May 8, 2006
(Senate)

STATEMENT OF ADMINISTRATION POLICY

S. 22 – Medical Care Access Protection Act of 2006
(Sen. Ensign (R) NV and 16 cosponsors)

The Administration strongly supports Senate passage of S. 22, legislation to reform the Nation's badly broken medical liability system. The bill would improve access to quality care, reduce health care costs, and ensure a more timely, predictable, and fair liability system.

The President strongly believes that patients who are hurt due to the negligence of a doctor should be able to collect full damages for current and future medical care, therapy, rehabilitation, lost wages, and other economic losses. Victims of malpractice should also be able to collect non-economic damages, such as for pain and suffering, but within a reasonable limit. In addition, victims of malpractice should not have to pay exorbitant legal fees.

Urgent Congressional action is needed because rising medical liability costs have forced some doctors to close their practices and made it more difficult for patients to access affordable, quality health care in certain parts of the country where the liability crisis is particularly acute. In many States that have not enacted meaningful reforms like those contained in S. 22, health care providers are facing enormous increases in their medical liability insurance premiums or are unable to obtain coverage at all. Physicians have been driven to quit their practice and leave patients with reduced access to trauma care, obstetrical services, and other critical medical services.

The Administration looks forward to working with the Congress to enact comprehensive legislation that meets the President's goals of reducing medical malpractice premiums and overall health care costs by limiting excessive non-economic and punitive damage awards, limiting attorneys' fees, and minimizing frivolous lawsuits and time-consuming legal proceedings.

* * * * * * * * * *