TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

Healthy citizens constitute our greatest natural resource, and prudence as well as justice demands that we husband that resource. In time of peace as in time of war our ultimate strength stems from the vigor of our people. As a nation we cannot afford to lose the productive energies and capacities of millions of our citizens. We should not—and must not—permit millions of youths to grow up without an equal and fair chance for a healthy life or for survival itself. We must not permit our rural youth and our farmers to suffer from an unfair distribution of doctors, dentists, and hospitals. And as a nation we should not reserve good health and long productive life for the well-to-do, only, but should strive to make good health equally available to all citizens.

In my message to the Congress on November 19, 1945, I said that every American should have the right to adequate medical care and to adequate protection from the economic fears of sickness.

As yet, however, we have not done enough to remove from our citizens the fear of ill-health or to put into practice the principles which I stated eighteen months ago:

"We should resolve now that the health of this Nation is a national concern; that financial barriers in the way of attaining health shall be removed; that the health of all its citizens deserves the help of all the Nation."

More today than ever before, simple justice to our citizens and the welfare and security of our Nation demand that the right to good health be made available to all, in all sections of this country, regardless of residence,
economic status, or race. It is for this reason that I renew my request that
the Congress now enact adequate and bold legislation to make these rights a
reality.

Improving our citizens' health is a complicated task, which requires
integrated action on a wide front. As is true of any major problem, it will
take time to reach our goal. We will not become a healthy nation merely be-
cause the Congress legislates. But it is also true that we cannot progress
very far toward our goal of sound national health until the Congress acts to
provide an integrated health program. Certain elements of such a program have
been enacted by the Congress, but no comprehensive plan has been put into law.
Continued delay is dangerous to the national welfare.

I have previously outlined weaknesses in our health program which require
prompt remedial action and have submitted recommendations to correct them. I
say again that we need these improvements:

1. Expanded public health services, and an expanded maternal and
child care program.
2. More medical research and medical education.
3. More hospitals and more doctors—in all areas of the country where
they are needed.
4. Insurance against the high costs of medical care.
5. Protection against loss of earnings during illness.

Our public health services — federal, state and local — are perhaps our
greatest and most successful preventive for communicable diseases. In urban
areas, we have purified almost all of our sources of water; we have provided
for sewage disposal and improved sanitary facilities; and we have virtually
eliminated such diseases as typhoid fever, smallpox and diphtheria. But in many counties in America, limited funds reduce the work of our public health services to a dangerously inadequate level. Public services related to maternal and child health were expanded by the 79th Congress, through amendments to the Social Security Act. But the need for additional services for expectant mothers and infants and for care for crippled or otherwise physically handicapped children is still great. Large parts of our population receive woefully inadequate assistance in these respects.

The Nation needs more medical research and education in order to prevent diseases through research into their causes and into methods of combating them. This research and education is a national responsibility. The Congress has recognized this fact by providing with increasing generosity for cancer research and for research into mental disease and abnormalities. Further dividends will accrue to our Nation—and to our people—if research can point the way toward combating and overcoming such crippling illnesses as rheumatism, tuberculosis, diseases of the heart, kidneys and arteries.

There is a critical shortage of hospitals, doctors, and dentists, and those available are unevenly distributed. The 79th Congress provided for an expanded hospital construction program, and I hope the fruits of that program will soon be seen. In the last analysis, however, the patients' ability to buy a doctor's services, and to purchase hospital facilities, will determine the distribution of doctors and hospitals. Few doctors can be expected to practice today in sparsely settled areas or where prospective patients are too poor to pay for services. It is natural for doctors to concentrate in communities where their incomes are secure and their chances for service greatest. The maldistribution of doctors
and hospitals will remain to plague this nation until some means are found to
finance adequate medical care for all citizens and to protect them against the
sudden and often disastrous losses of unpredictable illness.

The greatest single health need of the Nation today is for national health
insurance. Because adequate treatment of illness is expensive and cannot be
planned for in advance by the individual, many persons go without needed medical
attention. Children do not receive adequate medical and dental examinations and
preventive care; adults ignore symptoms which a physician should examine, often
until a belated trip to the doctor is useless. Nor is it only the poorest of
our people who cannot afford adequate medical care. The truth is that all
except the rich may be at some time struck by illnesses which tax their re-
sources to the limit, or which require care and services they cannot afford.
Countless American families who are entirely self-supporting in every other
respect are "medically indigent" at time of serious illness.

Although the individual cannot successfully "budget" his illnesses, large
groups of citizens can collectively do so. If the risks of illness are spread
among all our citizens, no one person is overburdened. More importantly, if
the risks are so spread, more people will see their doctors, and will see them
earlier. More Americans will be healthy and the nation will be strong. All this
can be achieved through a national medical insurance program, whereby all citizens
who pay into an insurance fund are entitled thereby to necessary medical, hospital
and related services. Such a program is a logical extension of our present social-
insurance system which is so firmly entrenched in our American democracy.

There has been a certain amount of emotional reaction against a national
medical insurance plan. It is said that such a program would destroy the
traditional relationship between doctor and patient; it is said that patients
would no longer have a free choice of doctors, or that care would deteriorate. These fears are groundless. The only way such a plan would change traditional relationships is that more Americans will be able to afford good health, and more doctors—in small towns and rural areas as well as in cities—will receive adequate compensation for their services. Under the program I have recommended, patients can and should be as free to select their own doctors as they now are. Doctors and hospitals can and should be perfectly free to participate in the plans or to reject participation. And a national health insurance plan can and should provide for state and local administration, subject only to reasonable national standards.

An insurance plan is an American plan. Furthermore, it is the only plan broad enough in scope to meet the needs of our people. It is—in the long run—less costly and more effective than a charity system, and it is clearly more consistent with our democratic traditions.

Finally, I should like to repeat to the Congress my earlier recommendation that the workers of America be insured against loss of earnings due to illness or disability. Insurance against loss of this kind is already provided by two states and is being considered in others. Insurance of this kind can be integrated easily with other aspects of the social insurance program. It is appropriately associated with a comprehensive health plan, and should be a part of such a program.

A comprehensive and integrated national health program is crucial to our welfare and should receive the serious attention of this Congress. The heart of this program is the insurance plan. Until some such system is a part of our national fabric we shall be wasting an unnecessary part of our most precious natural resource and shall be perpetuating unnecessary misery and human suffering.