

Breast Cancer Event  
East Room  
October 21, 1998

PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

**HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON**  
**REMARKS TO BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH**  
**EVENT**  
**THE WHITE HOUSE**  
**OCTOBER 21, 1998**

It's a great pleasure to join the President in welcoming all of you to the White House, as we come together to mark Breast Cancer Awareness Month. All of you here have been such powerful voices in the fight against breast cancer, and today, we will celebrate how far we've come in that fight -- and renew our pledge to the task before us. But right now, I want to introduce someone whose decision to take time out of his busy schedule to join us -- on this of all days -- is an indication of his commitment to this cause, and to all of you.

He wants to highlight some of the important victories we have just gained in the budget -- some of which will have a direct impact on the work that all of you do, day in and day out, to improve the health of America's women. It is a pleasure to introduce to you a person who has been a great champion for the cause of breast cancer, my husband, President Bill Clinton.

[President speaks]

I want to thank the President for that good news briefing, and again, to express my appreciation to all of you for joining us today. Think how

far we've come. When I was a college student, a diagnosis of breast cancer was the equivalent of a death sentence. Today, breast cancer is at the forefront of the nation's health care agenda -- and we have made tremendous strides in preventing, detecting, and treating this disease. That progress could not have happened without the tireless work and commitment of all the people in this room.

Today, we have with us leading breast cancer advocates; researchers and scientists; corporate sponsors of the Medicare Mammography Initiative; women's health advocates; and those representing our federal agencies, and I'd like to ask the representatives from the Department of Defense to stand. I want to acknowledge as well the cancer survivors who have joined us -- who are daily reminders of how early detection can save lives.

I also want to welcome Dr. Jane Henney -- who as the President has just announced has just been confirmed as the nation's new FDA Commissioner. She's been such a strong advocate for breast cancer -- and I know we all celebrate her new position in the Administration.

A special word of thanks to our speakers this afternoon: Secretary Shalala -- whose unflagging leadership has done so much to improve the health and well-being of America's children and families; Dr. Nancy

Davidson -- Director of the Breast Cancer Research at the Johns Hopkins Oncology Center, who represents the many dedicated scientists and researchers across the country who are making extraordinary strides in our fight against breast cancer.

We will also hear from Fran Visco, whose private courage and public advocacy on behalf of women with breast cancer is renowned far beyond the walls of this room. In addition to her leadership of the National Breast Cancer Coalition, she's the co-chair of the National Action Plan on Breast Cancer, and serves on the President's Cancer Panel. I'm so pleased she's just been named to the Integration Panel of the DOD's Breast Cancer Research Program.

I will never forget the day in 1993 when Fran and so many other passionate breast cancer advocates came here to the White House -- to this room -- armed with the signatures of 2.6 million Americans demanding national action on breast cancer.

Since then, the public/private partnership that grew out of that meeting -- the National Action Plan on Breast Cancer -- has worked tirelessly to reach its goal: the complete eradication of breast cancer.

Today, I'm pleased to release a report highlighting the Administration's accomplishments, and the progress we've all made together in the fight against breast cancer.

First, the Administration has taken the lead in dramatically boosting its investments in cancer research. These new funds have helped lead to historic breakthroughs -- including the identification of new breast cancer genes, and promising new treatments. The FDA has recently approved two new drugs [Herceptin and Taxol] which will help slow the spread of the disease. Another drug [Tamoxifen] has been shown to dramatically reduce the incidence of breast cancer in women at high risk for the disease. We celebrate the lives saved or prolonged by these new scientific discoveries.

Second, the Administration has expanded the availability and quality of prevention tools like mammograms. Too many women just can't afford the mammograms that could save their lives. This year, thanks to Administration leadership, Medicare began covering annual mammograms for all beneficiaries 40 years and older -- and is making

them more affordable. We've also spearheaded a series of unprecedented outreach initiatives -- to make sure older women take advantage of the mammography benefits offered by Medicare.

Third, the Clinton Administration has worked hard to improve access to treatment and quality of care for women with breast cancer. The President has proposed that Medicare cover clinical trial costs -- and we are making it easier for physicians to enroll patients in clinical trials. Acknowledging the terrible and persistent racial disparities in treatment, access to care, and general health -- the Administration has proposed an initiative to address racial health inequities in six major areas -- including cancer. And Congress has taken a first step in funding this proposal. And finally, building on the valuable efforts begun at the DOD and the FDA -- the National Cancer Institute is fully integrating patients and advocates into setting the nation's research agenda.

Working together, we've brought breast cancer mortality rates down markedly here in the United States -- a decline of 4.5 percent between 1991 and 1995. And we should be proud of that accomplishment. Yet as every person in this room knows all too well -- breast cancer remains the second leading cause of cancer deaths among American women. Today, one in eight women will develop breast cancer; up from

one in 20 just two decades ago. This year alone -- approximately 180,000 new cases will be diagnosed, and the disease will claim nearly half a million lives in this decade.

Clearly, we cannot rest on our accomplishments. We must instead rededicate ourselves to the task of preventing, treating, and one day curing breast cancer -- which continues to take such a terrible toll on our own lives; on our communities, and on our nation.

Toward that end, I'm very pleased to announce a number of very important new steps that this Administration is taking to build on and expand our record of progress -- in addition to the historic investment in cancer research that the President has just announced.

And here, I'd want to add my thanks to the Vice President, who has played such a pivotal role in expanding these new cancer research funds.

I also want to underscore that of the \$388 million increase in the NIH budget -- that \$40 million will be devoted to breast cancer alone.

Today, I'm pleased to announce a major new clinical trial of drugs

that have the potential to reduce the risk of developing breast cancer. The trial will involve about 20,000 women at hundreds of sites across the country and Canada -- and will build on the success of previous breast cancer trials by examining two drugs which have shown promise in reducing the risk of getting breast cancer. I also want to highlight an ongoing trial at NIH that is examining the relationship between diet and disease. It's already showing that what we do -- in our daily lives -- can decrease the chance of getting cancer.

We are also launching an expanded outreach and education campaign that will help ensure that America's older women get recommended mammograms. It will build on government and private efforts that have been going since I first announced this campaign in 1995.

This year, HHS will focus particular attention on low income and minority women -- who continue to suffer disproportionately when it comes to breast cancer. And here, I want to recognize the private sector partners of the Medicare Mammography Initiative -- with special thanks to our national sponsors, Avon, Eli Lilly, and Zenecca, and our corporate supporters. [American Greetings, the National Association of Chain Drug Stores; the Food Marketing Institute; 1-800-FLOWERS; the American

Association of Health Plans, Direct Selling Association, the Florida Association of HMOs, the National Community Pharmacists Association, and Pitney Bowes.]

I would also like acknowledge a number of breast cancer survivors who are with us today -- including Hazel Parego (PA-RAH-GO); Zora Brown; and Jean Camak [KA-MECK] -- a White House volunteer.

Alfreda [AL-FREE-DA] Elzie is another survivor here today. She's 47; and an African American. Unfortunately -- that means she's more at risk than many for breast cancer. Luckily, she got the last slot of the day at her church for a free mammogram, which she received from the George Washington Mammovan.

As a result of that first screening, Alfreda was diagnosed with very early breast cancer -- and was treated in Maryland -- thanks to the Breast Treatment Program paid for by the cigarette Tax. She's finished her therapy -- and is doing fine. Her story is a powerful reminder that early detection can save lives.

Stories like Alfreda's remind me that we must do a better job of getting people the treatment they need. That's why I'm so disappointed that Congress did not pass legislation, sponsored by Senators Jeffords and

Kennedy, that would allow people with disabilities and illnesses like breast cancer to buy Medicare coverage.

I also want to recognize Jean Lynn, who I believe is also here today. She runs the breast cancer/mammogram van program that in its first two years alone has provided 4,000 screenings to women like Alfreda throughout the DC area. Those working on the frontlines in our communities to help prevent and detect cancer -- dedicated individuals like Jean -- deserve our deepest thanks and appreciation.

Today, we are facing a critical juncture in the fight against breast cancer. Our national commitment is beginning to pay off, as we witness dramatic progress against the disease.

Now is the time to push even harder. To redouble our efforts to pass a strong, enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights; to fight for laws that will end discrimination against individuals based on their genetic information; to end racial disparities that place minority women at far greater risk for dying of breast cancer; to increase access to clinical trials; and to continue to integrate advocates into planning the nation's cancer

research agenda. And most importantly -- to continue to support research that builds on the dramatic breakthroughs of the past few months and years. Then -- and only then -- can we truly hope to prevent, detect, treat, and one day cure this cancer that strikes so many of America's women.

And now, I would like to introduce Fran Visco, who has done so much to bring that day closer.