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INTERVIEW WITH THE FIRST LADY
BY TOM BROKAW OF NBC NEWS

(Unrecorded question)

MRS. CLINTON: Well, Tom, I don't think we've made many significant changes. I think that we have fine-tuned the proposal which was in draft form, and we asked for people to give us their comments and their suggestions and their criticisms. The President said repeatedly that what's important to him is to have a plan that works for Americans. And I think that's what he is presenting in this plan. It is one that will guarantee coverage, it will do basically what he said it would do when he made his speech.

But all through this process I think it's important that we try to make sure we do it right. I think that's what the American public wants. And, so, we are going to be continuing to ask people for their good suggestions as long as they understand we want to make sure we get everybody health security, and we do it in a way that is affordable for everybody.

(Unrecorded question)

Well, I am looking forward to sharing those with Chairman Moynihan, and we will be doing that in great detail. Secretary Bentsen, who chairs the Finance Committee, has been in charge of the Treasury's efforts to look at all these numbers and analyze them. And they do add up. And they add up in ways that I think will please the American public because we are not asking for a big tax increase. We are asking people who have never paid their fair share for insurance to pay so that we can lower the cost to those people who have been paying too much.

And we are going to be taxing tobacco. And we are going to try to make better use of the money that is already in the system. And I think that based on the extensive work that's been done by the Treasury Department and the Office of

Management and Budget and others, the numbers add up, the numbers support the plan, and we are looking forward to sharing those with Congress.

(Unrecorded question)

Well, Tom, I think that we've learned a lot from why the Medicare costs and other health care costs could not be accurately predicted because for years we have been writing a blank check, and we have not held the system accountable, and we have not tried to reward efficiency. But instead have just continued to throw money at any kind of inefficient health care procedure. That is one of the things that will change with the President's proposal.

We are not talking about taking the system that has cost us too much in the past and just continuing to pour money into it. We are talking about trying to make it more efficient. And I know that we can do that because all over this country companies and families and individuals and states and cities have actually done what we are saying can be done on the national level.

So I am very confident that the money that is in there, whether it's the 80 billion dollars in fraud that everybody has agreed is in there, or the unnecessary cost due to defensive medicine and malpractice, or all the other things that drive health care up when it shouldn't have to be as costly as it is, we are going to be eliminating a lot of those problems.

(Unrecorded question)

Well, I think that what we see instead is trying to make this affordable for both businesses and individuals. And individuals will be paying. They will not only be paying their 20 percent of premium, they will be paying some out-of-pocket costs as well. We think that's a fair kind of distribution of cost. And I think that this idea that everybody should pay and be responsible is one of the most important features of the President's plan. So we are very supportive of that.

(Unrecorded question)

We would have to see what the alternatives were. I mean, one of the difficulties that we have is that no one

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else with any other plan has analyzed their numbers and gone to the extent we have to be specific. Some of the other plans that are on the table say that they are going to provide benefits, but they don't even tell the American people what the benefits will be. They set up a national board and leave all that to the national board. It's very hard to price what the fair cost of health insurance should be if you don't tell people what the benefits are.

So until all these other plans and these alternative approaches actually are scrutinized the same way we have scrutinized our figures and scrutinized our benefits, we are not going to be able to know whether somebody has got a better idea. But we invite that kind of analysis. We think that will be good for the process.

(Unrecorded question)

Well, Tom, we don't see those as necessary trade-offs at all because we don't believe that you can control costs and have adequate benefits for everybody, even the currently insured, unless everybody is in there. Let me just quickly say why. Right now those of us who are insured, every time someone goes to the hospital, who is not insured, and is treated, as they will be, and cannot pay the bill, you and I pay the bill. That's why our insurance premiums continue to go up even if we don't use the services.

So we think universal coverage and comprehensive benefits have to go hand in hand if we are ever going to give every American, no matter who they are, or where they work, the kind of health security that they should have, and if we are going to be able to do it in an affordable way.

So for the President, the principles he outlined in his September speech are the principles he is going to stick with. Now, are there ways of getting there that we haven't thought of, or that are maybe even better? I hope there are because we want something that works best for the American people. That's our goal.

(Unrecorded question)

Because the problem with that is that many of the companies that have been moving to try to control their costs are doing so by denying choice to their employees. They are basically telling their employees there is only one place you

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Many of the businesses that have been successful in controlling costs have done so only on a temporary basis because if the whole system is not under control, whether it's in the public programs or private insurance, they cannot continue to see the kind of cost benefits that they have been enjoying for the last several years. Because if everybody is not covered, and if even those who are covered don't know what the health care is really costing them, because they are not sharing in that decision, then eventually even a successful business cannot continue to control costs. There are too many other factors that will spin out of control.

(Unrecorded question)

Yes, he did, Tom. He remembered my birthday, and we are going to have a family dinner tonight. And I am really looking forward to that. Thank you.

(The interview was concluded.)

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