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VICE PRESIDENT GORE UNVEILS NEW REPORT HIGHLIGHTING IMPORTANCE OF MEDICARE FOR WOMEN

Washington DC – Vice President Gore unveiled today a new report showing that women have the greatest stake in preserving and improving Medicare.

“This report makes it clearer than ever that to honor and value our mothers, sisters, wives and friends, we must preserve and strengthen Medicare,” said Vice President Al Gore at a round table with the Older Women’s League.

The report, entitled “The Face of Medicare is a Woman You Know,” was conducted by the Older Women’s League (OWL), a non-profit organization focused on issues of interest to midlife and older women. The study also underscores OWL’s strong support for a number of Administration proposals to improve and modernize Medicare, including covering prescription drugs, dedicating a portion of budget surplus to Medicare, and opposing efforts to increase the eligibility age.

This new report, released as part of the Older Women’s League’s annual Mother’s Day event, found that:

- **More women than men depend on Medicare.** Women comprise nearly three-fifths of all Medicare beneficiaries and, by age 85, women outnumber men in the Medicare program by a two to one ratio. Twenty million older women depend on Medicare and another two million women with disabilities are covered by the program.
- **Older women are at greater risk for poverty than men and have higher than average health care costs.** Women over the age of 65 are more than twice as likely as older men in this age group to be poor. The older a woman is the more likely she is to be poor: among those on Medicare age 85 and older, more than half of women, compared to one in four men, had incomes of less than \$10,000 in 1996. A previous survey found that low-income women are less likely to use preventive services -- 20 percent less likely than women to have mammograms than those with higher incomes.
- **Women live longer and have more chronic illnesses.** Women rely on Medicare for longer because they live longer -- an average of 79 years compared to 73 years for men. Nine in ten women age 65 and over report one or more chronic conditions and almost

three out of four have two or more chronic conditions. These chronic conditions are sources of significant and increasing disability as well as mortality. Older women also are more likely to live alone -- giving them less access to support. More than one in three older women (35 percent) live alone -- compared to 14 percent of men.

- **Medicare has critical gaps that leave women vulnerable to high health care costs.** The report highlights some of the important gaps in Medicare that cause women to pay high out-of-pocket health care costs. For example, Medicare does not cover prescription drugs. As almost eight in ten women on Medicare use prescription drugs regularly, most pay for these medications out of pocket. Because women have greater health care needs and lower incomes, they spend a larger portion of their income on health care: women on average spend \$2613 on health care -- or 22 percent of their income, nearly one-third higher than men.
- **This report underscores need for important Medicare reforms advocated by the Clinton-Gore Administration.** The report emphasizes that because women are disproportionately impacted by the Medicare program, older women have more to lose or gain from efforts to reform the program. In releasing this report, the Older Women's League underscored that this report validates their strong support for a number of Clinton-Gore Administration Medicare proposals. Specifically, OWL supported:
- **Investing a portion of the budget surplus to strengthening Medicare.** This report underscores that given the overwhelming challenges facing Medicare (as the number of people age 65 years or older will double by 2030), applying a portion of the budget surplus would make it possible to extend Medicare into the 21st century without reducing the many critical protections that are in place today. OWL supports proposals like the Administration's policy to invest 15 percent of the budget surplus to Medicare program.
- **Opposing raising the Medicare eligibility age from 65 to 67 which would have a particularly harmful impact on women.** This report highlights the dangers of raising the Medicare eligibility age, predicting that such a change would leave large numbers of women uninsured. In 1996, three out of five uninsured Americans between the ages of 62 and 65 were women, and the proportion of uninsured left by this policy change would disproportionately impact women as well.
- **Enabling vulnerable Americans 62 to 65 to buy into Medicare, such as the Administration's Medicare buy-in policy.** The report also supports proposals to allow Americans ages 62 to 65 to buy into the Medicare program to give these vulnerable Americans -- most of whom are women -- access to much needed health care.
- **Including prescription drugs in the Medicare benefits' package.** As women have higher out-of-pocket health care costs and rely more on Medicare, efforts to address some of Medicare's current shortcoming has a disproportionate impact on them. This report

underscores the need for Medicare to pay for prescription drugs and calls for coverage of prescription drugs for all those on Medicare.