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Interview of Hillary Rodham Clinton
by Mimi Hall of USA Today
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Q: I've read your Wellesley speech, well I've read it a bunch of times, but I re-read it before coming up here and you mentioned at both in Michigan and here about the idealism and you mentioned it to the students today, the graduates. What I want to try to get at a little bit is how do you maintain that. You said that you tried to but now..... your the ones who can make change if any body can and when you run up against stumbling blocks or the political and social realities, for instance, with you know, the ideal goal is everybody in the Military should be treated equitably including homosexuals but then you run up against these blocks. How do you maintain it, how do you strike a balance?

Mrs. Clinton: Oh, I think it's a constant balancing because it's very rare that anything every goes according to some preordained plan. I mean our lives, politics, business, arts just about everything has the potential of being overtaken by circumstances beyond anyone's control or running up against obstacles that are there to be overcome. I think that what's exciting about life is what Franklin said, you know, that we really can make changes they may not be everything that you want but you can make changes in a day to day way on a very small scale that aggravate up. So even if you get deterred by some circumstance that you have overcome you still could be making change you still could be committed to being as kind of person as possible. You could be committed to that.

Q: You don't have to feel like if you are making compromises that you are selling your soul to get something for it?

Mrs. Clinton: Oh, no. No, I mean of course it depends upon how much, how much of a value is stake and what the circumstances are. But no, I think change is happening around us. It is our obligation to try to make it the best possible change for the most people.

Q: Because some people have voiced concerns that the Clinton Administration is to idealistic for these times.

Mrs. Clinton: Well, I don't that's the case. I think that without some sense of ideals and values you have no ruttier. I mean it's politics as usual. You are just out there holding power for the sake of power. There's no point in being in public life today unless you believe in the possibility of change and in instilling more responsibility in individuals, for example. So I would be worried if anyone in public office didn't have ideals. And I would be worried if they weren't practical enough to know how to implement those ideals in so far as it would possible at any given time.

Q: Looking back at your Wellesley speech is there anything that you wished you would have said now and also are you the person today that you thought you would be then?

Mrs. Clinton: You know, I have never thought about that, Mimi. I said what I said then because that's who I was and those were what the times were and it really was an opportunity for me to speak on behalf of my classmates. So that it was in part the words and ideas of a lot of my friends. And that's who we were back then.

Q: Strange to look back at those. I mean I look at things I've written years ago.

Mrs. Clinton: Sure, because you can see how your thinking has evolved from where you were then or what you've experienced in life and what that's taught you. But I never ever thought of myself as ending up in any specific role or place when I was growing up or when I was in college.

I have always just tried to be enjoying and getting the most out of each day and preparing myself for the next day. Learning something new every day. So I've never set down and said well here is what my life plan is and here is where I'm going to end up. I couldn't have asked for a better set of opportunities that I've had though because each one kind of just came along and I was willing to follow them.

Q: Now here is a question from my editor, who is about your age. So remembers the times better than I do. She said ask her if her and her friends use to make fun of Pat Nixon the way everybody did and if now she feels real empathy for her?

Mrs. Clinton: I never did that. I always had a lot of respect for women in any public role when I was growing up. Because there were so few of them and the strains on them were so obvious. And I also admired Mrs. Nixon's daughters. I've never met either one of them but they both seemed like very accomplished and intelligent young women who were making there own lives and decisions.

So I thought that was a very positive reflection on their mother so I never had any feelings like that.

Q: You have said though, I think maybe you said it in Austin I don't remember. But that nobody can really understand what it is like to be First Lady.

Mrs. Clinton: I think that's right, until you've done it. I think that's right.

Q: What has surprised you about it that you didn't, I mean you must have had a lot of expectations and known a lot what it would be like.

Mrs. Clinton: Well, I think it's always surprising to me how anything becomes a matter of great public interest. Like my haircut for example. I mean there are probably a million women in America a day who get their haircut. All in some way or another. Probably millions I'm not even sure how many beauty salons we have and how many people can be fit into them in the course of a day. So I wasn't really prepared for how there was such a high level of interest in all kinds of everyday sorts of things.

Q: Tell me, I do want to ask you one health care question if you are willing, it's not real specific but the ? who cover health care for the paper wanted me to ask. Secretary Bentsen talked in somewhat vague terms yesterday about phasing in the plan. And we were just wondering if you could give us any kind of sense of when we will be living under this plan. If you can predict that, and is it going to be established so slowly and over so much time that it really there won't be a sense that there has been sort of a health care revolution that's going to be?

Mrs. Clinton: Well, I think it depends on when the program is passed. If the program is passed by the end of this year most people both patients, physicians, nurses, other people in the health care system will see real changes, and I think positive changes from their perspective, by the end of 1994. And that the system will be up and running in a year or two after that. So much of it depends upon how soon we can get a program passed.

Q: So 96, maybe?

Mrs. Clinton: Yea, for most things that's right, yea.

Q: Do you have sense at this point speaking of ideals versus hitting up on reality and stumbling blocks what percentage of your ideal plan may make it through? I mean are you going to get 80% of what you want you think? 50%, 90%?

Mrs. Clinton: I think there will be tremendous support for the outlines of this plan based on the many conversations that I've been having over these last months. And that the basic framework will be implemented. And there will be changes of course and I bet there will be changes for the better.

I am not somebody who thinks that you present a piece of legislation and everybody either accepts it or rejects out of hand. I think it's often possible if you know what your goals are and what your underlining principals are that in the process of a piece of legislation as it moves through Congress can be improved. So, I think that the basic framework will be accepted because it is from everything we have learned and studied going to be closest to what Americans now have, what they understand, what they expect and it will be acceptable to them.

Q: Tell me what you meant at Wellesley when you said the art of practicing politics. Let me find it here, you know the sentence I am referring to. "For too long our leaders have used politics as the art of the possible. And the challenge now is to practice politics as the art of making what appears to be impossible, possible." Can you tell me a little bit more about what you meant by that and is that what you're doing?

Mrs. Clinton: I think that at that time I was talking about how often people reject change because they say well that's not possible. When, by education and effort a lot of what used to be considered impossible becomes possible.

And if you take health care, as an example, people have been proposing health care reform in this country since 1915 on a national basis. Franklin Roosevelt initially wanted national health care insurance to be part of social security. Harry Truman had a plan, Richard Nixon introduced a very progressive health care plan when he was President. And yet when the President, when my husband, began talking about health care during the campaign a lot of people said, "Oh it will never happen that's impossible." I mean you know, just don't even think about a national reform. You know, keep tinkering around the edges.

Well now I think that in part because of Senator Wofford's election, because of the very intense bi-partisan interest in this issue in both the House and the Senate, but mostly because of my husband's willingness to put this on the front burner of the national political agenda what seemed impossible 3 or 4 years ago, so that policy makers wouldn't talk about it seriously, now seems possible. And it didn't happen by accident. I mean there have been thousands and thousands of groups working on this.

You know the Catholic Hospitals Association has had a steady group for over 2 years and they came to me. What they came up with independently bears a great resemblance to what the President is interested in. I just met with the National Health Care Alliance made up of business and labor and non for profit groups that have been meeting for 5 years. When they started nobody thought any of this was going to happen. So the actions of all these people over time has created an environment in which it is now possible to talk about health care reform. If everyone of those people had been discouraged before they started by being told-this country hasn't dealt with it since 1915, Franklin Roosevelt couldn't get it done, nobody can do this-we would just be sitting here watching our condition deteriorate. Instead of sitting here hoping that we are going to be able to turn it around which is what I think is going to happen.

Q: What's the best thing that's happened to you since you've come to Washington, either politically or personally? What's made you the happiest?

Mrs. Clinton: You know one of the really great things about being there for me is that I actually get to spend more time with my husband than I did before. Because we live and work in the same place and I can be there for him if he wants to see me or needs me and he can be there for me in a very real way. And we've had lots of our friends come visit and its been a very personally positive time even, you know, with my having to go through my dad's death.

We've had so many friends both in Arkansas and in Washington who have been so supportive that it has been a very wonderful time for us as a family.

Q: Great. What's the worst thing politically that's happened, I don't want to get personal because I know the obvious answer to that?

Mrs. Clinton: I don't think any worse thing has happened. I mean I view all of what's going on is part of getting ready to be working for positive change over the long haul. I mean I don't understand making judgements about anything that happens on a kind of minute by minute, day to day basis.

Q: That's what I was going to ask. If the 100 days stuff makes you mad?

Mrs. Clinton: No, it didn't make me mad it just doesn't make any sense to me. Because I see my husband's goals as being very long term ones for the country. And turning around what we've done to ourselves over the past years. The way we have let lots of problems get out of hand and yet act like we can't do anything about them. Well, you know its like well, were just going to

have to live with these problems. It requires lots of changes in lots of peoples attitudes and behaviors not just the Presidents. So from my perspective all of this instant monday morning quarterbacking is kind of off the point. How committed are we, how willing are the American people really to change which is what they voted for even though it is going to be hard in many respects to do things differently. I am very upbeat about all of this, I think my husband has already changed the

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(in progress) play one upmanship. Well we can cut more spending. We can do this more responsibly. That's a change in attitude.

Up until this year Presidents sent budgets, the budgets they sent were never balanced or even moving toward lowering the deficit. The Congress made the budget even worse on both sides of the aisle, both Democrats and Republicans. One wanted more defense, one wanted more social spending, nobody wanted to take responsibility and all of them told the American people there was such a thing as a free lunch. So changing that mind set I think is already happening.

I bet in history people will look back and will say, if my husband's plans are carried out over the next years, that because he was willing to lay it on the table and to take some of these hard decisions and to take the knocks that go with them people began to understand they had to be more responsible and they couldn't keep running this game that we've been.

Q: Do you think people are ready, are you confident?

Mrs. Clinton: Well, I think that there are still a lot of people that want something for nothing. You know there are a lot of people who want to pretend that, "gee we don't have to do anything differently and these big ol' deficits are no problem. And the fact the economy is not producing jobs doesn't really mean anything for people and you know, cluck cluck, it's just human nature that we've got guns and violence dominating our, you know, inner city and to many drug problems and all of the stuff we know goes on." So sure I think a lot of people are either unwilling to change or afraid to change or don't know how to change. That's where leadership comes in. And you can't do it over night, you can't snap your fingers, you can't waive a magic wand and there are going to be set backs, anytime.

I mean change yourself, I mean if you wake up in the morning and say, "you know I want to quit smoking, I want to start exercising, I want treat my kids better, I want to make my marriage work, I want to be kinder to my employees," I mean, what ever you say in your own mind about how you want to change, you

don't get it right the first day if you quit, that's the attitude of a loser as far as I'm concerned. I mean you got to stay with things that are hard. That's how you make change. I mean I love that line from you know, "A League of Their Own," when that character said to her coach, "Ah I can't do this," and he said, "Look if it were easy everybody would be doing it." Life is hard, change is hard. I'm really excited about how I see all these people making changes that I think are going to add up to a lot of big differences for the country.

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