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LAS VEGAS REVIEW

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INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY  
BY JANE GREEN  
LAS VEGAS REVIEW

MRS. CLINTON: 1 o'clock, and we drove to the hotel, and everything was still going on. And there were people on the streets and all kinds of activity and all these huge, beautiful hotels. I was just stunned. You know, you can imagine it, and you can see pictures of it, but seeing it in person is -- it's very different.

And then Governor Miller was telling me about, you know, the sizes of these hotels that I'm not going to get to see. And, you know, they have got theme parks inside them and everything.

MS. GREEN: Did you have a chance to get out at all?

MRS. CLINTON: No. It was, I think, about, what, 4 o'clock Washington time by the time we got to the hotel -- or 4:30 Washington time.

MS. GREEN: So gambling is not a high priority for you this trip?

MRS. CLINTON: I don't think so.

MS. GREEN: Well, I was wondering about --

MRS. CLINTON: But I wanted to say something else about Las Vegas. My mother-in-law loved Las Vegas, and everybody here was so nice to her. And, of course, she died shortly after she came back from her last trip when she came to the Barbra Streisand concert.

And I just want to thank the people. I mean, everybody was so wonderful. And a lot of the people in the hospital told me they had had a chance to meet her or that

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they had had a conversation with her, because she was such a gregarious person. She never met a stranger. And I just wanted to thank everybody.

MS. GREEN: And this trip, I understand, is partly political and partly health care related. And Governor Miller's support, is that the main reason why you've decided that you wanted to help him out? Is it because of his previous support of Mr. Clinton?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, you know, Governor Miller and his wife, Sandy, have been friends of ours for a number of years, going back to the time when the President was a governor. Their children have played with our daughter at governors' conferences. And then, from the very moment that the President decided he was going to run for President back in 1991 or so, Governor Miller has been a staunch and effective supporter.

So he's a friend, as well as a supporter, and we have had the privilege of working with him through the Governors' Association since my husband has been President. And, certainly, months and months ago, I said if there were anything I could do to help him, I would be glad to. And I'm pleased to be able to do that.

And then health care is such an important part of what the President's trying to do. And so, for me, coming to see what is happening in Nevada and having a chance to talk to people about health care is also very important.

MS. GREEN: And on health care, I'm interested in asking you some specific questions about how your plan might affect Nevada. The biggest issue that state officials here are concerned about is the rural nature of Nevada and how you extend managed care out to those areas.

I know that there are ideas there for expanding the workforce of medical personnel there and electronic technology. Do you think that's enough?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think there are some additional elements of the President's approach that will get better and more affordable care into rural areas. One of the big problems in rural areas is that you have a very high Medicare and Medicaid and uninsured population.

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And, by providing stable funding streams in rural areas, you're going to have a much better financial base for providing health care, which will be attractive to physicians, nurses, and other health care professionals on its own, because they will begin to have some reimbursement for their services.

We are trying to designate facilities in both rural and urban areas as necessary, so that we can better support those where they're needed. And then, we are trying to encourage more professionals to go to rural areas. We're reviving the National Health Service Corps. We want to provide loan forgiveness and better loan repayment terms.

And I think technology will be a boon to rural areas. I've seen examples of it, where a doctor in a rural area 400 miles from a medical center has a conversation about an x-ray that is seen simultaneously in both offices, so you don't have to either transfer your patients unnecessarily, or the patient doesn't have to go to the expense of traveling as much.

So all of those factors together, all of which are part of the health care plan, will make a big, positive impact on rural areas.

MS. GREEN: One of the other things that Nevada officials are concerned about is there are so many transient people here who actually live here for a number of months out of the year, and the local alliance would be able to treat them for emergency care but not nonemergency. What would you do about that?

MRS. CLINTON: But people who come and work here for a couple of months will transfer their enrollment or, if they don't get around to transferring it, their enrollment in wherever they came from will have, in a sense, a designated fund of money that has been paid in on the behalf of those workers which will be used to pay for care that they receive in Nevada.

And, in addition, once somebody goes to work here, then there will be payments made on their behalf and by the individual into the alliance or the purchasing cooperative here in Nevada. So, in effect, Nevada will be better off than many states because they have a lot of problems that now

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fall between the cracks in the current health system.

MS. GREEN: And I was also interested after your husband's speech where he pretty much promised a veto of anything without universal coverage. Does that basically mean that he would veto the Cooper plan or any other specific plan?

MRS. CLINTON: We don't know what the final legislation will be, and so I don't think anybody's speculating about it. But he made it very clear that without, in his words, "guaranteed private insurance," he will not think the Congress has done its job.

MS. GREEN: And were you supportive of the idea of drawing a line in the sand that way?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, he has all along. This is nothing new. When he took the legislation to Capitol Hill and when he gave his health care speech, he said everything is negotiable, all the details about how we get to where we're going. But what's not negotiable is getting everybody covered, because we know that will save us money, as well as taking care of people.

MS. GREEN: One of the philosophical questions people talk about a little bit is whether health care is a right. And that seems to be underlying debate about how this should be gone about. I believe you've said in the past that you feel it is a right.

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, I do.

MS. GREEN: How does that compare when you have health care that a lot of people see as a commodity, not something that people can --

MRS. CLINTON: But it's not a commodity like any other commodity. You don't comparison shop for your health care. You don't plan the purchase. You have no idea when you're going to get struck by illness or accident. You don't really have a chance to get the kind of information that the marketplace can provide you about automobiles or dishwashers. So it is a service. And, as a service, it is one that we all cannot do without.

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But there's another underlying issue, which is that countries with whom we have competed that have made health care coverage a right have actually done a better job in keeping costs down, because this is not the kind of marketplace where people feel comfortable bargaining. I mean, the providers are the people who have all the information.

Most of us don't have the capacity to make a decision about what is or is not the proper medication. And, once we get everybody in the system, we can stabilize the costs and get better information to people so that they can truly make more informed decisions.

But, in the absence of that, we're just flying blind. And people are spending money on health care and doing what they're told to do at the time because that's the way it happens to them. They don't think about it ahead of time.

MS. GREEN: Well, I know the National Health Corps would be envisioned as a body that would make a lot of decisions about what kind of health care would be provided on things like transplants, for instance. And I'm wondering, in your view would, for instance, a 62-year-old man be able to get a bone marrow transplant? I mean, in the current system, it kind of depends on who his insurer is.

MRS. CLINTON: That's what it's going to depend upon in the reformed system. You know, the health board, under the President's approach has fewer -- not more, but fewer powers than the health boards created in some of the other approaches that are being advocated, because the other approaches set the basic benefits under their health plan board.

This legislation of the President sets the basic benefits and then says, if there are to be changes that can be built on -- but it's a very significant difference, where the people will know what insurance they're getting from the President's legislation. In these other approaches, they won't. They'll just vote to create some big government board, which I think is very scary.

So these are decisions that we want to leave to the individual and to the local community. And, where scientific

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evidence can be useful, we want the National Health Board to make that available. But we don't want the National Health Board determining what your insurance benefits are. We want that in the legislation.

MS. GREEN: For instance, with transplants, one of the problems right now for those people is that it is such a mishmash. It depends on what your insurance is. It depends on whether Medicaid covers that particular procedure. Would you still have that problem under the President's plan?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, you would for some that are experimental procedures, but not for others. And that's the kind of thing that we think should be put into a more standardized form. And, yes, there will have to be decisions made, as there are now, but they will be much less haphazard than they are now.

MS. GREEN: And you mentioned the Republican attack on the plan currently is focusing on the alleged bureaucracy involved. How do you respond, for instance, to what Mr. Dole put on TV the other night, his big chart, do you think that's giving the wrong message?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I thought it was just kind of funny. I mean, he knows better than that. They have got two attacks. One is that one and the other is that there is no health care crisis. And both of those are just desperate attempts to try to undermine the real need to get decent health care reform.

We have the most bureaucratic system in the world right now. Have you ever seen a chart of what the existing system looks like? That's what they're trying to divert attention from, because they are defenders of the status quo in the health care system.

Under the current system, I can't get anybody who can rationally either describe it to me orally or give me a chart about how it works, because you have 1,500 different insurance policies, all with their different terms and conditions, all determining what you do or do not get covered for, all of them interfering with your doctor's clinical autonomy, because now, more and more doctors have to get permission from insurance company bureaucrats to do certain things to take care of their patients.

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We already have the most bureaucratic system. You could not design a more bureaucratic system. And, in fact, the approach we're taking dramatically simplifies it. It saves money through the simplification of it.

MS. GREEN: And also, I wanted to throw in a question on your visit. Were you aware that the pro-choice advocates in the state were real concerned about your visit because Mr. Miller does not have a pro-choice stance? They felt maybe you were putting politics above that issue.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, as I understand it, there's a state referendum that established Nevada as a pro-choice state. Isn't that right?

MS. GREEN: I believe so.

MRS. CLINTON: So that, to me is, you know, pretty definitive as to what the state and its citizens want. And I think, as I recall what happened, Governor Miller signed the petition and was willing to have it on the ballot and is willing to abide by the decisions of the majority of the people of Nevada, which strikes me as an appropriate outcome.

MS. GREEN: You don't see it as a conflict?

MRS. CLINTON: No, I don't. I wanted to say one thing, though. Somebody mentioned to me this morning as I was traveling around -- I think it was in your newspaper -- that said what really ought to be done is the federal employees' health benefit plan ought to be extended to the country.

MS. GREEN: That could be.

MRS. CLINTON: I think that your newspaper had advocated that or had argued it. At least one of the doctors or somebody told me that. And that's absolutely the model that we're trying to achieve. And the trick is, though, that there is, in effect, a funding mechanism for that to happen, because the federal government, as the employer of all these people, pays 75 percent of the health care coverage, and the employee pays 25. And we're asking for an 80-20 split, which is about the same.

So I know that this doctor who was talking to me

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said that your newspaper had been critical about some of the features of the President's plan. And I would be happy to have somebody talk with the people at the paper to explain to them that what they're advocating is what we are proposing. So there shouldn't be misunderstanding or any kind of inaccurate information about that.

MS. GREEN: I'll pass that along to our editor.

MRS. CLINTON: You can call me or call my office, 456-2960, and talk to Neil (phonetic), probably, who set this up. And we would be glad to line you up with someone, a senior policy advisory on health care.

Because I don't have any problem with people being politically opposed to what the President's trying to do. I just want to be sure that we get accurate information, because this is such an important decision for the country. The people need to make their decisions on the basis of accurate information about what is or is not going to happen.

MS. GREEN: I understand. Thank you for your time.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you for your time. Thanks for your questions. You've done your homework. I really appreciate that.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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