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INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY WITH
THE TACOMA TIMES
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Q I might first start by asking you, you have spoken a lot about the need for a public outpouring of support for health care reform in this country, yet today, much of the crowd was here to protest what has been proposed by the Clinton Administration. Does that discourage you at all in your efforts? And what do you take from that when you see that kind of protest?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I don't really pay much attention to it because it's a well organized, vocal minority that has its own political or financial reasons for being against health care reform. They don't speak for the 70 to 80 percent of Americans who want universal coverage, guaranteed private insurance, and want it paid for with employers and employees sharing the cost. We know that that is what the vast majority of Americans want, and that is what we believe health care reform should deliver.

Q When I told people that I had the opportunity to talk with you today, a lot of viewers called wanting me to ask you a question. And it's really a very simple question, but may require a more complex answer. And that is, basically, how much, in actual dollars, will your health program cost every American, and exactly what services will be included in that?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, that is what is being finally worked out in the Congress. In our original proposal, very few Americans who have insurance would have seen their costs go up; instead, the costs would have gone down, just as we have seen happen in places like Hawaii, where everyone is insured. And that is still what is likely to happen if we get guaranteed insurance, so everybody pays their fair share.

The reason costs go up and down is because you

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cannot control them unless everybody is in the system. Right now, if you are insured, you are paying for people who are freeloading off the system. Because the very poor get insured through the government, so they get their way paid. The very rich can pay. But the people who are not able to afford insurance or feel they don't need to have it, if they get sick, they go to the same hospitals we do; they get taken care of; and there is no such thing as free medical care. The cost is shifted onto those of us who are insured.

If everybody is paying their fair share, those of us who have been paying will actually see reduction in our costs.

Q And I think people are -- they are looking for specifics. They are looking to find out how much, how many dollars?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, the problem is, it depends upon your insurance policy. See, one of the real difficulties we have is there are too many different kinds of insurance policies in America, so it is very difficult to compare one to the other.

Once we get a standard benefits package, then individuals will be able to decide how much it should cost them. Let me give you an example. I think every American should have the same guaranteed health insurance that members of Congress and other federal employees do. The top-end plan under the federal government plan that members of Congress get to subscribe to cost members of Congress a little over \$100 a month. And then the government, namely, through an employer requirement, kicks in another \$300 plus a month. So it is slightly over \$400 a month. And that covers nearly anything you could imagine.

I think most Americans, and certainly, most people watching us tonight would think it would be a pretty good deal if they could have full coverage with very reasonable copays and deductibles if they only had to pay out of their paycheck a little over \$100 a month, like members of Congress do.

So our point is, members of Congress have guaranteed health care coverage, paid for with the employer and the employee making a contribution. It cannot be taken away, so long as they are there. And they have vast choice.

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Q Are you confident that what is being negotiated in Congress right now will meet your and the President's goal of universal coverage for everyone?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, we are confident that that is the goal, and that if it doesn't, then we will not have health care reform. Because if we do not reach guaranteed health insurance, then we will end up doing something that could hurt middle-class, insured Americans.

There are a lot of folks floating around ideas about, oh, all we need to do is a little insurance reform, and let's just do that and call it victory and go home. The problem is that states which have tried just that have raised costs on insured people. And when that happens, businesses and individuals drop coverage, which means you have more uninsured people, which means you have more people getting care that then has to be paid for by the rest of us. And you have a vicious spiral.

So anything that calls itself reform just because it does that is not real reform. But if the Congress comes up with a plan that guarantees insurance and has a way of paying for it fairly, then the President will sign it, because it will save Americans money.

Q In talking about what Congress is doing now, Congressman McDermott, who was out there with you today, said yesterday -- and I'll quote him: "People are beating up on this thing as the 'Clinton Plan, the Clinton Plan, the Clinton Plan.' Last night, the Clinton Plan was put to rest. There is no Clinton Plan. We are now working, and we are going to make people look at what's happening from Congress."

MRS. CLINTON: That is what should happen. That is what we have been waiting to happen. When the President introduced his proposal, he said he had no bottom line other than guaranteed health insurance, and that if somebody had a better idea, he wanted to hear it. It's the Congress' obligation to do what it is now doing, and Congressman McDermott is absolutely right.

They had to go through a process. They had to decide what kinds of systems would best work, how people could explain them to constituencies, and we're coming out

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with some very good, positive ideas. And some of the changes that have been made in the President's original approach were good changes; we approved of the changes.

So what we want are, finally, is to have a bill in the House and a bill in the Senate that everybody can look at and answer the questions that your viewers are asking: "What will it do to me?" And once we do that, I think people will be very reassured. They will realized they are not losing anything, but they are gaining the chance to make sure they never lose their insurance, and they get it at a cheaper price.

Q Mrs. Clinton, next week, when Congress starts doing hearings into the whole Whitewater situation, are you concerned at all that the country will be distracted by that and that attention may be turned away from health care reform?

MRS. CLINTON: No, I think they will be bored to death. And I think that will be good. Because it's a non-issue and a non-event.

And what is really important is whether or not we keep working on what real people care about when they get up every morning: Are we going to pass the Crime Bill? Can we put more police on the streets and get the weapons out of violent criminals' hands? And are we going to have health care and Welfare reform? That is what people talk to me about, and that is what we are working on.

Q Great.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you

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