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Warm greetings to all those observing Michigan's Public Health Week.

Even in the 21st century, one of the most important challenges any society faces is protecting the physical health of its citizens. We are fortunate to live in a time of striking progress and stunning breakthroughs in medical research. Unfortunately, it is also a time of unique challenges to our health, such as rising rates of asthma and obesity, particularly among our young people.

I became particularly interested in the childhood obesity issue after having heart bypass surgery in 2004. Since then, I have become more aware of the alarming trend toward unhealthy eating and lack of exercise among our children, and I joined with the American Heart Association to create the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, which is striving to lead our youth toward healthy habits that last a lifetime -- and lengthen it. While I am proud of our efforts and accomplishments, I know that young people are still very much on their own to make decisions regarding their health. That is why I am so pleased that the theme of this year's National Public Health Week is "Designing Healthy Communities: Raising Healthy Kids," and that Michigan has chosen to express this theme by asking citizens to assess the status of the built environment in their neighborhoods and its impact on children's health. We have a much better chance of inspiring real change in our kids if the change is powered by the people in their own community.

I commend this year's Public Policy Champions, who ensure that Michigan's government truly functions in the best interests of the people they represent, and I salute the 2006 Hometown Health Heroes for their exceptional contributions to local health. True heroes are rare in today's world, and too often, those who are really making a difference go unnoticed and unrewarded. Whether encouraging physical activity, promoting childhood safety, or discouraging youth smoking, these heroes work every day to keep the public safe and healthy, and I am proud to join Michiganders in giving them the recognition they deserve.

Best wishes for a meaningful observance.

*Bill Clinton*