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THE WHITE HOUSE

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INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY
TELEVISION, PORTLAND

Q Let's start first with health care. You poured a tremendous amount of time and energy in health care reform over the last year when it disintegrated and nothing passed.

I want to look ahead to next year. Chances are the Congress is going to be even more conservative than this one which was not receptive to health care reform. What is the President going to propose in terms of health care reform next year, and what kind of reception is he likely to get?

MRS. CLINTON: The problems that caused the President to make health care reform a priority are not going away. Unfortunately, many of the conditions that had caused people difficulties in getting (inaudible) afford the insurance are continuing to worsen.

So the President will come forward with some proposals that he thinks will help the people be healthier and have insurance for their health care. But the exact nature of those at this time are not all decided.

Q Let's talk about the mid-term elections now less than three weeks away. We are seeing something rather strange. And that is Democrats who are not running with the President, but actually running away from him. There are Democrats who do not want him to come into their districts and campaign.

How do you account for the President's lack of popularity even among candidates of his own party?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I think that the President has taken on some very tough issues. And when you take on tough issues, you are controversial. And that is certainly what has happened in the last 20 months. But the country is better off because he tackled those tough issues. And has really made some decisions.

They have reduced budget deficit. They have begun

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slowly to rein in lobbyists although we sure didn't get what we wanted given the Republican filibuster in the Senate, and have begun to change the way government works. Whenever you do that you are going to have controversy.

But this president knows that we have a choice on November 8. Do we move forward, or do we go back to the 1980s and to the trickle-down economics and all the problems that causes for Maine and the rest of the country.

Some candidates know, as we all do, that local issues are of more concern, and that's what they are focusing on. But nationally we have a good story to tell. And that story is going to be told more and more in the next few weeks.

Q It certainly appears that the Republicans are going to pick up seats in both the House and the Senate, and that is going to make it more difficult for the President to push his agenda in Congress.

How, not how, but is he going to change his approach next year to deal with a new Congress that is more Republican and more conservative?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, let's wait and see how the elections turn out. I never predict what's going to happen. And I think particularly this year, where the campaign for most Democrats has just been started, because the Congress has just finished.

Let's wait and see what the issues really are. Because once those issues are (inaudible) we will have a better idea both what the Congress will look like and whether or not people are going to vote to keep going forward and making the progress we are making, or turn the clock back.

There was a meeting of all the Republicans running for the Congress on September 27th on the steps of the Capitol where they signed a contract that would take us right back to the 1980s and Reaganomics and trickle-down economics.

I don't think the American people or the people in Maine want to vote for a party that would explode the deficit again, shift jobs overseas, squeeze hardworking middle class Americans, and end up with a trillion dollars worth of promises that can't be paid for. And if voters know that, I

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think there will be some surprises in this election.

Q One person we know won't be back on Capitol Hill is Senator Mitchell. You worked very closely with him on health care. The President has worked with him closely on a wide variety of issues.

What kind of a difference is it going to make not having George Mitchell lead the Senate?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, George Mitchell was a superb majority leader. I think everyone who ever worked with him would attest to his intelligence, his dedication, and his humor. Everything that you would want a leader. So it's a loss. It's a loss, not just for the Democrats, but for the entire Senate, and I think really for the country.

Q Let me end with a personal question. It's been almost two years now since Bill Clinton was elected and you got thrown into the spotlight.

How do you like your job? How have you found it now that you have settled in and gotten used to it?

MRS. CLINTON: It's such an extraordinary privilege to be in Washington and live in the White House, and try to help my husband, and try to help the country. I wake up every day very (inaudible) chance.

That doesn't mean I am happy with everything that goes on, because I think there are some very unfortunate aspects of politics today. But they are far outweighed by -- it makes a difference to me that we finally have a president who has introduced welfare reform after other people talked about it.

It makes a difference to me that yesterday the President got to sign the first order sending more police into our communities. He has made a difference. And I am very proud of that, and very glad to have a very small role in it.

Q That's all I would like to ask.

(End of interview.)

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