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INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY
WITH KEN WALSH
U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT

KEN WALSH: There are a number of stories that I'm working on that I want to talk to you about. One that's come up this week actually. I'm doing a cover story on Bosnia. And I just wanted to start off with a couple of questions about that. (inaudible) a good way to ask you about this. But basically one of the most important things that adults can teach children about fatherhood (inaudible) we're trying to look at fatherhood specifically (inaudible)

MRS. CLINTON: Well I think it's a very important topic because there is such a difference between biologically fathering a child and being a child's father in the full meaning of that term. And for me fathers are critical in supporting children with love and attention and discipline and helping children to appreciate the world outside the home. Because so many fathers have varied experiences that they can bring into child rearing that give a child a sense of greater possibilities. So providing that solid support that every child need and helping to build on that is what I look for in fathers. Sometimes it's difficult for fathers to put aside their own aspirations about their own lives and what they expect from their children. But a father who is able to put his child first and help that child develop what ever skills he has is giving a great gift to his child.

KEN WALSH: Your father, I take it, did that. And you learned (inaudible) the most valuable lessons you learned.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, my father did that for me. I was thinking today that he said something several times when I was very young that made such a huge impression on me. He would tell me that he would always love me no matter what I did. But that doesn't mean he would always like or approve of what I did. But he would always love me as a person. And I can remember as a young girl I would say, "well does that mean that if I murdered somebody you would still love me?" And her would say, "yes, I would love you and I would support you but I wouldn't like what you had done." And there is something about that absolute solid security of knowing that you are loved. Especially as you get to be a teenager and you don't agree and you have differences of opinion and you often wonder how you could be from the same

family, and the things that kids go through as they become independent that is such an anchor that every child needs. Preferably every child needs a mother and a father who love that child unconditionally and do everything they can to give that child the tools he or she needs. But if it's not possible to have both parents then at least as I've heard Dr. Barry Brazelton say -- every child need at least one person who is just crazy about that child. Fathers sometimes don't emotionally convey that but they can be that solid presence of support and love that you need.

KEN WALSH: When we were just being out with you today you got a number of questions about violence and crime and that must be something that you constantly (inaudible). I wonder if you could give me a sense of how much you think that is on people's minds and more generally what it is you pick up traveling (inaudible) on the country's mind and specifically what the country wants from Washington.

MRS. CLINTON: Well violence is on peoples minds. And as we saw in the high school its on young peoples minds. And it is important to give all of our people but particularly our children a sense of physical security. And that's the first thing that adults owe children in a tangible way that they are safe and secure so as I said in the high school I think we need to proceed with the President's plan in the Crime Bill because it had the support of the people who know what they're doing when it comes to fighting violent crime as opposed to playing politics with it. Because we have to reassert a sense of security and safety in our homes and neighborhoods. I hear about violence when I travel around. I hear still a lot about health care -- an enormous amount about health care. I just had a classmate of mine, a professional woman, who has been having some health problems and just came up and said, "boy, I am now a firm advocate of what you were trying to do -- I had experiences I wanted to tell you about. And from people I don't know I hear much of the same. So there's a lot of encouragement to continue to try to improve the health care system and to deal with discreet problems within it -- like trying to solve this paradox of Medicare benefits being available for mammography but women not taking advantage of it.

I also hear a lot about education and it takes different forms. People will say "tell the President to keep working on education." Or, a woman said to me in Des Moines yesterday "I've got a child in the Americorps program and it's making a huge difference in his life." Or they might say something very specific about -- they like the President's proposal to deduct education funding. So education, the cost of education is something I get a lot of.

I think most Americans really want to see their government work better. And to provide type of support that a government effectively can offer to citizens who are trying to do their part. I don't think that most Americans are as anti-government

as some of the rhetoric from the right would suggest. But I think most Americans are looking to try to sort out what families should do for themselves, what individuals need to do to take responsibility, what communities have to do to be more effective in dealing with problems at the local level, and what the role of state and national government is. I don't think this is a uniquely American question right now. This seems to be affecting all of the advanced democracies. With the absence of an external enemy, like the former Soviet Union, posing such a threat. There is a reexamination going on about what is the government's role. I think that's very healthy. But I think my husband has it right from a historic and political perspective that we want a government that is "leaner not meaner" to use that memorable phrase. We want a government that helps people by extending opportunity and in return asking for responsibility. And that's the theme that has run through my husband's approach to government ever since he first started talking about it which is ever since I knew him more than twenty years ago.

And people will say different things about that to me. They'll say, "tell the President to stand his ground on fill-in-the-blank. Tell the President that I want him to work with the Republicans on fill-in-the-blank." So there's a lot of sorting out going on in the public about what we want from government.

KEN WALSH: Are you confident that this next election cycle will produce a healthy debate about the direction of government and what the country wants from its leadership. Or I was just wondering if you feel like it's becoming less possible because of the negative atmosphere you've talked about and others have talked about. Some of the harsher (inaudible) critics on the Hill has not been such a great experience for (inaudible) so far. (inaudible) dynamic on the Hill. I wonder what you think of that.

MRS. CLINTON: I don't know what to think of that. I think it's a very important question because a lot depends on the answer. If we don't figure out a way to provide information to people that enables them to participate in the decision making. But also rebuilds their confidence in their decision makers. Because there is no way we can have a virtual democracy -- two hundred and fifty plus million people to decide every issue that breaks twenty four hours a day in the world. So we both have to expand democracy and rebuild trust in those whom we have asked to lead us. And both of those are equally important and it is very troubling to me that we have had a continuing erosion in the trust placed in our public leader often on matters that have nothing to do with public issues or the public good however one were to define it. And I'm troubled by the negative confrontational nature of every encounter over the exchange of information regarding issues in government. I'm troubled by the tendency to inflame as opposed to inform the electorate. And not because of who the President is. This has been a trend that has been developing over time. And unless we as a country

collectively, because we each have a role to play --the press has a role, the leadership has a role, business has a role, the citizens have a role. Unless we all figure out how we are going to sustain a democracy in the information overload age which we are now living in -- I'm concerned about who will enter public life, who will stay in public life, the quality of the descisions that are made, the extraordinary role that big money interest will play because they can marshall information driven campaigns that permiate the atmosphere with frankly, misinformation. Or if not wrong information, certainly inacurate because incomplete information. So these are really big important questions and ones that I worry about a lot.

KEN WALSH: Are there particular programs or direction that you are troubled that are being jeopardized by the Republican majority?

MRS. CLINTON: I think it's too soon to tell. I think we just have to wait and see. There's going to be a lot of reconsideration, a lot of moderation, a lot of changing of postitions, cutting back on the rhetoric and the posture . So I'm going to wait and see how that plays itself out.

KEN WALSH: You addressed this earlier (inaudible) What would Dr. Foster bring that is most important to that job? Is it his leadership on the teenage pregnancy program? Is it just his long time commitment to these very important young people's issues?

MRS. CLINTON: I think it's his whole professional career which has been committed not only to his private practice but to a public health perspective that has seen issues like teenage pregnancy as a health issue, as one of profound public health implications. And we have all been appalled by the rise in teenage pregnancy and we have certainly seen many on the political front point fingers and rail against teenage pregnancy. We have seen very few people step into the midst of an extremely complex issue and actually do something to solve the problems underlying teenage pregnancy. And Dr. Foster is one of the few people with a proven track record. And its not just because of the programs that he has started and inspired in Nashville, among others throughout the country, but its because of his whole career which led up to his recognition of the importance of that kind of intervention.

KEN WALSH: Is the way he is being treated and sort of charactertured does that say something about some of the things that you were talking about earlier (inaudible)

MRS. CLINTON: I think it does.

KEN WALSH: I'm trying to look at another story that I think is here down the line. The idea that -- how you and the president keep a sense of normalcy in your lives both for

yourselves and for Chelsea, the kinds of things you do to keep in touch with the every day (inaudible) compared to how you used to live to what you do now. And I talked to some folks around you and I talked to Lisa about how you could be more engaged in the D. C. community for instance for the time as you were in Arkansas. I just wondered how all that comes together.. (inaudible)

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I mean one of the things I do is what I did today. Being in touch with my friends from years past is a real return to normalcy to me. They are not only very supportive, but honest and funny and constantly reminding me that I had a life before and the kind of person that I was and making fun of me when appropriate much to everyone's amusement. And I think that people who end up in the positions that my husband and I are in right now have to constantly work to maintain contact with what is going on outside the White House and outside of Washington. Because Washington is a company town. Everybody talks about politics. Everybody talks the sort of horserace political process game. Most people in America don't get up everyday worrying about who said what to whom at some Washington dinner party. That's not how they live their lives. And it's so important that those of us who are in that situation day in and day out remember that it is not the way most Americans are thinking and feeling. I mean I thought that was so clear in the difference in reaction to the President's State of the Union -- between people who were psrt of the Washington political scene and the people who called me, and who wrote me, and who I saw around the country who were moved, touched, motivated, and encouraged by that speech. Well if you're able, as Bill and I try to be, to go back home to see people, then at least you have a fighting chance to remember what's going on in your friend's lives while you're caught up in what goes on . . .

KEN WALSH: Does it help to try to keep in contact with popular culture. I mean to see what people are watching on television.

MRS. CLINTON: Yeah it does. And you know we don't get a lot of opportunity to do that but we try to -- you know my husband keeps really up to date on popular sports culture. I mean he is deep into sports and he is a great fan. He can sit down with anybody and talk basketball or football or whatever. But we also try to keep up as best we can -- what popular books are, what popular television shows are, what the movies are, and what the people who are trying to explain America to itself are saying. But it's a real effort. It doesn't come easily because the pressures on him are so enormous that he often has to be totally concentrated on some foreign policy issue and then move to a domestic issue and then back to a foreign policy issue that he doesn't get the time. And so seeks opportunities to listen to people and talk to people again not as easily as we would like it to be.

KEN WALSH: Is there any -- you mentioned that there were people who tried to explain America to itself -- is there anything that you've found that is helpful in that way. I remember that during the Reagan years that the folks in the White House would say that they thought that the Johnny Carson Show showed sort of the outer limits of what was acceptable in making fun. And I wonder if there is any television shows or movies or anything of that kind that you found helpful in that (inaudible)

MRS. CLINTON: It's a good question. No I mean we just -- it's sort of catch as catch can. I mean we try . . .

KEN WALSH: I mean Dan Quayle used to read "People" magazine, for example.

MRS. CLINTON: I mean, I think, well you know we try to do as much if that as we can it's just not, I mean we don't do anything on a regular basis. I can't point to something like that.

KEN WALSH: The last thing is on, sort of what you could do to most help the administration right now. And a lot of people sort of wonder -- I'm sure you've been asked this a million times but maybe the best way to ask it is what you could do to be most helpful to the administration.

MRS. CLINTON: Well my first responsibility is to do whatever my husband would want me to do that he thinks would be helpful to him. That's what goes at the top of my list, whatever it is. I mean it maybe, something of great moment, but, you know more likely its just to kick back, have a conversation, or even play a game of cards and just listen to him ruminate. I mean whatever it takes to kind of, be there for him I think is the most important thing I have to do because I don't believe anyone who has not been in this position can appreciate the extraordinary burdens that come with it. And it would be very difficult to try to handle that alone and not have a sounding board and not have some body who you can talk to.

KEN WALSH: The presidency?

MRS. CLINTON: Yeah, it's an awesome responsibility, as goes without saying. But then also in addition to doing whatever he asks me to do I want to continue working on issues that I care a lot about, I want continue working on health related issues, particularly women's health and matters that affect the research taht goes into women's diseases and problems, trying to be as involved as I am on the mammography issue for older women. To be a voice for the health care proposals taht the President will come forward with in the future. And to be involved on behalf of issues I have a long history with on children and families, and there's a broad range there that I care about. And some of that is on the local level. I went to a Wahsington, DC public school the other day and I try to do something like that every couple of

weeks at least so that I can get out into the Washington community and be a presence there since that city has so many challenges. Or it might be like the article I wrote trying to lay out some ways of thinking about children in the welfare context, or it might be working with people around the country who care about violence. I try to be of help with some citizens groups worried about the foster care system, worried about drugs. There's a whole range of issues that fall loosely under the categories of strengthening families, strengthening children and strengthening communities which I have a lot of interest in and will continue to work on.