

Fundraising Kick-Off

Thank you, President Smith, for that kind introduction. And thank you all for that warm reception. Good evening, everyone.

I am heartened to join forces with you in the fight to combat a growing National health scourge ... diabetes ... the 6th leading cause of death in the Nation.

Disease prevention and health promotion are increasingly top priorities for our Nation. As I say that, I am thinking of the observation that "*Health is the first of all liberties.*"

The freedom of good health is not unlike the personal freedom we as Americans call our birthright. Together they allow each of us ... each in our own way ... to engage fully in *life and the Pursuit of happiness*, wherever we choose to find it. During the 20th century ... and now in the 21st century ... four generations of America's 25 million living veterans have held Liberty's torch high, protecting and preserving it for us and for our friends and allies. They are doing so now.

They secured the Freedoms and way of life that allow us to fight a different, but no less deadly battle ... A war on the debilitating and life-threatening effects of diabetes ... A war to secure that essential '*first liberty*'—good health.

We are waging this battle on behalf of the American people because the staggering increase in diabetes is a problem we cannot afford to ignore. Today, up to one million Americans have Type 1 diabetes ... juvenile diabetes.

The young people affected by this condition are held hostage by its lifelong demand for insulin and a carefully regulated diet ... and they are ever mindful of diabetes' constant threat of deadly complications.

At least another 16 million of our citizens suffer from Type 2, "adult onset diabetes," linked to a combination of genetics, excess weight, and lack of exercise. And at least 16 million more have "pre-diabetes" ... a serious condition because most people who have it will develop Type 2 diabetes within a decade.

These facts are too troubling to disregard and too grim to tolerate. Diabetes was once considered a disease of middle-age and the elderly. But now we are seeing it increasingly in our children ... and that is simply unacceptable.

As parents, adults, and concerned citizens, we need to ensure our country's children get off to a healthy start. We need to be more aware of what they are eating. It's startling that today 51% of children and teenagers don't eat fruit each day ... and 29% don't eat even one vegetable, unless it's fried!

We also need to see to it that America's children get off the play-stations and onto the playgrounds and playing fields for more exercise and physical activity!

And we need to be aware of diabetes' risk factors ... We need to educate all Americans about the small but important lifestyle changes that can help them stay healthy and prevent this serious disease.

The ultimate challenge of diabetes, of course, is in finding a cure. And the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation is the vanguard in that effort. JDRF knows the cure is waiting to be found in the Nation's public and private research and development laboratories ... in the biotechnology industry ... and in our country's teaching hospitals and great universities.

Those laboratories are the front lines in the battle to vanquish diabetes. Today, doctors and scientists are answering its challenge as they relentlessly push the boundaries of medical science ... Tomorrow, with our help, they will make that final diabetes breakthrough!

The enthusiastic faces I see around me tell me we here are ready to meet the growing challenge of diabetes in a more direct and personal way. Each of us can do that by serving as foot soldiers in the fight to find a cure. We can help shape the health of America by participating in the *Walk to Cure Diabetes* held here in the Nation's Capitol and at locations across the country. Last year this event raised more than \$70 million for research ... and we want to do even better this year. And, make no mistake about it, we will!

I am proud to join JDRF in bringing-to-bear the full force of our research resources to better the lives of Americans with diabetes, especially those most vulnerable among us ... our children.

I ask Americans to join the 2004 *Walk to Cure Diabetes*. I ask all who are able, to offer their support to JDRF so we can – once and for all – put an end to this costly, insidious disease. And I urge everyone here today to give the gift of giving ... set the example ... and through your vigorous and lengthy *strides* in this year's walkathon, help make real and lasting *medical strides* in combating juvenile diabetes.

For with each determined step we take, America will be able to move one step closer to guaranteeing that priceless '*first of all liberties—good health*.'

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.