want more coverage for preventative care and other benefits should be able to choose from multiple health plans under an enhanced Medicare program. This option would be similar to the health care coverage available to every Federal employee. If that coverage is good enough for Members of Congress and Federal employees, it is good for our seniors.

Third, seniors who want the benefits of managed care plans, including prescription drug coverage, should be able to choose from a range of plans that best fit their personal needs.

And fourth, we must provide extra help for low-income seniors, so that all seniors will have the ability to choose the Medicare option that serves them best, and every senior will have the option of a prescription drug benefit.

In a Medicare system that reflects these principles, every senior in America would enjoy better benefits than they do today. And they would continue to benefit from the most important strength of American medicine, the ability to choose your own doctor. We want seniors and doctors, not Government bureaucrats, to be in charge of the important health care decisions.

Members of Congress are working hard on this issue, and I encourage their efforts. I also urge Americans to make their voices heard. If we work together, Congress will pass a strong Medicare bill, and our seniors will finally get the prescription drug benefits and choices they need and deserve.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9:40 a.m. on June 6 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on June 7. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 6 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks Following a Cabinet Meeting and an Exchange With Reporters

June 9, 2003

The President. I just met with my Cabinet, had the opportunity to brief them about my trip overseas. I talked about the visit to Poland and to Russia, where we've got good friends in both those countries, at least in terms of their leaders.

And then I went to the G–8 in Evian, France. The message there was, is that America and Europe can do a lot together. We can make the world more peaceful. We can make the world more free. We can work together to help fight the pandemic of AIDS in Africa. There's a lot we can do together. We need to put our differences in the past and combine our efforts. We can do—trade together so our people can find work. And I left feeling very good about our relations in Europe.

Then I went to the Middle East and started the—started the march to peace. And I'm optimistic about our chances to bring a peaceful, free Palestinian state in existence, to live side by side with a secure Israel. We've got a lot of work to do, but I was pleased with the response of Prime Minister Sharon. He's a courageous leader, dedicated to the security of the Israeli people, as are we, but also recognizing that life can be better for the Palestinians.

And I appreciate the leadership of Prime Minister Abbas, the new Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, who spoke eloquently and clearly about the need for the free world to fight off terror in order for a Palestinian state to emerge.

And then I went over to Qatar, had a very good visit with Ambassador Bremer and General Tommy Franks, and we talked about the need for our coalition to continue to make steadfast progress in Iraq so that the people of Iraq will be able to eventually run themselves. And we are making steadfast progress.

Finally, we talked about domestic matters. Secretary Snow briefed us on the economy. And we're optimistic about our economy, but we won't rest until we're certain that people who are looking for work and who want to work can find a job. The jobs-and-growth package passed by the Congress can be very beneficial to those who look for work.

We also talked about the possibilities of Congress getting a good Medicare bill out. I will spend time this week discussing Medicare with the American people. Secretary Thompson briefed us on the progress being made by the Congress, and I want to thank the congressional leadership for showing the determination that's going to be necessary to get a good Medicare package out for America's seniors.

I'm proud of my Cabinet. I want to thank them for their good work and really proud of the team we have put together here.

I'll answer a few questions. Tom [Tom Raum, Associated Press], and then Patsy [Patricia Wilson, Reuters].

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, since you left the Middle East, there's been a new outbreak of violence; three main Palestinian militant groups have claimed responsibility for it. Prime Minister Abbas says he will not use force to control these groups, and Prime Minister Sharon has been criticized by rightwing members of his own party. Why are you so optimistic?

The President. I'm optimistic because I was able to listen to the Prime Ministers of Israel and the Palestinian Authority talk about the need for peace and for a state.

Listen, I recognize there's going to be extremes, particularly in the Palestinian territories, that want to blow up peace. But I think people are sick of it. The average Palestinian must understand that their lives will improve with the vision of Prime Minister Abbas. And the Arab neighborhood understands that violence will lead to nothing except misery and the lack of hope. And so I'm optimistic that responsible leaders have now got the message that we must combine to work to fight off the terror attacks so that a peaceful Palestinian state can emerge.

And I understand there's going to be a lot of work to do, but I'm prepared to lead. And we're sending a team in place. Ambassador Wolf will be on the ground soon, holding people to account and working to strengthen Prime Minister Abbas so that he can deliver on his promise, a promise he made not only