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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
BERGAN-MERCY HOSPITAL

5:25 P.M. CDT

Thank you, Sister Mary Vera, Archbishop Sheehan, Senator Hruska, Senator Curtis, Secretary Butz, Mayor Zorinsky distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

- On my way here this afternoon, I visited the site of the house where I was born at 32nd and Woolworth. As it is for anyone who revisits the scene of his early childhood, the visit was a very moving experience, mixed with nostalgia, with a new appreciation for having been born in this very wonderful part of the country. And thanks to the generosity of the people of Omaha, the site where the house once stood is being transferred into a garden to mark the birthplace of the first native of Nebraska to serve as President of the United States.

That certainly is a record I never expected to establish when I left this city for Michigan at the ripe, old age of a year and a half. (Laughter)

I am deeply honored by the thoughtfulness of the people of Omaha in preserving this site and I thank everyone who participated.

But my real purpose in being here, though, is to honor the courage and the resourcefulness of a great number of other Nebraskans. Just one year and one day ago a disaster struck Omaha in the path of a devastating tornado. Archbishop Bergan-Mercy Hospital was struck with its full force, but miraculously none of the 900 patients and staff members inside the hospital was seriously injured.

The Sisters of Mercy and the hospital staff showed great courage, great heroism, in evacuating the self care unit before it was wrecked and moving patients into the safety of the main building. It was truly a magnificent job of responding to the ravages of the worst storm ever to hit Omaha.

Throughout the city, people brought order to a chaotic situation, provided for the injured and the homeless and cleaned up the damaged sections of this great city.

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I first -- and very early -- heard about the tornado directly from Senator Hruska and Congressman John McCollister, two members of your very fine Congressional delegation. Federal disaster relief was on its way within 24 hours, and now the rebuilding of the damaged area is so complete it is very difficult to find any sign that a tornado ever passed through here.

I can't help but say this. When you have a tornado or a flood or an earthquake, it is nice to know that somebody in Washington in the Federal Government does care. So you should be proud here of what all of you have done, what all of those who helped you have done, and the self-sufficiency and this great community spirit.

You are preparing now not only to rebuild from the ruins of a major disaster, but to expand on this site. This groundbreaking, in itself, is an act of courage and of faith, two qualities that have never been in short supply in the great State of Nebraska.

The new East Tower which will rise from this site will be more than an institution of health care. It will be an inspiration to all of the citizens of Omaha. It will symbolize your strength, your compassion, your sophistication, and your rising ambition.

In more practical terms, it will serve your community with nursing care of the very highest quality for older citizens of the Omaha area. All of us know that it takes money and lots of it to build a facility like the East Tower, money to maintain it, money to staff it, money to provide the professional care that is needed so much.

As a result, medical care, especially for the elderly, can be a very expensive proposition. If an older person has to stay in a hospital or a nursing home or, under doctor's orders, for an extended period of time it can put an incredible strain on lifetime savings and on the peace of mind of the patient and the loved ones alike.

Being in poor health for a long time is bad enough without having to worry about the ruinous economic effect of long-term illness. I have suggested a plan to insure that older Americans will receive medical and hospital care they need without going broke in the process.

Under this suggestion, Medicare patients in hospitals or nursing homes would never have to pay more than \$500 a year for medical care or ten percent of their total hospital bills, whichever is less, for covered doctors services. The maximum would be \$250 or 20 percent of the total, whichever is less. Medicare would pay the rest, whether it costs \$1,000 or \$10,000.

I want to see America's older citizens live their lives in dignity and in security and in the very best possible care. So to the Sisters of Mercy, who have given more than a century of service to the sick and to the disabled in America. They have shown countless times that the quality of mercy blesses both those who receive it and those who give it.

The rebuilding of your city and the expansion of Archbishop Bergan-Mercy Hospital exemplifies another important trait that I am proud of as an American. Our continuing faith in our American way of life.

Fears of some of the problems we have had in the last year provided another challenge. As we have seen so often in the history of our Nation, the threat of adversity merely uncovered new reservoirs of strength and resourcefulness. You have not only repaired the damage following a disaster, you have built a newer and better facility for a newer and better community.

The feeling of confidence in the future that I see being rekindled all across America is no better demonstrated than right here in Omaha on this site where the ravages of the past have so confidently been replaced with our very best hopes for the future.

Thank you very much.

END

(AT 5:32 P.M. CDT)