



NEWS RELEASE

GOVERNOR'S COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2004

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Press Remarks
Governor Phil Bredesen
17 November 2004

Last week I stood here and said that we were going to be forced to return to a traditional Medicaid program. I also said that there was a glimmer of light, and that we had received a letter from the TJC asking for seven additional days to consider standing down and to propose some alternative ways to solve the fiscal crisis that TennCare presents.

Those talks have not gone well, and we are at an impasse. The offer made by Gordon Bonnyman at his press conference Monday was a good one, and I thought would work. The actual document when we received it leaves gaping holes and falls far short of the general standing down that I heard in the news conference. Further, it has become clear their current intent is to continue suing us, but to do it in new lawsuits rather than through the existing consent decrees. TennCare reform cannot be successful in this environment.

By any reasonable measure I should say "it's over" and move on.

But that is not what I am here to say today.

My four years as governor—I hope eight years—is for me when I'm supposed to bring to bear all those things I learned the last 35 years—building businesses, being mayor, working late—to do some good things for my state. I've always had a knack for finding solutions to problems where others couldn't; we have quickly gotten the state budget under control, for example.

TennCare is the most difficult problem I've ever tackled. I believe I bring some experience that can help solve it, but I cannot do it alone.

In the past year I have gone around the state and met with TennCare enrollees. It was only a few dozen of the hundreds of thousands who are out there, but their stories and their faces haunt me. For those with serious health problems—and there are a lot of those—maintaining their health care is a central issue in their lives and I believe they are depending on me. It is one thing to sit in your office with aides and spreadsheets and talk policy, it is quite another to sit down with a real human being who needs your help.

I said that I would solve the TennCare fiscal crisis, and I will. But before I go down the road of taking 430,000 people off the rolls; more specifically, before I can face even one of them individually and tell them that it is over, that I can no longer help, I need to be clear in my own heart that I've done everything that I know how to do to solve this. I need to be able to honestly say to myself that I have brought to bear everything that I've learned these past years to find a path.

I'm not there yet.

We need to step back from the brink and I need to try again. This thing is over-lawyered, it is too personal, it is rushing too fast to a conclusion. I met this afternoon with Gordon, just the two of us, and I believe he feels the same unease. We agreed to step back and try again.

Andrea and I are going to be out of town next week—it's our 30th wedding anniversary—and when I return I am going to try one more round, pull the lawyers back, and sit down personally to see if some sort of a responsible accommodation can be achieved. I want to look at some alternatives to see if they would work financially and if some different approach would be more acceptable to Mr. Bonnyman.

I want to be very clear that there is no guarantee of success; it's not too much to say that this is a long shot. But if this were to succeed, it would be a huge win for a lot of people I feel a great responsibility for; if it fails, we will be no worse off than we are here today.

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