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ADDRESS

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It is a pleasure to be here for the first formal event of the Stewart B. McKinney Foundation. I commend his family, friends and associates for choosing to honor Congressman McKinney in such a compassionate and worthy fashion.

The AIDS epidemic presents the people of the United States with a difficult and complex test of our national character. It is still very much a mystery and it is always fatal.

But in some ways, the scientific issues pale in comparison to the highly sensitive issues of law, ethics, economics, morality and social cohesion that are beginning to surface. To tell the truth, we may already be at a very sensitive stage in regard to the ethical foundation of health care itself.

We hear of physicians, dentists, nurses and other health care personnel who refuse to treat persons with AIDS or even persons they suspect of having AIDS. While fear of AIDS is understandable, there is no factual or scientific basis for this fear. The risk for a health care worker to catch AIDS is minuscule as long as they follow the guidelines for self protection issued by the Centers for Disease Control over a year ago.

Let me quickly add that rejection of AIDS patients is not characteristic of health professionals by any means. The overwhelming majority of my colleagues continue to provide quality, compassionate care to persons with any illness...including AIDS.

But the problem exists. And there are associated problems. Hospitals with national reputations for providing care for AIDS patients are being by-passed by medical and nursing students deciding where to continue their training because they want a greater variety of experience. And there are reports of non-AIDS patients asking their physicians to check them into hospitals with few, if any, AIDS patients because of unwarranted fear of infection or concern that friends may think they have AIDS.

I think this is serious because it could lead to separate and unequal treatment for AIDS patients and magnify the impact of the AIDS epidemic on the American health care system.

A related issue, and certainly one that is much on the minds of this group, is the cost of care for AIDS patients. Those costs are currently running at about \$2 billion annually. The Journal of the American Medical Association recently published a study indicating that the average inpatient cost for AIDS is \$20,320 per year.

By 1991, the bill to care for AIDS patients will range from a low estimate of \$8 billion to a high estimate of \$16 billion. Where will the money come from? Right now, the American taxpayer is covering about 25 percent of that cost, mostly through Medicaid. State and local funds, health insurance benefits and the patients' own resources make up most of the rest.

A question being asked is: As AIDS costs rise, will the resources continue to be available to meet the needs? Will the American people and the system be willing and able to provide the same level of care for people with AIDS?

I believe this event today, and the stated goals of the Stewart B. McKinney Foundation, provide encouragement that ways will be found to meet these needs and that the care will be given. The establishment of the first Stewart McKinney AIDS residence here in Stamford, and the goal of funding more such residences elsewhere, are the kind of undertakings in the private sector, that give hope that innovative new ways will be found to help shoulder the burden of the AIDS epidemic.

Residential care facilities such as these provide not only support and sustenance for the AIDS patients, they can help to contain the rising cost of AIDS by providing quality care in the most appropriate setting.

I did not personally know Congressman McKinney, but I have heard many accounts of his compassion and caring, of his humane character and warmth. Clearly, these are qualities shared by his wife, Lucy, and his five children, as demonstrated by their efforts in establishing and nurturing the Stewart B. McKinney Foundation.

I applaud these efforts and wish them every success in what is a very fitting tribute to the philosophy of Congressman McKinney.