

average American will live to an age of 82. That's 6 years longer than the average life expectancy today.

Now, as I said, those of us who hope to be in that group consider that a high-class problem. We also are very encouraged that people are living stronger, healthier lives. We are encouraged that disabled Americans have more options to live fully and healthily for a longer period of time. We are encouraged that all these folks are proving that retirement can be a beginning as well as an end. We see all kinds of people learning new ideas, taking up new work, doing new community services, traveling and going places they never would have imagined before.

But we know that with aging, inevitably, come the infirmities of age. Nearly half the people over 85, one of the fastest growing segments of our population, need help with everyday, basic tasks—eating, dressing, going to a doctor. We cannot expect that every older American will be able to fend for himself or herself. And the real question is, what are our obligations to help every American get the care that is appropriate for each individual case?

Millions require the care that can only be provided in a nursing home. But millions more choose to remain at home with family and friends. Indeed, the elderly are remaining at home in record number. The same is true of people with disabilities. Today, millions and millions of households are caring for elderly relatives or even for neighbors. They represent the best of America, fulfilling a family obligation often unspoken but deeply resonant in the American character.

Providing long-term care at home is more and more a common choice, but as you have just heard, it is rarely an easy one. Since this kind of care is almost never covered by private insurance or Medicare, out-of-pocket expenses can be staggering. So, too, are the professional costs. Caregivers who hold jobs outside the home—that is, the vast majority—may have to take unpaid leave or work fewer hours to fulfill their responsibilities. In countless ways, caregiving is vital, meaningful work. But as you have heard, it can also be very stressful.

The First Lady has mentioned some of the things we have worked to do to ease the burden of families: improving nursing homes, strengthening Medicare, making Medicaid more flexible.

But more will be asked of us in the 21st century, and more must be done.

Today we announce a critical new initiative to give care to the caregivers, to help Americans provide long-term care for aging, ailing, and disabled loved ones. The size of the senior boom demands it. The needs of our disabled population require it. The length of our lives makes it more important than ever and so does the sacrifice of American families who put the well-being of their relatives above their own.

This is a complicated challenge that requires a range of responses. Therefore, to improve long-term care in America and to give it a priority and support these families, we proposed to do four things: first, to provide a long-term care tax credit, \$1,000 for people with long-term care needs or for the families that shelter them. It is far better to devote this money to help keep the elderly and the disabled at home than to spend the same amount to pay for them to live away from home. And if it makes it possible for more people to stay home, it may well be cheaper, too. Our parents worked and saved and sacrificed for us in our youth; adult children are now working, saving, and sacrificing for their parents in old age. It is the cycle of life and one we should recognize and reward.

This targeted tax cut of \$1,000, paid for in our balanced budget, would meet the individual needs of individual families, supplementing the care they already provide, empowering them to decide what to do and how to do it best. It would help to offset the direct cost of long-term care, like home health visits and adult day care, as well as the indirect costs, like unpaid leave some caregivers must take. The care they provide is invaluable, but we can show that it is valued by our society.

Second, we should create a family caregiver support program, a new national network to support people caring for older Americans. In decades past, families could do little for ailing relatives but give them shelter and love. But today, because of advances in science, caregivers tend to everything from dialysis to depression, preparing intravenous meals and insulin injections. This initiative enables States to create one-stop shops, places caregivers can access the resources of the community, find technical guidance, obtain respite and adult day care services. This is especially important for those families who are thousands of miles away from their loved ones but who still want to help. These families